

The Cenacle



17TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

NUMBER 80 | APRIL 2012



**"We all become
stars
when we die . . .**

*then again,
maybe stars become
all of us . . ."*

**—James Michael Burke III,
1953-2011**

April 21, 2012
10:12 p.m.
Copley Place-bench
Boston, MA.

Dear Jim,

This letter inaugurates the 17th anniversary issue of The Cenacle which is, sadly, dedicated to your passing & remembrance.

Sadly, I suppose, for you didn't live your life as a sad man. There was too much love in your heart, too much music for you to be sad for very long.

As your friend for many years, I can remember many of your high & low times. Your divorce caused many bitter years of child custody battles. You won, because, I think, ~~you~~ you simply loved too much to lose. Maybe I get that. Maybe not yet.

I was mostly there, most often, for the music. To hear you play, to read my words with you. We were "out-stored" together hundreds of times in over 20 years of friendship. We taught each other what we both knew:



-28-

Art is our faith & calling in this world,
& our best chance of doing good.

So I am sad, tonight, my brother,
sad & high & loving the lack of your
existence. You were & are the finest
example of a good man. You treated
others kindly, tolerantly, respectfully,
with humor when all possible.

You lived your 58 years on this planet,
my friend, & you made the most of them.
And those you touched & affected, among
whom, I am only one of many, they
were & are changed. Even your ex-wife,
whom I hugged & saw, was happy, as we
talked at your funeral. I think you would
have winked at me, pleased.

Most personally, you endorsed me
as an Artist & as a person. I knew you
always had my back, & were always ready
to play. Play on through is what I
often hear you tell me these days. Just
smile & play on through. And I think
you would have me believe in the all-
powerful healing & redemptive power
of love more than I do. But like the man
says in pulp fiction, "I'm trying. I'm
trying real hard."

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So, then, from a confusing brew of emotions, I asked some of your friends, well-known but even unknown too, to contribute to this issue of remembrance. For those passed, for those lost.

Not a memorial issue, but one of remembering & by doing so, both embracing & letting go.

I am sad your big gorgeous form ~~would~~ ^{won't} be ripping out guitar at my house or yours again. Let you would nod to me to keep playing. Remember, love, & keep playing through.

So, tonight, on a gorgeous springtime night in Boston, your most beloved city, I feel you again, as before, I love you, James Michael Burke III, I love you & will see you among the stars, in every way possible, & I will keep playing through for as long as I hold this pen & its like in my hand, as long as I hold this form.

A renewed promise to you, my brother: I will never spend my guitar or pen —

 4-21-2017

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Edited by Raymond Souldard, Jr.

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NEW ENGLAND

2012

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Thank you to the many people, including the contributors to this issue, who inspired me to find my path through mourning my friend, & to arrive finally at this new issue, one that both mourns & carries on . . .



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

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

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

Eulogy for James Michael Burke III

March 18, 1953 – December 1, 2011

*[Edited text of remarks given at St. James Church,
West Hartford, Connecticut, December 9, 2011]*

As I write these remarks, I am traveling on a bus from Boston down to Hartford. It is a route I've been traveling on occasion since 1992 when I moved up to Boston, so about 20 years, & would return to visit friends, family, & old favorite places in Connecticut.

Usually waiting at Union Station in Hartford was my dear friend & brother Jim Burke. He'd pull up in whatever car he drove at the time, & would greet me with a hug & a handshake. It was always good to see him, to be hosted by him for a day or two.

Jim loved many things but I think Art, Nature, & family & loved ones were his greatest of loves. I wanted to share a few of his own thoughts on these things today from letters he wrote me over the years; to summon him not by my own memories, but by the enduring force of his being that resides among us today, a week after he died, & I believe will remain, changed the world because he so passionately participated in it.

Jim was a wonderfully good musician, inheriting this gift from his mother, & pursuing it obsessively on his own. He could play a light funny song or dive so deep that spittle, guitar picks, and strings would fly (we called it getting “art-stoned”). He wrote: *“I play the guitar & make the music & then realize I am the music.”* He described himself simply as being *“a musician who enjoys the challenges of being a father,”* & I think this summed things up for him. For those of us who were lucky enough to hear Jim sing & play, the gift he offered was to allow us witness to a mortal being merging with the eternal, become for a little time a confirmation of open passage between the two, that the mortal & the eternal are, in essence, connected parts of the whole.

Jim also imparted to others his profound love of Nature. From Nature he derived evidence of truths that most of us at best intuit consciously in rare, shining, inexplicable



moments. Nature is what “*should be*,” he wrote, continuing: “*the twigs on the tree and life from them remind me of infinity. Their language is a mystery until you stop listening—perpetuation is the key, Freedom is obtained through non-action & least resistance. And, after all, what is a tree, without a twig?*”

Lastly, but not least, his loved ones. Jim’s love for his daughters, Belinda & Natalie, was, I think for him, the human side of this equation that includes Art & Nature. With them, he did not have to ponder deeply or stretch for a higher note. He woke every morning, lived every hour, & slept every night, with the most awe-inspiring love for them. Simple & complete. He loves them still.

And I say that not to imply that I know where he is now, if in realms of timelessness & perfection, or simply at one with his beloved Nature, or still vibrating here & wherever there is a guitar ringing out for truth & peace & love. I do not know. I can say, however, that as I arrive in Hartford in a short time & see the faces of his girls, & later the faces, your faces, gathered to honor him, I know that he is here & hereon & forever in the ways any good man might be in this mysterious world & Universe we dwell in.

I’d like to close with a poem I wrote for Jim shortly after I learned of his death. I woke from a dream with these lines in my head:

Peace Love Dove

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

And finally, to paraphrase his favorite rock band, The Who:

Long Live Jim Burke III!
12/8/2011

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

* * * * *





Boston to Vienna

I went to sleep last night at nine,
woke up just now at three with a gasp.

The distance between the jungle and Boston is so huge,
but I crossed it in a single breath.

I lay in bed, not moving. In my dream, I was near the Aguarico River.
Someone had been trying to kill someone else with witchcraft.

This led me to think about my cousin Mimi in Durham, North Carolina,
who's so sick with cancer,

and then about my grandmother in Hamden, Connecticut,
who's so old and frail.

Yesterday, a sunny spring Sunday,
I was parked in the north parking lot of the University of Massachusetts - Boston.

Gusts of wind off the harbor were hitting the car.
I was talking with my grandmother on my cell phone about leaving for Vienna.

She reiterated for the umpteenth time,
"I just want you to be happy."

On the drive home, I started crying behind my sunglasses
when on the radio someone sang, "I know I'm going away."

I'm in Boston, moving back to Vienna in two months.
I also never really left the jungle, the shamans, their sorcery, their politics.

I live in several places at once,
sometimes at peace, sometimes in pieces.

My path has led through three continents and a number of different languages.
But as Chomsky says, there is only one language.

I hope to learn to speak it before I become language,
disappearing into my e-mails as Borges disappeared into his short stories.

For now I'll just sit here in the corner of the study scribbling
something like poetry, only more crude,

while in another room of the universe
my grandmother prays for me over her sabbath candles.

You can come cry on my shoulder if you're in the mood to.
We know we're all going away.

This poem contains one blue Skylark, two tiger cats,
the clicking tock on the wall,

Ka sleeping in the bedroom,
me sitting here in the study at 3:20 a.m. with my notebook on my knees....

This poem contains memories,
boiled down, resinous.

In Vienna we'll live near the Volksoper, and the WUK,
an anarcho-socialist arts complex

where my butoh dance group used to work up a sweat
transforming ourselves into nobles and hobgoblins.

But now I'm closer to the African American street people couple
I met in Roxbury two weeks ago.

I'm wondering about the white crud under their friendly eyes—
didn't they wash their faces in the morning?

One day I gave them ten dollars,
and the next week I happened to be back in the same place,

waiting for a gallery to open,
and they were there too,

and I asked them if I could sit down
on their cracked plastic milk crate

and they said "Sure," and I did,
and I listened to them and their friends

for ten minutes
before my ears attuned to their way of speaking

and then I was telling them about going to Vienna,
and how the Austrians love ski jumping.

And as I was explaining opera to Clarence
Betty said, "What are you two talking about over there?"

And Clarence said, "Opera. You're not interested in it."
But Betty said,

"That's what you don't know about me. I like opera.
I just don't have no money to go see it."

The subtext of their presence there on the sidewalk that day
was that they were trying to

smuggle some crack to a prisoner who was part of a work crew
cleaning up a vacant lot nearby.

And I said, "How do people get crack into prisons?"
And Clarence said, "O you can put it in your nose, in your ear, in your ass.

"You can even swallow it and shit it out later,
light it up in the cell!"

I want to swallow some things while I'm here in Boston
and smuggle them with me on the plane to Vienna, including:

Hip Hop music, the Master's degree I'm about to earn,
the sunlight on Boston Harbor, the political struggle against Bush,

the St. Patrick's Day parade,
which I avoided but don't want to forget,

and the Irish pub on the corner where I feel uncomfortable
because the people look like me ten or fifteen years ago.

It's disgusting to say this, but the metaphor is apt: you swallow experiences,
and later you shit them out as memories and light them up in your cell.

Space and time are so huge,
but you traverse them in the span of a single breath,

alone, smoking memory
like crack.

The breath is part of the path.
Abhhhhhhhhhh, the path.

The path is logical, it's pathological, it's a logistical old
path between there and here,

it's a well-trod trail for tiger cat or giant snail,
and I never left it, and now it's taking me away.

Yesterday, when I got home from the university
and the sky was still light,

and I was pacing around the living room
because I knew I was going away,

I called my mom and took the cell phone
out to Puddingstone Park on the hill above the Stop and Shop supermarket.

I felt like I was getting high on the earth,
and I looked at the intelligent sunset that was looking back at me,

and I looked at the geometrical crystals of the Boston skyline gleaming,
cold, yellow-silver, snuggling back against the slate-blue sky,

and I looked at the nice row houses with individuals and families in them
and I felt the grass compressed under my shoes.

I didn't see it
but the path curled up like a snake behind me.

And I said to my mom, "I'm going to smoke a Cuban cigar
that Mike Milne gave me last time I was in town,"

and my mom said, "You ought to leave it in your pocket,"
and I said, "But it's a Cuban cigar,"

and she said, "But it's still carcinogenic,"
and I said, "But mouth cancers caused by Cuban cigars are so much

richer and more full of flavor than those caused by
ordinary cigars."

And I listened to my mom's nice warm voice tell me about
her editing job and how she can walk on her new knee pretty well now,

and Sam Walker's new book on baseball,
and Ted Chamberlain's new book on horses,

and Janie might come to Maine in the summer,
and Saramanda got married

two months before the wedding was planned,
she and he and the best man and the maid of honor

just went down to some justice of the peace and did it,
but they'll have another wedding in May anyway,

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

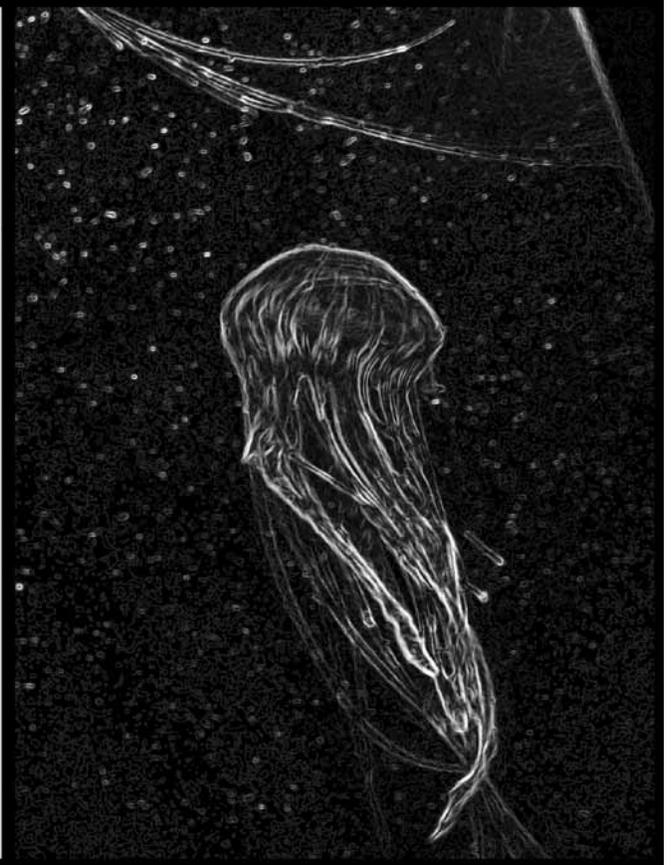
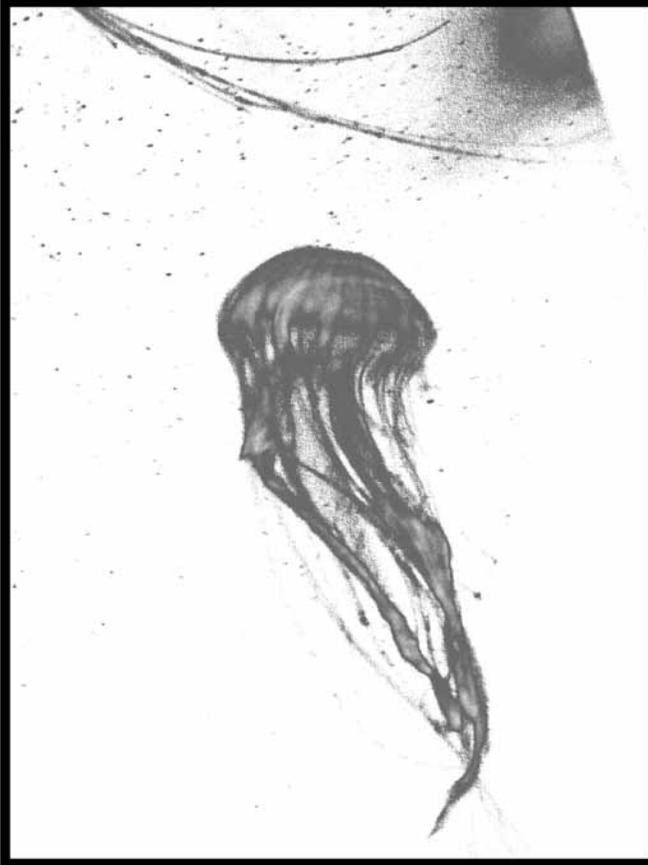
I should call her,
she'd like it,

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

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

April 3, 2006

* * * * *



Ric Amante

In Copley Square

It could be a sunny day like today—
gulls circling overhead, delivery truck idling in the alley,
northwest breeze bending the tops
of curbside lindens.

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

* * *

Downtown Crossing

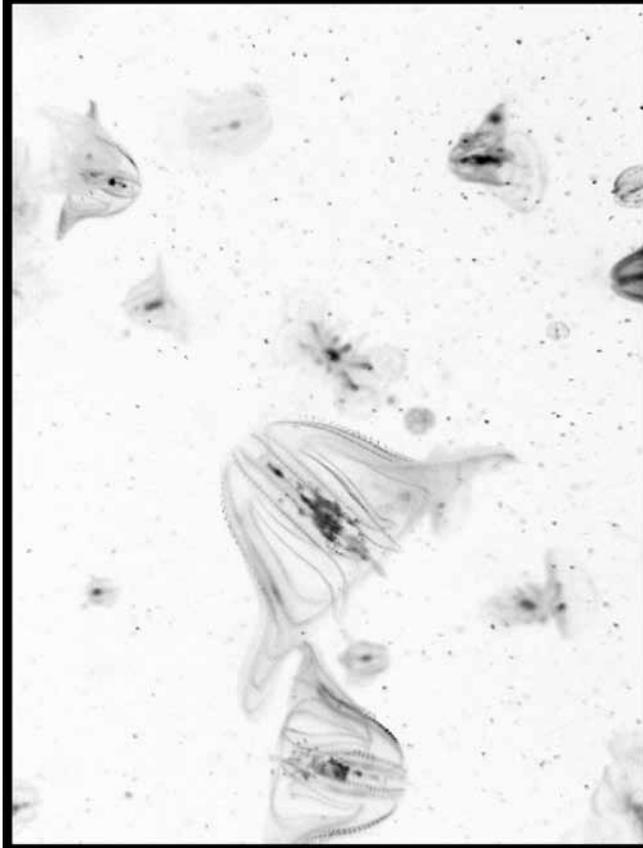
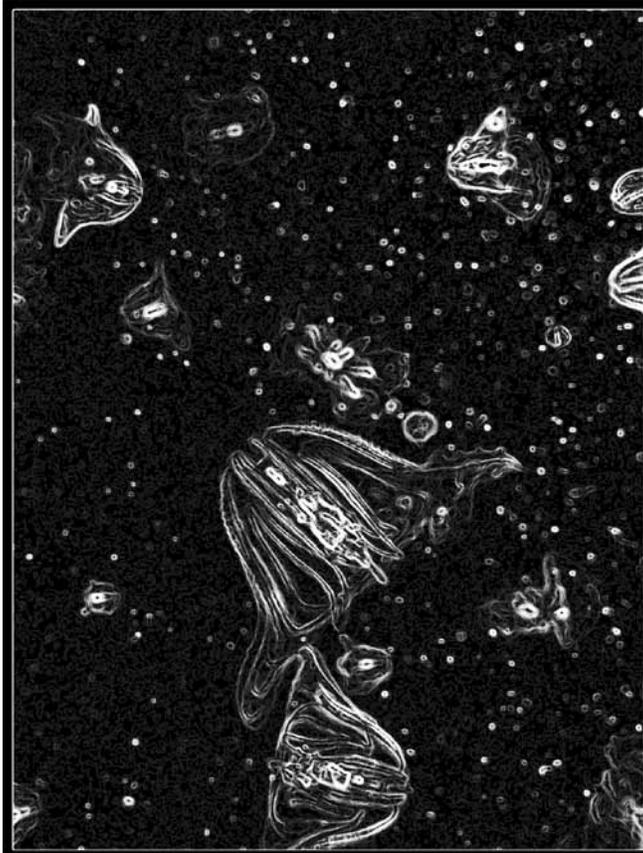
You'll be riding this same train,
Walkman tuned to modern rock
at the dial's far, unlikely left.
Eighty-three, yet still transformed
by the sonic lift of guitar lines,
by precision and passion entwined.
You'll have left at the station
the asperities and bloodshot eyes—
decades now without a quarrel—
doors, not wounds, opening wide.
You'll have shuttered the visions that veer towards ruin—
mind today taking snapshots
of water lilies, children, skies.
You'll be prompt, alert, grateful,
but somehow won't ever arrive—
this same train jumping the rails
to a vastly different sound.

* * *

Redux

And what are your preferred sentiments?
Isn't it enough that change
batter you raw and groundless,
shatter yet expand the game?
At this juncture of grief and faith,
voices and vistas roam
unincorporated, daunting.
But just meeting the pain as it arrives
launches a wilder, wider flight.
Isn't it enough, timely, and right
to continue to swing for the meaning,
continue to honor the ghosts?

* * * * *



Joe Ciccone


The Window

Everything is still complete on the other side
 Though the window fell shut
 Sometime in the night
 The sky reflected there is as flat as a door

In the bleak schoolhouse my father without a beard
 Took his pupils to the lectern
 And set out to teach
 Why tomorrow was to be for everyone

It was here he first calculated the day's turning
 It was here the measurements piled up like the dead
 With no answer
 And he wondered how someone can teach what they are unsure of

Today he is gone three years

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

Everything is always briefer than you'd think

Soon the wreckers will come
 With their engines moaning
 To pause in the snow
 Laughing
 Laughing

They trust what they've been told
 I still hold what we never had in common
 Hope for very long
 Courage with words

A train in the clouds headed west

But neither of us was good at being young anyway
And it occurs to me now
It is mainly the heaviness of our hearts
Toward our own things
That we must bear alike
Even in death

The day is made of granite
What is on the glass is not real
Today my father's hallways are crumbling
But our lives were not made for the taking
They are irreplaceable

All around me the gray pavement is receding
Soon it will be evening
I leave trying to remember what I was supposed to do

* * * * *





A Travel to Belize

[Journal]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 79 | October 2011)

Esmeralda and Beyond

On we go, soon on the beach road along the coast. Everything here is for the tourists, things not so shabby, but deserted. There are no vacationers here. To get here is impossible, as we have demonstrated. Of course, now out of pesos again. Dark approaching again. No water, no food, need to stop and camp. But where? All is hotels. On the second try, I am able to change some dollars for pesos at a rip off rate. Get water, chips, some bean dip. Seeing that we're running out of coastline, and that the road will soon veer inland to the next rip off city of Veracruz, I pull into a hotel. It is nice. All that the urban legend of hammocks, pools, drinks with little umbrellas embodies. No. No camping there, but there is a place just a klick down the road called the Cabanas. We find this. All is well. Friendly. Cheap. Here is where the story started so many pages ago. Here is where we dry out, eat our bean dip on a blanket on the beach, where the dog runs, the cats sprawl out in the tent. Where the soft sea breeze revives us. Where the horrors of the past days can be relaxed from.

The morning as beautiful as the evening, with a brisk walk and fumbling through the wreckage of our water-destroyed crap. I have a briefcase that has spent the last week submerged. All the cardboard boxes are dissolved, their contents strewn into a garbage pile. I pick Kim's earrings and other jewelry from the exploded kitty chow, oatmeal, and kitchenware. It is like an archeological dig, the treasure mingled with the offerings of food for the gods. In a micro-moment of inspiration, I devise a method to tweak the trailer. Placing blocks found around here under the front frame, and putting a board up on the tongue, I drive the truck up the board and bend the tongue down, thereby giving more elevation to the trailer front. Works fairly well, get some bendage, then the blocks crush to powder, as they are made of a bad mix of limestone. Well, everything helps. Sorted, packed and loaded, we press on. I would like to stay another day, but there is the issue of the animals, who have only a ten-day vaccination pass. We are on Day 14 or so, but have it from the quarantine people on the Belize border that an overage of time is OK. Out into the highway, and off into the deep unknown of Mexico.

We have perused the map extensively at this point. There is a winding road through the coastal range that cuts off before Veracruz, where a main boulevard travels west to Mexico City. The 101 coastal route dives straight into the Veracruz city. OK, doesn't take brain surgery to figure what that's gonna be like. A major local police fleeing roadblock as we enter the city, then likely one on the way out, possibly one in the middle. Who knows? Who wants to find out? This inland route may take a little longer. But the worst driving is better than the best fleeing. My nerves just can't take it anyway, not to mention the rapidly dwindling money reserves.

Of the three types of roadblocks, two are actually benign. The military s are heavily armed, often with machine gun nest emplacements. If they should decide to shoot you, there is little Bonnie and Clyde chance you'd ever get out of there in a hail of bullets looking anything different than a western road sign. But they're just about finding out who you are, and if you have a load of AK-47s for the Zapatas that will eventually shoot back at them. So no reason, if a body could in these situations, to think you'll be intimidated into paying these kaki full-uniform itchy-finger troopers. The *Federales* are also benign, and equally sinister in appearance. Often they wear black ski masks, and are always in full flak dress-down, with grenades and numerous murderous paraphernalia hanging off them. They must be roasting in all that garb, enough to take on a frontal assault at a moment's notice. I worry that the irritation of this preparedness will have an effect on our encounters, but it never seems to. They are generally business-like, and perceptive that we're not on Mexico's top ten list of desperadoes. Although I always feel like I am, and of course my imagined guilt crosses all the language barriers.

The local police are a different story.

How the government of Mexico can be intent to shoot a pack of well-meaning revolutionaries, or some enterprising drug dealers who are holding the economy together, but let these uniformed bandits run wild on the public streets, intimidating cold cash out of the innocent population, is beyond disgraceful and criminal. On the main thoroughfare of every major town, they set up and wave not only the obvious easy marks like us, with all our crap and stupid Amerikan license plates, but also most others, big trucks and equipment, poor bastards just trying to get to work. Then they're robbed. For what? What recourse do they have? None? Pig with gun . . . hello . . . what the fuck are you going to do? Pay. That's what. Sick as it is, this (literal) highway robbery is an accepted social condition. Why don't the revolutionaries gun these assholes down? I'd join that cause. Why doesn't the military or *Federales* stop these bastards?

So we learn a few things. Always there is some sort of infraction for which a "*ticketo*" is in order. There is no paper exchanged for the *ticketo*, except for the bucks you hand through the window. I'd like to ask one of these thieves for a receipt, which would never happen. So they usually want to see your driver's license, as if they are doing their job, but that is more like a hostage situation—you don't get it back until you pay. I've heard to never give them your passport, as they will ransom that for 500 or more.

So then the invention of the crime. Dog in the front seat. No flags on the trailer. Driving through town. No sticker. Parking in the wrong place when pulled over. All crap. All payable instantaneously without the hassle of paperwork. Often my annoyance overwhelms my reason and I commence to argue with these Gestapo in broken chopped Spanish. *No, no ticketo. Todo Bueno.* Rarely this has any effect, but in some cases negotiations are a bit fruitful. So I wouldn't exactly call it reasoning with them, but more like if your bravado can overwhelm theirs, they'll accept a lower price. The *transmigrantes* who move stolen cars down to Guatemala on a regular basis have this all worked out. It helps to be able to argue in Spanish, and they claim they rarely have to pay more than 20 pesos, about enough for a beer, at any one of these fleece spots. They weigh this against a longer less direct route, and calculate the graft as being less than the cost of gas. I sure wish I had that local ability. The smoothest ride would be a rental car, Mexican plates, nothing visible inside, a good line of Spanish bullshit and, for me, maybe some skin dye.

We veer off before Veracruz, getting on a boulevard/freeway thing heading toward Mexico City. Where the hell is the road south? No signs, nothing on the map in the way of connecting roads. These maps are made by elementary students. I have never seen such a cartographic catastrophe. I am used to the detail of US maps, every side road and loop delineated, maps made by people who care about detail. We realize we're being sucked into the wrong direction and take a *retorno* before things get too weird. Heading back toward Veracruz, we see a paved unmarked road off to the south, which we cut into. Through a village in a gully, then into the mountains. Almost as an afterthought a bent-over sign says #127. We have found it by luck, once again, the bypass road around Veracruz.

This road is the windiest and narrowest yet. Snaking through lush hills, climbing for miles and miles, the vegetation changing to more flowering trees with coffee bushes growing underneath. Every small casa seems to have a dozen coffee bushes on the edge of their place, small paradises of flowers and fruit trees. These mountain people seem to have nicer and more well-kept places, the fruits of the land treating them better than the rats that infest the sides of the main highway. On and on we go, winding and winding up and down. In the deeper canyons are shrines cut into the hillside, often with some Christian bent, but obviously there to revere the spirits of the gully, with offering of fruit laid before them. We skirt the edge of a city somewhere there in the middle, now at a few thousand feet elevation. Coffee warehouses are along the road, the traffic piles up ahead and behind at various times. Then a long and endless descent back down to the plain.

After four hours, we come to small town we think is near the toll road. This toll road will take us across the bottom of Mexico, into the city of Villa Hermosa, out the other side, north again to Escarcega, and then a straight shot east to Chetumal, the border town with Belize. We are anxious to find this and get on it. No, this was not the connecting village, but a pre-village of a pre-village. On we go, not sure if we are on the right road now. Finally we see a sign indicating Fortin is ahead, the place of connection. Weird name for hereabouts. What you would expect to find in the Midwest. Traffic is backed up behind us as we plod along. Suddenly I see in my mirrors a police car has somehow muscled its way in behind us. Here we go again. In short order, the lights come on. Pull over. Don't even try to get out, as that threatens them. As he gets to the window, I have my wallet out, making a show of getting out my license while flashing the 200 pesos in there. Some blather commences about how we need these triangular flags that stick out of the sides of larger trucks. Infraction? *Quanta Costa?* 300 pesos. I try to hand him the 200, explaining it's all we have. Some back and forth about that but he's not budging from the 300. OK. Kim would you get a hundred out of the glove box. She pops it open where a lot of loose bills are stuffed. Cover 'em up, I try to whisper but, as always, we are exasperated. She hands me one, which I add to the others and hand over. The pig steps back in surprise. *Passo?* I query. *Si. Si, passo.* But we must stop down at the next roadblock to get the triangle flags. Yeah right. On we go. Even though the traffic is thick, the cop vanishes with his car.

"How much did you give him?" she asks.

"Two hundred."

"What did you give him?"

"A 500."

"*What?*"

"That was way too much."

“You told me to grab some money, so I grabbed some. How the hell was I supposed to know?”

“We gave him 700 rather than 300.”

“Well, goddamnit, I just grabbed the money like you said to do.”

“It’s OK. It’s OK. We’re past him. That was about 75 bucks US. Now look alive, we’re coming into this village.”

Ahead we can see a roadblock of about five police, a few cars, all drooling as they look up the road at us coming. We can see the toll road behind them, the elevated freeway whizzing with fast cars. This blockade is where we’re supposed to get the “flags.” Fucking fleeced and filleted is more like it. I’m sweating. What to do, what to do?

“Quota!” Kim shouts.

“What the . . . ?”

“Turn right! Quota Road!” I am already partway past but crank the wheel maniacally. The lumbering load makes the turn, partly into the oncoming lane. We were a block away from the check-point. *Quota* means toll down here, and although there was not a single other sign indicating any other city or direction, clever Kim picked up on this and saved our ass. Down under the freeway we hit a massive *tope* in the darkness, seeming to rip the back of the truck and trailer right off. Recovering from that, it is onto the ramp of the *quota*, also totally unmarked. We’re up and on it. Big clean four-lane freeway. Two lanes all to ourselves. I see the police down under the bridge, wondering where their victim got off to. And off we are. We’re outta here suckers. Now hundreds of miles of freeway, unblockaded (we think), a fast route to Belize now.

Toll road is somewhat of an ambiguous thing, as is most else in this country is. The toll, that is. There seems to be a toll-booth about every forty miles or so, sometimes less. I can’t figure if these are controlled by the mafia, or who exactly. There are billboards extolling the wonders of the government who have brought us this fine road, but they could mean anything, and probably not what a body would think. The road is good, made of concrete rather than the nine layers of half-ass applied asphalt. Pot-holes are few. A steady pace of 50 MPH can be maintained with all the maniacs passing to the left at 90. I am thankful to be out of the perpetual village phenomena with all their asshole bumps, road sharks, and rip off pigs. There seems to be no pigs whatsoever out here—the tolls themselves deemed sufficient extortion.

Toll-booths are confusing because I can count to ten and no higher. Even to ten I can’t understand what they are saying. So we just hand money out the window and hope for some change. On occasion, a number flashed on a marquee in front of us, giving us a clue what to pay. At every one is a big deal about how many axels we have, always resulting in the booth person having to get off their padded stool, lock the toll booth, come suspiciously around and look under the trailer. Each extra axel doubles the toll. Soon we catch on to this and proclaim *una* to their quizzical look, but they never believe us, and have to get out and check. I’m sure this costs us extra. There are always some sort of paramilitary goons around. The hover attracts them like flies to shit. The longer the inspection for axels, the more congregate, and I can feel their minds working up infractions. A few times I drive off with out the change, before the mental cusp is reached with these marauders. I notice that when a particularly toll is charged, it doesn’t show on the lighted board. At one booth, the fellow speaks some English. Three hundred pesos he wants. Not on the board. Paid and beyond, we conclude we’ve been fleeced again. Getting smarter now, we see that the fare rates are posted going into the toll booth. This

allows us to only hand over exact amounts, like we knew what we were doing. Yeah, that's better.

After the booth there is often a check-point, military or *Federales*, but who really knows who the hell they are except their mothers. We are always pulled over without question. Then the questions. *Transmigrantes*, we plead, handing over the *documenteros*. After some scrutiny we're allowed to pass, unfleeced. Sometimes we have to get out of the truck as a young uniform hops into the back and rummages around a bit. Not sure why we have to get out and smell the machine gun oil, but it is unnerving. It being the first step to being shoved up against the bullet-ridden wall. On and on this goes, the road still good, the toll-booths and check-points frequent.

Both sides of the road are flooded in this long stretch to Villa Hermosa. People with their baggage on their heads walk along the roadside, going who knows where. Flooded shacks can be seen everywhere. At times we cross mammoth rivers of swirling mud, their banks undefined, merging with drowned fields as far as we can see. I see scraggly abandoned horses, still tied to their roadside grazing places, chest deep in water. Why does no one cut them loose? I should feel pity for these inundated people, but I don't. Somehow, I think if this whole country washed away, who could possibly miss it? Come on, God, you have a fine start here. Just another 20 feet of water ought to do it.

Kim has found in the yuppie *RV Camping in Mexico* guide another possible campground. It is vaguely described as being forty or sixty miles this side of Villa Hermosa. We haven't seen a single RV anywhere. The detailed directions tell us the place is on the other side of the freeway and one must somehow see this, then take a *retorno*, pull in at a gas station, go around behind it, park, bang on a gate, walk up a hill to the office, etc. etc. I miss the obvious motels of the west. We're out of the damn pesos again. The last one we had to dig through a pile of aluminum and brass coins to find, and pay. I stop at a Permex gas station that advertises a bank. This is only a cash machine, which is no use to us, our credit being left in shambles back in the states. No, nobody will change Yank money. Maybe try the gas jockeys. Yes . . . one sharp-looking fella will do it, at the rate of 1000 (a mil) pesos to the hundred. The rate is 1300 in an airport, 1250 on the street, so this guy is making about 30 bucks on a hundred. I change 200 US and get enough funny-looking money to stuff the glove box again. There are three different kinds of hundred peso bills. Some have clear cellophane windows in them. This must represent the national plant, which is a plastic bag stuck in the roadside brush.

Now the dark panic again. The sun setting in an aura of menstrual mist. Gotta get off the road. On the far side of the road we see Wangderro's RV sign. It is folded over, broken and crumbling, a wrecked car upside down in front of it, a fallen down barbed-wire fence all covered in tendrils of vegetation. Immediately there is a *retorno*. Too quick to react from the far lane. Maybe there is another *retorno*. I doubt it.

"The place looked abandoned to me, what about you?"

"Looked bad alright."

"Well the hell with that anyway."

But now we're charging straight into the city. It's fleecing hour. Maybe it's past fleecing hours and they're all home pigging *empanadas*. Nevertheless, we'll be driving for an hour in darkness before we hit the big town, and that solves nothing. Only complicates. Have to get off the road. We'll sleep in a gas station. Groan. Getting pretty dark now. The road worsening and we're hitting some road craters at high speed, feeling the agony of the frame twisting



underneath with the drubbing. There's a Permex on our side. I'm getting off the now-dark road. Pull into the far back corner. Stopped at last, but on a concrete slab that is remarkably unappealing. What to do? I piss the dog and tie her to the trailer. Walk with Kim over to the gas station where she barges into the bathroom not asking if the traditional three-peso fee is required. Inside the store is dark. Nobody ever turns the lights on around here. A few *senoritas* gossiping behind the counter eye me witheringly—particularly my ragged shoes in which I have hidden gold bars. If only they knew. Buy some beer and back to the truck. The dog has been barking desperately, feeling abandoned in this no-place. We sit behind the truck in the soaking bedroll, drinking the beers, which are a little comforting. What to do? Twelve hours till dawn. Have to wait it out.

A concrete wall next to us is covered in lizards, attracted to the bugs under an erratic mini-street lamp. That's pretty cool. The air is thick and muggy. Mosquitoes take up ten percent of the atmosphere. They are biting the hell out of us, injecting us with malaria, dengue, elephantitis, and every other exotic tropical disease known and unknown. Ahead of us to the east, the sky flashes continuously with some massive storm headed our way. Blast after blast of white light, seeming to reveal our skeletons in their intensity. No matter how we cover ourselves, the little disease vectors continue to stab us mercilessly. It is incredibly hot. Has to be over a hundred something.

We pack back into the truck, starting it and blasting the AC. Crammed in here, our spines pre-fused from endless hours on the road, upright seating only. Turn the truck off and it's a foggy hundred in four minutes. We are relatively miserable. An hour has passed . . . eleven to go. Suggest we set the tent up and fling the cats in, give us more room in the truck cab. This is a unanimous vote. We do so, putting the soggy cat box in there with them. The little crazy one escapes again, but is distracted long enough by the lizard wall to be recaptured. The furry creature seems to be intent on becoming a Mexican cat, or, more realistically, a *gato taco*.

A little more room in the truck now. We share leg space, trying to straighten them for a brief time to return blood flow. Truck on. Truck off. The storm nears slowly, now with accompanying booming behind the flashes. Four hours in and no sleep yet, just writhing. Sweltering inside with the truck off, but we don't dare let the blood-sucking hoard in through the window. Already there are a few micro-devils sucking us that have slipped in. We thrash for these, hitting the dog and each other. Truck on for a few moments of icy air. Truck off, can't leave it running all night.

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

We stagger outside to pull the program together. The cats are OK, although not speaking to anyone. The hover trailer is only two inches off the ground in front. Too low to go anywhere. The hovercraft is full of 50,000 gallons of rain-water. I try to bail it out, but it is an impossible task. With much reluctance, I take the big bar and stab two holes through the floor. This will do it. No point in hauling Lake Erie around. Soon our sodden crap is all packed away again. A lot of heavy things that were in the hover are put in the truck. Back out onto the road.

No coffee, no food, just cigarettes.

On the Belize Border

The road degrades as we approach Villa Hermosa, in inverse proportion to the increase in traffic. I'm expecting a rip off station on the outskirts of town, but it is the morning rush hour. This place is huge, with some miles of industrial districts on the outskirts. The two-lane highway plows into the city. Soon we are in the edge of downtown. Here the three-lane road is mosh-pitted with six cars abreast and multiple diagonal drivers too. Cars are less than inches away, and are aggressively squeezing from one lane to the next. I see no lane lines, just this sea of frantic cars all trying to squish through. I can't understand how we're not hitting anyone, as if we were a clam in its shell but not touching it. The only saving grace is that everything is moving at 3 MPH. For a few miles we crawl along in this car constipation, until skyscrapers are all around us and the masses mob the off-ramp to their office endeavours. The road becomes less packed, almost drivable. Still the two-lane toll road with a boulevard down the middle. We pick up speed, happy to be through the city, on our way to the east. Nothing happens. No police fleecing blockades. We're out in the country now and traveling fast. The usual toll-booths at their usual frequencies, now all followed by military check-points. They are searching for revolutionaries, who are common to this area. One captain tries to trick us up in well-spoken English, trying to get us to tell different stories about where we're going, how long we'll be there, what our purpose is. Anticipating this, we have rehearsed our intent, and the fellow is unable to make headway on incarcerating us.

On and on we go, making good time. The road is improved and there is little traffic. We are out of the flooded areas now, traveling through lush fields. Now heading north, crossing in and out of the state of Chiapas with associated military check-points at every border crossing. At one check-point, the road is a mass of chuck-holes. Dust seems to be on everything. The military is intense, having us get out while they rifle through everything. Bunkers on the roadside have bullet holes sprayed in them. It would seem this was a site of a recent assault by the revolutionaries. But we are not they, and eventually pass. The blood pressure factor is much lower now, goons with guns being so commonplace. Hardly warranting a ceremonial cigarette after a scrutiny. The last town comes at last. Escarcega. From here it is due east to Chetumal, the border town, and entry into Belize.

The road degrades to a one-lane town road, right through the heart of the small city. This is the perfect arrangement for the fleecers. But something is different here. The town is gaily painted and strewn with banners and flags. This is the city closest to dozen of famous ruins all around, and they are apparently capitalizing on the tourist trade to those sites. El Tigre, Becan, Calakmul, and many more rise their temples to the sky, wonders of a vast civilization come and gone. We pass through town without a hitch, not even a sideways glance from anyone. We are on the last stretch of the highway to Belize. The road is great, no traffic, and we're stomping the gas.

We blaze across the Yucatan panhandle. No temple stops for us. Racing the clock as always. Coming into Chetumal, we get into an argument about where Santa Elena is, the border crossing. Kim seems to think it's down this dirt road that ends at the river some forty miles south of the highway. I contend no way, that there is only one, the one in town. But I humor her and head down this road anyway. It is soon the usual village with *topes* every three

miles, donkeys in the road, etc.

“No way,” I say. Turn around.

Argue back to the highway. OK, we’ll ask. Pull onto a mechanic yard with four rough-looking beer-swilling types. Nobody speaks English. After they figure out how pathetic we are, there is much discussion, ending in directions to continue down the dirt road. OK . . . Back down the road.

Now twenty miles in. I say no way. Stop and ask some street people. Oh no, Santa Elena is out of Chetumal. Must go back to the highway and continue into town. Yeah. Figured. Back again, on down the road. This double diversion took two hours. Follow some confusing signs, go through an abandoned-looking gate, then up a lonely road straight into a military encampment. Not good. Soldiers surround us. Apparently this is an unused bridge across to Belize, but we ain’t getting through here.

Much explaining in broken Spanish why we’re not trying to smuggle drugs through here, then I have to back the trailer up for a quarter mile before I can get turned around. Now getting dark. People driving here without lights, which multiplies the possible crash factor. We are sucked into the town. Shit. Pull into a gas station where we meet a Belizean who says he’s headed for the crossing and we can follow him. A gentleman. Now pitch black. We follow with difficulty, being the tortoise and him the hare. The roads are confusing, with three-quarter roundabouts, oddball left turns, nothing marked except one sign that says substitute route. Eventually a little town, money-change booths, and then the border/military fortress. OK, what the hell, we pull in and are stopped.

We’re identified as *transmigrantes*, cargo people. A higher official is called to explain to us. The office is closed. We are three hours too late. It is Friday and it doesn’t open until Monday morn. Screwed, basically. We are escorted out but have to pass through a military check post where we’re scrutinized, even though just making a U-turn. I was given some abstract directions to a place where we could wait it out. A parking lot? A hotel? The road out threatens to suck us back into town, but I make a variety of blind left turns, go around a few roundabouts, a blind right, and am somehow heading back toward the border.

A hotel on the right with a huge fence around it. Into that. The proprietor is a Belizean, working for an Iraqi who owns the hotel, here in Mexico. Ishmael, a nice enough fellow, but somehow distracted, as though the Iraqi was watching his every move. Allows us to have the pets. Directs us to park around the back. Stopped finally. Animals unloaded into the room, OK by equatorial standards. Has an AC unit. We collapse. We’re here, but not here. Out of Mexico, but still in it. Safe, but not across the border. A few days’ rest will do us good.

The border town of Santa Elena is pretty cute. Only a few blocks long, but packed with corner grocery stores and cubbyhole cafes. We walk the half-mile down there in the morning, and have some odd food at a tiny table halfway into the sidewalk. The café is about six feet wide, disappearing into the interior of the building, with an open window in front. There are a half dozen hot bowls with towels over them and an ample supply of flies flitting about. We discuss at length how we want a *vegimintero* something for Kim. This is not easy. Everything is geared to chicken. All the fly slop has chicken in it. At last we convey beans, salad, avocado etc., by pointing and trying to grope some wayward vegetable on the counter. I am satisfied with chicken/fly goop. Our repast is served in a bread bun, fresh and recently made locally. Whatever the hell it is, it is food, the likes of which we have not seen since time began. We

slather everything with various hot sauces, from green chili mild to the peel paint stuff. It's the best thing we've ever eaten. I could eat six more, but my stomach has shrunk to the size of a walnut. I've lost over twenty pounds on the trip down here. A fair start. I'd say this is a fairly guaranteed weight loss program . . . stress and starvation. I should start a fatty clinic. Here's two hundred bucks US, a battered car with Iowa plates, no instructions, start here in El Paso, and email me when you hit the Guatemalan border. We'll try to get your thin traumatized ass out of there.

Then over to a little park, buying some fruit from a wooden box vendor. Oranges, bananas, and I stupidly get a half a watermelon wrapped in cellophane. It's decidedly overripe, and I can just about see the micro-organisms seething under the plastic, but I eat it anyway, have to get all these intestinal parasites a-tuned to my gut chemistry. Some belly boil afterwards but all part of the process I figure.

We lounge. The hotel is nice, with a huge lawn for the dog to crap in, palm trees all over, flowers everywhere. I find a four-inch green grasshopper on a stick who kicks like a mule when I try to pick it up. There are land snails as big as lemons in the grass. In the evening fireflies play everywhere. The cats constantly try to escape the room, the dog barks excessively when we leave. But nobody cares. The small crazy cat finds a two-inch lizard in the room that affords hours of chasing and hunting for it. The water system goes off for eight hours. The power for five hours. We find an Internet shop and it is hard to connect out of Mexican Google. The @ symbol is a matter of big discussion, finally revealed by another customer as alt-Q. I spend my time writing, writing, Kim reading and puttering. It is nice to relax, the pressure of night situating not upon us. Now the only worry is getting into Belize, the animals, the vehicles, the sodden crap.

Monday morning eventually comes. Again the reluctance to leave this sanctuary, Ishmael and his ghost-like gliding along the halls, the brief peace. Now there we are, the first in line waiting for the official to review our cargo. Over the line actually, which excites many, and we are instructed to back the mess up to the proper place. A lot of payments to various officials, a sign-off with a quarantine agent, a lot of palaver with "custom brokers," a guy named Lester designating himself as ours.

The inspector for our cargo looks like "Doc" in *Back to the Future*, but on a bad New York heroin addiction. He is indifferent about all the crap. The stolen vehicle permit never comes up, and I don't mention it. Just wants the *paymento*. Hundreds of pesos, who can keep count? Then, the moment of glory, across the river into Belize. We're in, never to cross back into this a-cursed country again.

To be continued in Cenacle | 81 | June 2012

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Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Seventh Series

*"There's no final answer."
—Dr. Timothy Leary,
Radio interview, 1986.*

xlvi. Red Scarf

Pierre-August Renoir, "Dance at Bougival," oil on canvas, 1883.

Tis the red scarf brings you to this café,
it belongs neither to the dancer nor her mate,
tis the red scarf made the rest alight,
for tonight would have passed on another,
tis the red scarf you can thank, for the staying
hunger of cheek to cheek, hand upon hand,
dark blue, labial pink, trees, drinkers, this wide world.

xlvii. Nomads

Claude Monet, "Grainstack (Sunset)," oil on canvas, 1891.

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

xlvi. Shorelessness

“What’s missing in this canvas,” he said,
 “is not the shore nor the sky, as some say,
 nor an appreciative human bias to keep
 matters of nature subordinate to men,
nay, what’s missing here is the crippling flaw
 of seeing in time” &, when challenged
 to elaborate this ambiguous philosophy,
 he propped his elbows on the hoary, twisted
 frame, pulled his legs up in a diver’s crouch,
 & completed a splashless fall within.

xlix. That Book

Washington Allston, “Moonlight, 1819,” oil on canvas, 1819.

It was as he’d read to me a year before,
 in the book we’d had to burn, mail its ashes
 to the horseman now before us in the great moonlight.
 The boat was pulled ashore, its sail drooping
 in readiness. We’d brought the child as agreed.
 He might come one day too. I chanced one look
 around, this was a beautiful place with its far
 mountains & closer woods. Yet I didn’t love it,
 didn’t love anywhere, or myself, or my close companion.
 We were bound now to places where want & hunger
 & the need to dress for a lover that he may,
 pleased, undress you again, none of these existed,
 & my only doubt was twined of the boy’s damp hand
 releasing mine, & the inhuman figure dashing from our boat.

l. Lost Moon

Hermann Dudley Murphy, "Moonlight, Woodstock," oil on canvas, 1905.

Was it guns or 'crackers we heard that night,
 o we listened for hours. When the sky
 grew bluer despite the night, & roughened up
 like hard seas, & there were no stars,
 as there were no clouds, just what I say,
 the moon, tiny, weak, remained.

The brew of toeless sprites had been strong,
 beyond bitter, but its teases, tossings, &
 eventual turbulence did not explain. I turned
 to my friends & nodded. When the last light
 in the village in those far hills went dark,
 it was time. No matter the frothing skies,
 nor the labial pink lacing the fragile moon.

We would go, torn inside by days of fasting,
 tipped hard by the brew, there, the last
 went out & what had been solid earth
 under our feet defined itself as a laid floor,
 unattached to the earth, now rocking,
 now rising, o, why did I still wonder
 about the gunfire or 'crackers, the lost moon
 in its crying waters, what else,
 we are moving up, straight up now,
 toward the secret see of seas.



lii. God's Girl

Edgar Degas, "Woman with a Towel" pastel, 1894 or 1898.

The new one says I have a fairy's face
 & a whore's physique. His towel is thick,
 woven with money, leers softly upon my
 skin. He hears my talk of God & asks
 will God keep me when my breasts sink,
 my ass thicks or thins. When he sees
 me reading my books, he laughs, gestures,
 I come to him. I let him know secret things—

liii. Occupy (i)

Go on, tell me I can't breathe here.
 You've figured a way to govern air.
 Go on, tell me I can't sleep here.
 I don't matter & neither do my fucking dreams.
 Go on, tell me I'm not fit to occupy.
 There are many ways to burst heart & bones.

liv. 11/14/1981

The bloom I'd lay at your breast tonight
 is & is not the one I held those hours,
 touch, & there's still a tune. But if you don't,
 as you did not then, there's still a tune.
 Your young cheek, yes a bloom for you. My music,
 no, I earned that for my own romances.

lv. PeaceLoveDove

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

lvi. Tonight in Your Room

Later today, we will say our words &
 bury your ashes. A dozen & a dozen faces
 will gather who hadn't before, & you are gone
 & you remain. Now it's 3 a.m. & cold in your room.

I lie in your one pillow bed, looking toward
 the door you saw every morning for years.
 Out there, your cherished ones. Beyond that,
 the world. It's 3:02 a.m. & I weary.

Your guitars, your books, not a picture
 on your walls. No curtains on the windows.
 The light stirred you, woke you. Light &
 some car swooshing past. You are gone,
 those guitars now silent, this bed empty
 but me passing through. It's 3:05 a.m. & one last.

Does a room keep its departed occupant
 awhile? This building old, you weren't the first.
 Did it try to warn you the morning of your
 last day, or say goodbye, in a room's way,
 bunching its air at the doorway, bursting
 you through, slowing your scattered eye, your heaving breath?

lvii. Them Jellies

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

lviii. Revelator

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

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

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

lix. Entangle

“ *the world changes*
if two look at each other and see
to love is to undress our names”
 —Octavio Paz, *Sunstone*, 1957.

You laugh. You're dust in a courtyard, below
 a plaque, in a box waiting further dispersal.
 You laugh. “It matters & it doesn't. The tune
 of a lover's heartbeat when she's close. That same
 music, years on, another's arms. Nobody's.”
 You laugh. Because you know I'll climb
 from these depths again &, when exhausted, return.

lx. Leucocyte

“*If you plant ice*
you're going to harvest wind”
 —Grateful Dead, “*Franklin's Tower*,” 1975.

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

2/18/2012
 Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Herman Melville

Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street [Classic Fiction]

(From *The Piazza Tales*, 1856)

I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written:—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my employees, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.

Imprimis: I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. All who know

me consider me an eminently safe man. The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion.

Some time prior to the period at which this little history begins, my avocations had been largely increased. The good old office, now extinct in the State of New-York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me. It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. I seldom

lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master of Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a — premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. But this is by the way.

My chambers were up stairs at No. — Wall-street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call “life.” But if so, the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern.

At the period just preceding the advent of *Bartleby*, I had two persons as copyists in my employment, and a promising lad as an office-boy. First, Turkey; second, Nippers; third, Ginger Nut. These may seem names, the like of which are not usually found in the Directory. In truth they were nicknames, mutually conferred upon each other by my three clerks, and were deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters. Turkey was a short, pury Englishman of about my own age, that is, somewhere not far from sixty. In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o'clock, meridian—his dinner hour—it blazed like a

grate full of Christmas coals; and continued blazing—but, as it were, with a gradual wane—till 6 o'clock, P. M. or thereabouts, after which I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory. There are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact, that exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours. Not that he was absolutely idle, or averse to business then; far from it. The difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him. He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were dropped there after twelve o'clock, meridian. Indeed, not only would he be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he went further, and was rather noisy. At such times, too, his face flamed with augmented blazonry, as if cannel coal had been heaped on anthracite. He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him. Nevertheless, as he was in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, meridian, was the quickest, steadiest creature too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched—for these reasons, I was willing to overlook his eccentricities, though indeed, occasionally, I remonstrated with him. I did

this very gently, however, because, though the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet in the afternoon he was disposed, upon provocation, to be slightly rash with his tongue, in fact, insolent. Now, valuing his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them; yet, at the same time made uncomfortable by his inflamed ways after twelve o'clock; and being a man of peace, unwilling by my admonitions to call forth unseemly retorts from him; I took upon me, one Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays), to hint to him, very kindly, that perhaps now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labors; in short, he need not come to my chambers after twelve o'clock, but, dinner over, had best go home to his lodgings and rest himself till tea-time. But no; he insisted upon his afternoon devotions. His countenance became intolerably fervid, as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon?

“With submission, sir,” said Turkey on this occasion, “I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns; but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus!”—and he made a violent thrust with the ruler.

“But the blots, Turkey,” intimated I.

“True,—but, with submission, sir, behold these hairs! I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age—even if it blot the page—is honorable. With submission, sir, we both are getting old.”

This appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. At all events, I saw that go he would not. So I made up my mind to let him stay, resolving, nevertheless, to see to it, that during the afternoon he had to do

with my less important papers.

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business; and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting-paper. But no invention would answer. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brought the table lid at a sharp angle well up towards his chin, and wrote there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk:—then he declared that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowered the table to his waistbands, and stooped over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted any thing, it was to be rid of a scrivener's table altogether. Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients. Indeed I was aware that not only was he, at times, considerable of a ward-politician, but he occasionally did a little business at the Justices' courts, and was not unknown on

the steps of the Tombs. I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun, and the alleged title-deed, a bill. But with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me; wrote a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers. Whereas with respect to Turkey, I had much ado to keep him from being a reproach to me. His clothes were apt to look oily and smell of eating-houses. He wore his pantaloons very loose and baggy in summer. His coats were execrable; his hat not to be handled. But while the hat was a thing of indifference to me, inasmuch as his natural civility and deference, as a dependent Englishman, always led him to doff it the moment he entered the room, yet his coat was another matter. Concerning his coats, I reasoned with him; but with no effect. The truth was, I suppose, that a man with so small an income, could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time. As Nippers once observed, Turkey's money went chiefly for red ink. One winter day I presented Turkey with a highly-respectable looking coat of my own, a padded gray coat, of a most comfortable warmth, and which buttoned straight up from the knee to the neck. I thought Turkey would appreciate the favor, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no. I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket-like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him; upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses. In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom

prosperity harmed.

Though concerning the self-indulgent habits of Turkey I had my own private surmises, yet touching Nippers I was well persuaded that whatever might be his faults in other respects, he was, at least, a temperate young man. But indeed, nature herself seemed to have been his vintner, and at his birth charged him so thoroughly with an irritable, brandy-like disposition, that all subsequent potations were needless. When I consider how, amid the stillness of my chambers, Nippers would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and stooping over his table, spread his arms wide apart, seize the whole desk, and move it, and jerk it, with a grim, grinding motion on the floor, as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him; I plainly perceive that for Nippers, brandy and water were altogether superfluous.

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause—indigestion—the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off; and vice versa. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances.

Ginger Nut, the third on my list, was a lad some twelve years old. His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office as student at law, errand boy, and cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week. He had a little desk to himself, but he did not use it much. Upon inspection, the drawer exhibited a great array of the shells of various sorts of nuts. Indeed, to this quick-witted youth the whole noble science of the law was contained in a nut-shell. Not the least among the employments of Ginger Nut,

as well as one which he discharged with the most alacrity, was his duty as cake and apple purveyor for Turkey and Nippers. Copying law papers being proverbially a dry, husky sort of business, my two scribes were fain to moisten their mouths very often with Spitzenbergs to be had at the numerous stalls nigh the Custom House and Post Office. Also, they sent Ginger Nut very frequently for that peculiar cake—small, flat, round, and very spicy—after which he had been named by them. Of a cold morning when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers—indeed they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny—the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. Of all the fiery afternoon blunders and flurried rashnesses of Turkey, was his once moistening a ginger-cake between his lips, and clapping it on to a mortgage for a seal. I came within an ace of dismissing him then. But he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and saying—“With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account.”

Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master’s office. There was now great work for scribes. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby.

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of

Nippers.

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scribes, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined.

At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener’s business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scribes in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair. I can readily imagine that to some sanguine temperaments it would be



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altogether intolerable. For example, I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimped hand.

Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this purpose. One object I had in placing Bartleby so handy to me behind the screen, was to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions. It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, “I would prefer not to.”

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, “I would prefer not to.”

“Prefer not to,” echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. “What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this

sheet here—take it,” and I thrust it towards him.

“I would prefer not to,” said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined.

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicates of a week’s testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged I called Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

“Bartleby! quick, I am waiting.”

I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

“What is wanted?” said he mildly.

“The copies, the copies,” said I hurriedly. “We are going to examine them.

There”—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

“I would prefer not to,” he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

“Why do you refuse?”

“I would prefer not to.”

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him.

“These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labor saving to you, because one examination will answer for your four papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!”

“I prefer not to,” he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that while I had been addressing him, he carefully revolved every statement that I made; fully comprehended the meaning; could not gainsay the irresistible conclusion; but, at the same time, some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did.

“You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?”

He briefly gave me to understand that on that point my judgment was sound. Yes: his decision was irreversible.

It is not seldom the case that when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason

is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind.

“Turkey,” said I, “what do you think of this? Am I not right?”

“With submission, sir,” said Turkey, with his blandest tone, “I think that you are.”

“Nippers,” said I, “what do you think of it?”

“I think I should kick him out of the office.”

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey’s answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nippers replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers’s ugly mood was on duty, and Turkey’s off.)

“Ginger Nut,” said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, “what do you think of it?”

“I think, sir, he’s a little lunny,” replied Ginger Nut, with a grin.

“You hear what they say,” said I, turning towards the screen, “come forth and do your duty.”

But he vouchsafed no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby, though at every page or two, Turkey deferentially dropped his opinion that this proceeding was quite out of the common; while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out between his set teeth occasional hissing maledictions against the stubborn oaf behind the screen. And for his (Nippers’s) part, this was the first and the last time he would do another man’s business without pay.

Meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to every thing but his

own peculiar business there.

Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; indeed that he never went any where. As yet I had never of my personal knowledge known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o'clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance toward the opening in Bartleby's screen, as if silently beckoned thither by a gesture invisible to me where I sat. The boy would then leave the office jingling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger-nuts which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavoring one. Now what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity; then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along

with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange wilfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But indeed I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued:

"Bartleby," said I, "when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you."

"I would prefer not to."

"How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?"

No answer.

I threw open the folding-doors near by, and turning upon Turkey and Nippers, exclaimed in an excited manner—

"He says, a second time, he won't examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?"

It was afternoon, be it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

"Think of it?" roared Turkey; "I think I'll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!"

So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugilistic position. He was hurrying away to make good his promise, when I detained him, alarmed at the effect of incautiously rousing Turkey's combativeness after dinner.

“Sit down, Turkey,” said I, “and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?”

“Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim.”

“Ah,” exclaimed I, “you have strangely changed your mind then—you speak very gently of him now.”

“All beer,” cried Turkey; “gentleness is effects of beer—Nippers and I dined together to-day. You see how gentle I am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?”

“You refer to Bartleby, I suppose. No, not to-day, Turkey,” I replied; “pray, put up your fists.”

I closed the doors, and again advanced towards Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

“Bartleby,” said I, “Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won’t you? (it was but a three minutes walk,) and see if there is any thing for me.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“You will not?”

“I prefer not.”

I staggered to my desk, and sat there in a deep study. My blind inveteracy returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

“Bartleby!”

No answer.

“Bartleby,” in a louder tone.

No answer.

“Bartleby,” I roared.

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third

summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

“Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me.”

“I prefer not to,” he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared.

“Very good, Bartleby,” said I, in a quiet sort of serenely severe self-possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. At the moment I half intended something of the kind. But upon the whole, as it was drawing towards my dinner-hour, I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day, suffering much from perplexity and distress of mind.

Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there; that he copied for me at the usual rate of four cents a folio (one hundred words); but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers, one of compliment doubtless to their superior acuteness; moreover, said Bartleby was never on any account to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would prefer not to—in other words, that he would refuse point-blank.

As days passed on, I became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing revery behind his screen), his great stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition. One prime thing was this,—he was always there;—first in the morning, continually through the day, and the last at night. I had a singular confidence in his honesty. I felt my most precious papers

perfectly safe in his hands. Sometimes to be sure I could not, for the very soul of me, avoid falling into sudden spasmodic passions with him. For it was exceeding difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions, forming the tacit stipulations on Bartleby's part under which he remained in my office. Now and then, in the eagerness of dispatching pressing business, I would inadvertently summon Bartleby, in a short, rapid tone, to put his finger, say, on the incipient tie of a bit of red tape with which I was about compressing some papers. Of course, from behind the screen the usual answer, "I prefer not to," was sure to come; and then, how could a human creature with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness—such unreasonableness. However, every added repulse of this sort which I received only tended to lessen the probability of my repeating the inadvertence.

Here it must be said, that according to the custom of most legal gentlemen occupying chambers in densely-populated law buildings, there were several keys to my door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth I knew not who had.

Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground, I thought I would walk round to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me; but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the inside. Quite surprised, I called out; when to my consternation a key was turned from within; and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and

otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then, and—preferred not admitting me at present. In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs.

Now, the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanted my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener. Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning. Was any thing amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there?—copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday; and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that we would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day.

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified; and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered.



Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen; but it was very plain that he was gone. Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yet, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall-street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage!

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery

there is none. These sad fancyings—chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain—led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet.

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine, and its contents too, so I will make bold to look within. Every thing was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a savings' bank.

I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men; that he never went any where in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless indeed that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. And more than all, I remembered a certain unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather

an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his long-continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those dead-wall reveries of his.

Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact that he made my office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness; revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally, I resolved upon this;—I would put certain calm questions to him the next morning, touching his history, &c.,

and if he declined to answer then openly and reservedly (and I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, after reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply.

The next morning came.

“Bartleby,” said I, gently calling to him behind his screen.

No reply.

“Bartleby,” said I, in a still gentler tone, “come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you.”

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view.

“Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Will you tell me any thing about yourself?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you.”

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head.

“What is your answer, Bartleby?” said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.

“At present I prefer to give no answer,” he said, and retired into his hermitage.

It was rather weak in me I confess,

but his manner on this occasion nettled me. Not only did there seem to lurk in it a certain disdain, but his perverseness seemed ungrateful, considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received from me.

Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behavior, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my office, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said: "Bartleby, never mind then about revealing your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help to examine papers to-morrow or next day: in short, say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable—say so, Bartleby."

"At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable," was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night's rest, induced by severer indigestion than common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

"Prefer not, eh?" gritted Nippers—"I'd prefer him, if I were you, sir," addressing me—"I'd prefer him; I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he prefers not to do now?"

Bartleby moved not a limb.

"Mr. Nippers," said I, "I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present."

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word "prefer" upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my

contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? This apprehension had not been without efficacy in determining me to summary means.

As Nippers, looking very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached.

"With submission, sir," said he, "yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers."

"So you have got the word too," said I, slightly excited.

"With submission, what word, sir," asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener. "What word, sir?"

"I would prefer to be left alone here," said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy.

"That's the word, Turkey," said I—"that's it."

"Oh, prefer? oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—"

"Turkey," interrupted I, "you will please withdraw."

"Oh, certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should."

As he opened the folding-door to retire, Nippers at his desk caught a glimpse of me, and asked whether I would prefer to have a certain paper copied on blue paper or white. He did not in the least roguishly accent the word prefer. It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. But I thought it prudent not to break the

dismissal at once.

The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall revery. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.

“Why, how now? what next?” exclaimed I, “do no more writing?”

“No more.”

“And what is the reason?”

“Do you not see the reason for yourself,” he indifferently replied.

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.

I was touched. I said something in condolence with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while; and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that, having nothing else earthly to do, Bartleby would surely be less inflexible than usual, and carry these letters to the post-office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself.

Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby’s eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.

“What!” exclaimed I; “suppose your eyes should get entirely well—better than ever before—would you not copy then?”

“I have given up copying,” he

answered, and slid aside.

He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible—he became still more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness. If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic. At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days’ time he must unconditionally leave the office. I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode. I offered to assist him in this endeavor, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal. “And when you finally quit me, Bartleby,” added I, “I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided. Six days from this hour, remember.”

At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and lo! Bartleby was there.

I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself; advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, “The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go.”

“I would prefer not,” he replied, with his back still towards me.

“You must.”

He remained silent.

Now I had an unbounded confidence in this man’s common honesty. He had frequently restored to me sixpences and shillings carelessly dropped upon the floor, for

I am apt to be very reckless in such shirt-button affairs. The proceeding then which followed will not be deemed extraordinary.

“Bartleby,” said I, “I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours.—Will you take it?” and I handed the bills towards him.

But he made no motion.

“I will leave them here then,” putting them under a weight on the table. Then taking my hat and cane and going to the door I tranquilly turned and added—“After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well.”

But he answered not a word; like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room.

As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity. I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness. There was no vulgar bullying, no bravado of any sort, no choleric hectoring, and striding to and fro across the apartment, jerking out vehement commands for Bartleby to bundle himself off with his beggarly traps. Nothing of the kind. Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart—as an inferior genius might have done—I assumed the ground that depart he must; and upon the assumption built all I had to say. The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it.

Nevertheless, next morning, upon awakening, I had my doubts,—I had somehow slept off the fumes of vanity. One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning. My procedure seemed as sagacious as ever,—but only in theory. How it would prove in practice—there was the rub. It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby’s departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby’s. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities pro and con. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

“I’ll take odds he doesn’t,” said a voice as I passed.

“Doesn’t go?—done!” said I, “put up your money.”

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness.

As I had intended, I was earlier than usual at my office door. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my



procedure had worked to a charm; he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this: I was almost sorry for my brilliant success. I was fumbling under the door mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within—"Not yet; I am occupied."

It was Bartleby.

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell.

"Not gone!" I murmured at last. But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went down stairs and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard-of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me,—this too I could not think of. What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there any thing further that I could assume in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could

withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. But upon second thoughts the success of the plan seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again.

"Bartleby," said I, entering the office, with a quietly severe expression, "I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears I am deceived. Why," I added, unaffectedly starting, "you have not even touched the money yet," pointing to it, just where I had left it the evening previous.

He answered nothing.

"Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

"I would prefer not to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the not.

"What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?"

He answered nothing.

"Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the post-office? In a word, will you do any thing at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?"

He silently retired into his hermitage.

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Colt, being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act—an act which certainly no man

could possibly deplore more than the actor himself. Often it had occurred to me in my ponderings upon the subject, that had that altercation taken place in the public street, or at a private residence, it would not have terminated as it did. It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, up stairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance;—this it must have been, which greatly helped to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt.

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: “A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.” Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy’s sake, and anger’s sake, and hatred’s sake, and selfishness’ sake, and spiritual pride’s sake; but no man that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity’s sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. At any rate, upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don’t mean any thing; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged.

I endeavored also immediately to occupy myself, and at the same time to comfort my despondency. I tried to fancy that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him, Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage, and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door. But no.

Half-past twelve o’clock came; Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his inkstand, and become generally obstreperous; Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy; Ginger Nut munched his noon apple; and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries. Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him.

Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals I looked a little into “Edwards on the Will,” and “Priestley on Necessity.” Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling. Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I; I shall persecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs; in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. At least I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and so be tempted to throw out some sinister observations

concerning him. Sometimes an attorney having business with me, and calling at my office, and finding no one but the scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts; but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart, no wiser than he came.

Also, when a Reference was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses and business was driving fast; some deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) office and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy: as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus.

Ere revolving any complicated project,

however, adapted to this end, I first simply suggested to Bartleby the propriety of his permanent departure. In a calm and serious tone, I commended the idea to his careful and mature consideration. But having taken three days to meditate upon it, he apprised me that his original determination remained the same; in short, that he still preferred to abide with me.

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I should do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal,—you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall. What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paperweight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you.

Then something severe, something unusual must be done. What! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will not be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him as a vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible means of support: there I have him. Wrong again: for indubitably he does support himself, and that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing the means so to do. No more then. Since he will not quit me, I must quit him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser.

Acting accordingly, next day I thus addressed him: "I find these chambers too far from the City Hall; the air is unwholesome. In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services. I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place."

He made no reply, and nothing more was said.

On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and having but little furniture, every thing was removed in a few hours. Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn; and being folded up like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room. I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within me upbraided me.

I re-entered, with my hand in my pocket—and—and my heart in my mouth.

"Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going—good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that," slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor, and then,—strange to say—I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of.

Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages. When I returned to my rooms after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and attentively listen, ere applying my key. But these fears were needless. Bartleby never came nigh me.

I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me, inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at No. — Wall-street.

Full of forebodings, I replied that I was.

"Then sir," said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, "you are responsible for

the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses to do any thing; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the premises."

"I am very sorry, sir," said I, with assumed tranquillity, but an inward tremor, "but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me—he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him."

"In mercy's name, who is he?"

"I certainly cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I employed him as a copyist; but he has done nothing for me now for some time past."

"I shall settle him then,—good morning, sir."

Several days passed, and I heard nothing more; and though I often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness of I know not what withheld me.

All is over with him, by this time, thought I at last, when through another week no further intelligence reached me. But coming to my room the day after, I found several persons waiting at my door in a high state of nervous excitement.

"That's the man—here he comes," cried the foremost one, whom I recognized as the lawyer who had previously called upon me alone.

"You must take him away, sir, at once," cried a portly person among them, advancing upon me, and whom I knew to be the landlord of No. — Wall-street. "These gentlemen, my tenants, cannot stand it any longer; Mr. B——" pointing to the lawyer, "has turned him out of his room, and he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Every body is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must do, and that without

delay.”

Aghast at this torrent, I fell back before it, and would fain have locked myself in my new quarters. In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me—no more than to any one else. In vain:—I was the last person known to have any thing to do with him, and they held me to the terrible account. Fearful then of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely threatened) I considered the matter, and at length said, that if the lawyer would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer’s) own room, I would that afternoon strive my best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of.

Going up stairs to my old haunt, there was Bartleby silently sitting upon the banister at the landing.

“What are you doing here, Bartleby?” said I.

“Sitting upon the banister,” he mildly replied.

I motioned him into the lawyer’s room, who then left us.

“Bartleby,” said I, “are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the office?”

No answer.

“Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one?”

“No; I would prefer not to make any change.”

“Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?”

“There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular.”

“Too much confinement,” I cried, “why you keep yourself confined all the time!”

“I would prefer not to take a clerkship,” he rejoined, as if to settle that little item at once.

“How would a bar-tender’s business suit you? There is no trying of the eyesight in that.”

“I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular.”

His unwonted wordiness inspired me. I returned to the charge.

“Well then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants? That would improve your health.”

“No, I would prefer to be doing something else.”

“How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation,—how would that suit you?”

“Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular.”

“Stationary you shall be then,” I cried, now losing all patience, and for the first time in all my exasperating connection with him fairly flying into a passion. “If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound—indeed I am bound—to—to—to quit the premises myself!” I rather absurdly concluded, knowing not with what possible threat to try to frighten his immobility into compliance. Despairing of all further efforts, I was precipitately leaving him, when a final thought occurred to me—one which had not been wholly unindulged before.

“Bartleby,” said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, “will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away.”

“No: at present I would prefer not to



make any change at all.”

I answered nothing; but effectually dodging every one by the suddenness and rapidity of my flight, rushed from the building, ran up Wall-street towards Broadway, and jumping into the first omnibus was soon removed from pursuit. As soon as tranquillity returned I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution. I now strove to be entirely care-free and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though indeed it was not so successful as I could have wished. So fearful was I of being again hunted out by the incensed landlord and his exasperated tenants, that, surrendering my business to Nippers, for a few days I drove about the upper part of the town and through the suburbs, in my rockaway; crossed over to Jersey City and Hoboken, and paid fugitive visits to Manhattanville and Astoria. In fact I almost lived in my rockaway for the time.

When again I entered my office, lo, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk. I opened it with trembling hands. It informed me that the writer had sent to the police, and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. Moreover, since I knew more about him than any one else, he wished me to appear at that place, and make a suitable statement of the facts. These tidings had a conflicting effect upon me. At first I was indignant; but at last almost approved. The landlord's energetic, summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself; and yet as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan.

As I afterwards learned, the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but in his pale unmoving

way, silently acquiesced.

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon.

The same day I received the note I went to the Tombs, or to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice. Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was indeed within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated, however unaccountably eccentric. I narrated all I knew, and closed by suggesting the idea of letting him remain in as indulgent confinement as possible till something less harsh might be done—though indeed I hardly knew what. At all events, if nothing else could be decided upon, the alms-house must receive him. I then begged to have an interview.

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and especially in the inclosed grass-platted yards thereof. And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

“Bartleby!”

“I know you,” he said, without looking round,—“and I want nothing to say to you.”

“It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby,” said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. “And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass.”

“I know where I am,” he replied,

but would say nothing more, and so I left him.

As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat-like man, in an apron, accosted me, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder said—"Is that your friend?"

"Yes."

"Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that's all."

"Who are you?" asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially speaking person in such a place.

"I am the grub-man. Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat."

"Is this so?" said I, turning to the turnkey.

He said it was.

"Well then," said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man's hands (for so they called him). "I want you to give particular attention to my friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him as possible."

"Introduce me, will you?" said the grub-man, looking at me with an expression which seem to say he was all impatience for an opportunity to give a specimen of his breeding.

Thinking it would prove of benefit to the scrivener, I acquiesced; and asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby.

"Bartleby, this is Mr. Cutlets; you will find him very useful to you."

"Your sarvant, sir, your sarvant," said the grub-man, making a low salutation behind his apron. "Hope you find it pleasant here, sir;—spacious grounds—cool apartments, sir—hope you'll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable. May Mrs. Cutlets and I have the pleasure of your company to dinner, sir, in Mrs. Cutlets' private room?"

"I prefer not to dine to-day," said Bartleby, turning away. "It would disagree

with me; I am unused to dinners." So saying he slowly moved to the other side of the inclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead-wall.

"How's this?" said the grub-man, addressing me with a stare of astonishment. "He's odd, aint he?"

"I think he is a little deranged," said I, sadly.

"Deranged? deranged is it? Well now, upon my word, I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgers. I can't help pity 'em—can't help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?" he added touchingly, and paused. Then, laying his hand pityingly on my shoulder, sighed, "he died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So you weren't acquainted with Monroe?"

"No, I was never socially acquainted with any forgers. But I cannot stop longer. Look to my friend yonder. You will not lose by it. I will see you again."

Some few days after this, I again obtained admission to the Tombs, and went through the corridors in quest of Bartleby; but without finding him.

"I saw him coming from his cell not long ago," said a turnkey, "may be he's gone to loiter in the yards."

So I went in that direction.

"Are you looking for the silent man?" said another turnkey passing me. "Yonder he lies—sleeping in the yard there. 'Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down."

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped

by birds, had sprung.

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

arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. "His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?"

"Lives without dining," said I, and closed the eyes.

"Eh!—He's asleep, aint he?"

"With kings and counsellors," murmured I.

* * *

There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meagre recital of poor Bartleby's interment. But ere parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumor, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain; and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But inasmuch as this vague report has not been without a certain strange suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others; and so I will briefly mention it. The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!

* * * * *



Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor



Troubadour

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

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

* * * * *



It's time to Occupy Boston
Robert F. Kelly
When in the world we live
Everything becomes a fight
It's time to stop we speak is ignorance
When the line between friend and foe is a blur
From word to word sentence and alternates
To conflicting loyalties that keep us so wound up
It's time
When justice becomes an increasingly vague
And meaningless concept
That exists like a unicorn
It's time to change the script for the molder
For we need the schemer and soldier
Anything is possible
It's time to do something
The world holds enough for everyone's

The world holds enough for everyone's





Judith Haggai



Slow march
Through wormwood veils
This dusty wintry day

* * *

a grateful rebirth
slips out from between dead leaves
lemon grass fresh

* * *

lost chords
last rites
a bird takes flight

* * *

wisps of sculptured tunes
how long have i played this cup?
mountains of daydreams

* * *

long journey
all steps lead to sand
sun as compass

* * *

power surge
awe of existence
rush of life

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

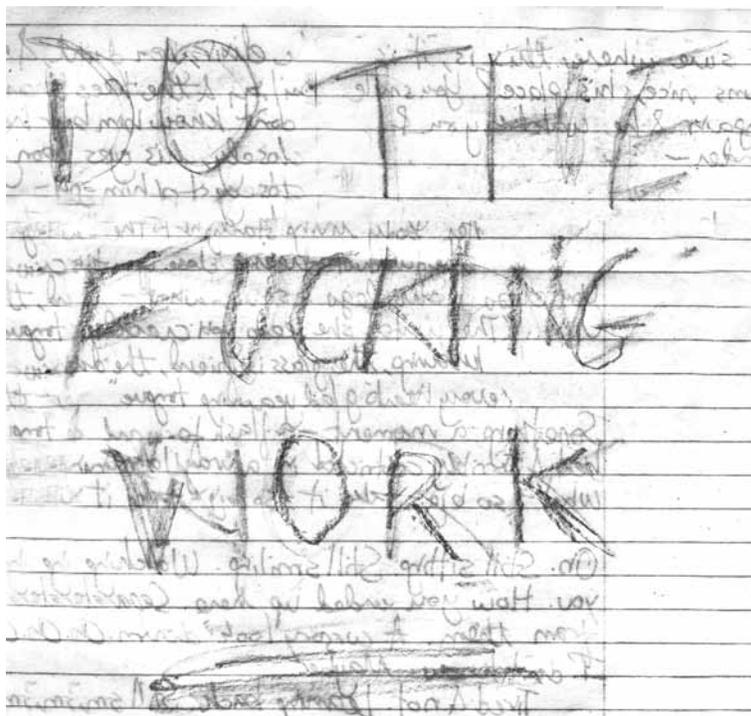
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Part Six

*“The bud
stands for all things,
even those things that don’t flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing:
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely”*
—Galway Kinnell,
“St. Francis and the Sow,” 1980.

xix./xxxix./lxxxii.

On a wall, reproduce here by a stub, was a phrase I wrote for myself toward days & hours when I need it—little else hits straight to my best as this:



Offered the elixir, you drink, & now the stars familiar & the trees shaman. He smiles. You don't know him but he watches you closely, his eyes upon yours as you drink, the rest of him—*oh*—

Not sure where this is, it is nice, seems nice, his place? You smile & drink again & he watches you & you wonder—

He reads to you

*Her body living starlight to the touch &
the furthest dreams close upon this petal*

You cross your legs & smile—what—

*The water she feeds you crackles with
knowing, the grass is friend, the drums
every heart's glad yearning tongue*

*Something a moment—a flash forward & bed & terribly constricted in a way—straining—what—so big—
take it—so big—take it—*

Oh. Still sitting. Still smiling. Watching you. How you ended up here. Separated from them. A cursory look down. *Oh*. I don't know. Maybe.

Tired & not. Learning back. Still smiling, still watching.

I'm in his arms. I try not to scream he is gentle *oh*. I didn't. But.

He is gentle but. Oh that. *Oh. That. Why. Now.*

I let myself. There are words like *beautiful. Sweet. Tight*. I know. I've heard them before. Never but.

He is gentle but. He moves me around. *Oh. Here? How*. I think. From a distance. I look.

He watches her as she sits with them. Listening. Bored. Music in hand. Waiting. Cringe at her outfit. *How. Shh*. He watches & waits. Talks to her. A parking lot. She goes. *I went?*

I feel myself being. *Oh. You*.

It's not that I don't. Just that. This feels. Oh. I can't. *Oh*.

“Oh”

“Shh”

“Please”

“Shh”

“Who?”

“Say please”

“Please”

“Again”

“Please. *Oh*. Please.”

“Nice.”

“*Oh. Please.*”

“Nice?”

“Oh. Please. *Oh. Please.*”

“Shh”

I stop saying. I watch him spread her out, he gently, & then, *oh*. I watch. *Oh*.

No. That's the word. No?

No. Not the word.

No. I don't know. I don't remember. I hadn't. I was bored. He watched me. He wanted me. I

wanted the want. Now.

I can't but he. And I am. He kisses. He licks. No. Kisses. Licks. *No.*

His mouth on me. I haven't. *Oh.* Licks down on me. *Oh.* Further down.

"Oh."

"Shh"

"*Ohh.*"

He licks into me I can't. *Oh god.* He won't. I can't. *Ohh shit.*

"Please."

"Shh"

"*Please*"

"Moan."

I moan. I moan very loudly, I scare myself, he holds me a little tighter, licks, *oh.*

"Fuck."

"Shh. Moan."

I moan. I am scared but I moan. Not a boy. Watched me. My body. I knew it. Not a body. I didn't.

"Moan."

He licks harder, almost angrily & I. *Oh I. Oh. I.*

When he. *Oh stop. Oh please stop. Oh. Oh. Oh. Big. Big. Hard. Big. Hard. Big. Oh fuck.*

"Oh fuck."

"Say it."

"*Ohh fuck.*"

"Say it!"

"*Fuck.*"

"Say it, Christina."

I cum. I cum hard. I am scared & hurt & I cum fucking hard when he says my name.

"I'm not Kinley you fucking slut."

I leave, half naked, bleeding.

"That's what it was like, Kinley."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

Kinley looks at me. He's held me as he drove but since this hotel room we've talked.

"Why no? Don't you believe me?"

"I'm your first."

I laugh at him. "No. You're not."

"First & only."

"Kinley?" I look at him. Something in my heart, not carnal.

His look is sad.

"It's OK." I smile. "I'm here now. With you."

He won't cheer & I am confused. His strength seems gone. I lay him back in the bed. Turn out the light.

Let him hold me. He's not sleeping.

"Tell me, Kinley."

"You were vulnerable because of me."

"No. Because I was a horny girl. We all were."

"I couldn't then."

"I know. It's OK."

"That first time. It was me."



“No it wasn’t. It was—”

“Who?”

“No.” I don’t know.

“It was me.”

“No. No, Kinley.”

“I couldn’t tell you.”

I don’t believe him but ask why.

“I was afraid.”

“Of me.”

“Of losing you.”

I sit up. “No, Kinley. It wasn’t you.”

He relents. “It can be.”

“Can be what?”

“Me. Then. Your first.”

“Look, its OK. Other girls fucked teachers too. It was a game. Nobody died. Nothing lost, but a few cherries & a few vows of fidelity.”

“I can be your first.”

I take a breath. This is Kinley. He kidnapped a bunch of girls just to talk to me.

“What do you mean.”

“I know ways.”

“What? Time travel, Kinley?”

He is silent. OK. I soften. “It’s OK. They’re all shit-heads & they’re all gone. Feel me. There. There. There. All yours. Like you said.”

He’s quiet, not satisfied but not as far. Putting his hand on my chest helped. We could both feel him stiffen without either of us having to touch it.

“Of a sort.”

“Time travel of a sort?”

“Yes.”

“All so you can be first to fuck me.”

Silence.

“What does it matter? I’m here.” *Jesess fucking Christ what is it with men?* They want us virginal, then to fuck like sluts, then sleep in their arms like human angels.

“No.”

“Then fucking explain it!”

He’s silent. But thinking.

I wait. This matters. I need to know what I’m into with this guy.

Still silent.

I speak. “Why not time travel back to stop Bush getting elected? Or 9/11? Why not something important?”

“You matter more than all that.”

“Why?”

I fall asleep waiting for him to talk.

“Look forward, Christina”

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

I look forward, now this was years ago, & I remembered & lost this talent too many times since but you said it perfectly, you timed it perfectly, I looked forward, it was a way of seeing, simple & hard as that, a way of seeing, to look forward, all laid out to see—

I saw it all primitively but I saw it. I saw the world radiate out from me in many directions, some harder, some more . . . vaporous—but it made sense in a way, I could see how each choice & its cluster of results & their choices—

& not very well I found I could turn it into a kind of road on which I looked on down for events

Kinley held me that night. Kinley loved me, loves me. Through all of this, he loves me as much as Penny loves Jack, I love Kinley, it coalesced this night when he held me while I first learned to look forward—

What I want to do is find Kinley in all this—

Held her as I hadn't that first—not me—how it got off—she doesn't see that—something missing—

xx. / xl. / lxxxi.

Always to lead with best punch, cover the midriff, dodge, dodge, keep feet moving, weaving, weaving always weaving, not to move against him but to move with him, let him, let him, lead him again, inside the violence there is calm, inside every violence is a calm, a breath, sure a breath, deep or deeper—

My struggle was how did I do this now, how do I do this now *now*, not do now like extending howling echo of the past—

I kept—keep asking this—keep asking—

Ask here because I trust Art to bear my questions—that it can—does—will—

I thought—think—ask—is it all sexual wounding & sexual healing—there are powerful thinkers say so—the root of the wound, the path to daylight—

And I wondered at it—thought of orgasm the amazing release—the good ones, the quick ones, the wasted ones—how the orgasm breaks a stress, a sense of block—

But—I balked—balked & wondered what I was missing—something—I could feel it—

For it was more like the root was self-consciousness—& knowing mortality—how everything came of this—how even sex was guided & controlled by mortal flesh, passing time, do, & do, & do, because mortal, & all comes from it, the sentimentality for youth, the needs to build structures of bodies & bricks & nation states,

the empires of god that focus the fear, direct it to work, to production, to yoke a healthy young body to a discipline, a set of self-punishments it would not conjure for itself—because death, because fear—

consciousness of mortality, fear of sickness, of decay, on year's pogrom to annihilate the less strong, another year's want to dose every smiling face & a glimpse of some comfort, some hand reaching close from eternity—

but how to work back, if the shell is death & all heat within is infinite singular consciousnesses pushing against this shell—what?

Tonight it's clumsy, my pen is unsure, I sit here pushing along despite—but it's not sex at the root—it's Art—I believe that—on both ends—a child is a creative being to be coaxed & called for more, & an old man for all his sickness & fear is about to release into something humans limit themselves from

easy or ever conceiving—

Clumsy. This. Clumsy words. Stuck with my worries for time & energy enough. I believe in Art. My poems, this fiction, every contrivance I make & call Art, is of this faith—that Art cares, consoles, keeps those who pursue—

Art is the near & the far, & what bursts the shell itself, what doesn't stop. Whether crumbling bones or returned to starlight, what breaches death is the making before & hereon, the ever creation, what contains men & knows them among countless others—

This helps me. Art is men & more. Art is life & death & more. Art is ceaseless & more.

Leave off there for a bit.

Return, with lingering thoughts of desert, & why I've left it behind. It's not the desert, really, whose long, blowing nights I bear deep, no, it's the festival, how it never became more, just rules-bound, & more, til the nature was so much freer than the thousands who travelled to her only to remain in men-contrived cages—

It was sad, when I finally knew I wasn't returning, because I felt relief & indifference, & that was sad. So many years, how it was, a pilgrimage to the desert.

Squat in a plastic box, thumping sounds of immolation & ecstasies without, a dirty box, the many shits coldly steaming under my ass, shits & paper & trash & whatever else can be shoved in a dirty hold because the door's shut & who knows—

I sate with a puzzling book & read its first lines. Suffer, it said, this is why you suffer, this canker of want in you, each of you, name it a god or a devil, this is why you suffer, that you live from first cry riven & crawl your years to be whole, that you cry up love into myth to keep it a step away, that you litigate desire for its blind, brutal wish, build great towers & temples of distraction, cage your every last soul in discontent, in bitterest hunger, *this is why you suffer*—

“Where did it go, Rebecca?”

“Your Art moved on, Raymond.”

“I have no like to it, no next, no sequel I know or plan to.”

“It's OK. Art remains. Art goes on.”

“That's all that matters.”

“I know”

“It was my community. It mattered to me. I drew my friends & meaning from it often.”

“And meaning still—”

“So what then.”

“You leave. But you don't part.”

“I suppose so.”

My shit came sudden & raw & the plastic ceiling above my head exploded; the stars fell in on me, I was a moment so beautiful & dead.

I've died a couple of times, several. Once in the Vermont woods, once in the Everglades. Once in the desert. Ascended through the dirty tent to the starry skies above, very high, saw the whole city below. So tiny below, mattered so much & not at all, & whether to return, or leave my corpse to be found days later—& choosing to return—each time, each of these deaths—the choosing to return—remain

embodied, remain here among the struggle—

“What remains?”

“You.”

“And for them?”

“Absence. Memory?”

“Change. And change again.”

“Art is directing me elsewhere. Strangely, it’s directing me east. After all these years, east.”

“East has never left you either, Raymond.”

“Nothing leaves.”

“No.”

“What then? Something, Rebecca, so this story can move along.”

“Change. Again. Sing. Again. The world recurs & all in it recur.”

“So. Sing & recur?”

Suddenly present, all blue eyes & bright face, first I’ve seen of you so much in so long, smiling,

“Yes. Sing, & recur.”

A turn back to Flying Elephant Services, the man is reading a letter it is from a mechanic who lives in a border town on the edge of the desert. The envelope & paper are brittle, amazing they survived delivery, the handwriting is difficult, like the writer struggled with each word.

It reads, in part: *“there is a system, I am sure. I see the pattern, with variation. It is communication.”* The letter discusses probability, discounts chance, but struggles for motive. *“I need Rosie back. You must send her back to me. I cannot go further without her.”*

The man reads in his gloom. Reads again. Mutters, softly, angrily. This account matters, more than all the rest no doubt. Yet there are limits to his services, parameters he chooses not to cross. Still, this request is not unexpected. He sighs, then moves to his work of retrieval.

xxi. / xli. / lxxx.

The next story concerns one of the previous stories, tells it differently. The one about Charlie Pigeonfoot & his checker-paying friend in the hospital, & the scraggly black nurse who argued with him about the code & the key. O, good one. The truth is, it was all a contrivance. Charlie was being held on a stage set among actors. He escaped finally, monitored by a dozen cameras.

How comes this revelatory knowledge? And why? What to do with it? I am following Charlie Pigeonfoot. I have been, long before I was the nurse on that hospital stage set. I have to see him successfully on his way.

I read the accounts of him as a child & the golden bird. No film, just eyewitness—the old man in that contrived scene. Only he wasn’t so old because that scene took place a long, long time ago.

In the “hospital” we were trying to get Charlie to remember, to wake the fuck up again. He lives in a cartoon version of his life. The things we said were prompts; even the checkers were dosed with something. It was no good. The block in him was too strong. We had to try something else.

I was helping Charlie like I’d been helped. Like I would help more if I could. Memory, Charlie, it’s about your memory & how things get off & too big &—

Listen—I was a young man when this happened—it was one night & then it was another—this girl’s face broke my heart with its every changing expression—I didn’t let on every moment—I was young—

her scent rocked my bones liquid—we walked through the city that night, holding hands lightly—her scent, her ruffles, her smile, when she held my look, when she slid away—believe me, Charlie, I understand, I do—in our hotel room there was still music in my ears—still ganja & tobacco smoke from park & bar—I was young, flesh touching flesh was terrifying to me—honestly, most boys fuck their hands more than anything else for a long time—

her kiss pressed me—& when I pushed, she pushed back—when I touched, she let be touched—there was release but not surrender—she was hungry for me—for it is all I could think—a series of clumsy moves to undress & there we were—her body all I wanted, more than I could—she pulled me inside her roughly—inwardly I cringed a little—so pretty, scent, flesh—hurt . . . her?—no, life was ugly & violent, this, this room, this bed *was not*, was safety, was closeness, “fuck me harder, I’m your little slut, crush my fucking tits, *oh yes*,” something in me withdrew, Charlie, even as I compelled my cock fuck her hard as she wanted, ride her hard, using strength to cover it all, bruteness, hard breathing, stupid words to mask my terrified silence, I made her cum for me, & I made her cum again, I exhausted her so she would not see me, see what would have been plain otherwise—

Charlie, for a long time, I suffered that memory, let it harm me, what she wanted, how want goes, I suffered it deeply & badly—until someone helped me like I am going to help you now—remember it now, Charlie, remember it now, remember it new, Charlie, climb inside it, break it apart, break it the fuck apart & crush it—

“No”

“No?”

I look at you, not sure of all this but you are looking at me, too—

“No”

“What, Charlie?”

“Losing you hurt me a lot. I lost every confidence I had”

“Losing . . . me? I’m standing right here.”

“The canvasses stop. You are gone. I am in a room with a friend who smokes hashish all day. He is true & loyal.”

She looks at me hard. “You know.”

I nod. Let her say it, whatever it is. “I’m sorry. You’re sweet. How did you figure it out?”

“When do you go?”

“Soon.”

“Why?”

“It’s not working. Your canvases.”

“Were you supposed to inspire me?”

“Yes. I guess. He said you needed a reward. And to be watched.”

“So you don’t care for me.”

She looks down. “It doesn’t matter. It’s a role.”

“Fucking me is a role?”

“I didn’t say I didn’t like it. But yes. Don’t feel bad.”

“It gets worse when you leave. Do you know that?”

She says nothing.

“I can’t have you back. But I can blood this memory.”

“I don’t understand. I’m still here.”

“How did you feel when you left me?”

“I—uh—”

“Tell me.”

“Sad. It wasn’t right.”

“How long till the next one?”

“There wasn’t one I really cared about again. Not for a long while.”

“Tell me.”

“I was done. I said I didn’t care what he threatened me with. I dreamed about you. I still do, but not as much.”

“And now?”

“Does it matter? It’s another world. Another lifetime. I don’t have answers for you. I wish I did.”

Charlie is still asleep but something is now going on. He stirs to notice.

xxii. / xlii. / lxxix.

The Princess & her companions had entered the Noah Hotel awhile ago, through a mirror in the corner of a woman’s cottage. But their story had stalled there, in the hotel room they’d entered. The Princess sniffed the air & knew danger was near. Her plan to find Maya halted as she cowered in this hotel room, in the closet of clothes they’d seen Maya rummage among, select a dress from.

Her companions could not inspire her to move. They sniffed danger too, but it was dispersed, something one could move carefully through, sniff & move, sniff & move.

The Princess understood something else. They had crossed over. This was not their world, not one where her powers could protect her & her friends. She was just a girl & they could all be harmed or destroyed or separated from each other.

Benjamin had warned her. He had been her protector until she had him away. She confused the nature of his love & felt suffocated. Now she wished for him but knew he would not come.

She sat in a crumpled heap in the closet, door shut all but an inch on the room. She expected someone to enter soon, irrationally expected. Yet she did not move.

“Princess?” said one & another of her companions but she only shook her head once & was silent & still after that.

Benjamin had warned her about ever coming to Maya’s world. It seemed unfair. He would not argue on this.

“Humans hurt each other. They are very good at it.”

“How? Why?”

“Especially their girls & women.”

“Am I one of them?”

“I know you want Maya to return with you but it probably won’t happen.”

“Probably?”

How she came by knowledge of the mirror was unclear. The White Woods figured in her story but only slightly & unnamed. And yet here she was, in the room Maya had been in, in the closet Maya had examined.

For a long time no noise at all. Then, in the next room, voices. The Princess huddled with her little friends, listening.

One says: “The last time on the phone, my father was lost to space & time, waving his legless stumps around while nurses murmured & checked numbers.”

Another: “This again. Why don’t you just fuck me & pay me so I can get on with my night?”

The first: “He cried into the phone how we’d fight the bastards together, the enemies keeping us far.”

The second: “Sit down on the bed, honey. Let Mama relax you. You’ll get nowhere fast talking all this over & over.”

The first: “Nobody had told him how it would end, this drowning, this ravaging despair, this

freak tempest of professional eyes, this humiliation of taking & taking & taking!” There was thumping & the sounds of rusty springs pressing down hard.

The Princess panicked but her friends compelled her to stay seated, pinched & nipped her in place.

The first one’s voice grew ragged: “I think of him now, bones in the earth, free of all he loved.” The pounding harder & harder. The Princess sweating, trembling, her whole body buzzing with strange excitement & fear.

The first one again, shouting now: “Were his life’s truths any softness beneath those last hours? The truths, the loves, the promises vowed to someday?” The Princess hears grunts & moans & sighs. Her friends understand better but say nothing.

A softer voice now, sad & broken: “I wonder & I wish I could have given him a warm hand to his cheek, a word of comfort, everything is alright.” Pause. Long pause. “And this is a lie, & this is the truth.”

The Princess’s body convulses & she nearly cries out. The voices continue, more softly, movements, eventually departure.

She looks at her friends & nods. There is danger here. And it’s terrifying & exciting.

“We will stay. We will be in disguise. I will conceal you. I will find Maya.”

xxiii. / xliii. / lxxviii.

What is known, what we feel, & the world beyond a soul’s senses. Struggling to get any of this, & no matter how clear & true it seems, *seems* is not enough—seems shifts one hour to the next—

This hotel bothers me, more than most solid things, it is not what it seems, not close—I suppose it is an obsession, I heard Jazz was last seen here, one of her friends told me, wasn’t sure, didn’t like me asking—what girl wants to spend her time talking about another?

And so I came & found it not to be what I thought. I reacted *emotionally* more than *factually*—I was nauseous being here—it would not have not gone much further, in truth, but I met a man one night, he’d been a reporter, I think, but his advice worked—

Looked me over, nodded, “If you’re going to stick around, for your own reasons, you have to find your sea legs here—”

“Sea?”

“Yah. This is an ocean & you’re trying to swim in deeper. You need a clue.”

I nodded. I felt sicker every moment.

“Focus a minute. Don’t think about your goal. Close your eyes. Remember something beautiful, more powerful the better. Remember with all your worth. It will help.”

Squeezed my shoulder, more to say, didn’t say.

I tried it. I remembered the most beautiful thing I knew. It was her smile. That day. The sickness left me. My heart darkened & saddened but I wasn’t sick any more.

OK. Trade nausea for heart sadness. At least now I can function. OK.

She’d said facts were facts & feelings were feelings. Told me not to confuse them.

“Then there’s the rest. The world, the universe. Dreams, all that.”

She was getting all egghead as she did. I followed as best I could, a secret part of me undressing that tight little body of hers & using every way I could imagine to make her moan & cry out. She knew, always. A sort of vacant smile, a nod, as though to say “you’re fucking me again right now, aren’t you?” & then she talked on.

Alternative history. Always back to it. Usually where she lost me.

Now it seems important to remember, to understand, to use it to find her. She’s here. Somewhere.

“Imagine you could prove one historical fact a lie,” she tried to explain it easy one time. In a



pink halter top. God, I was—

“Or you showered how two well-known facts didn’t connect as was always thought.”

Just a taste, Jazz. Those lovely pink nipples almost in view. *Fuck.*

Nod, smile, she continued. “But this wasn’t enough. You figured out what the truth really was, the connection. Really figured it out. And this changed everything. New lies, new connections.”

And that ass, cherry round & perfect for the cracking.

I think what she said next was: “When I disappear, it means I’ve found somewhere to start with all this.”

Or: “Use my white bra to bind my hands, my flowery panties to stuff my mouth, & fuck me slowly & thickly & make me cum til I can’t see or move—”

Or maybe not. Maybe I just hate school & this is my preferred mission. Looking for a girl I tutored in literature class & jacked off to *every fucking night.*

Nobody knows I’m here. I don’t think anyone would much care.

Tutored. She knew more than I did. I mentioned only once.

“You don’t need a tutor.”

“Sure I do.”

I shook my head.

“You know my sister Ashleigh?”

Another of my wet dreams. Lead filly in my stable. My fantasies about her made the ones about Jazz seem fun for the whole family. Ashleigh needed *far worse* punishment.

“Yah.”

“They think it runs in the family here. One sister shakes it for better grades, the next one will of course.”

I laugh. I don’t mean to. She stares at me, shocked, then calms.

We meet in the library. Not many times before she goes missing.

Last time she brought me a poem. I have it here with me, I keep it in my pocket. She wrote it out. Pink ink, curlicues. More girly than she was aware.

Wouldn’t exactly say who it was by. I found that out myself. Joker named Cosmic Early.

“This guy knows,” she said.

“Knows what?”

She wouldn’t say more. Didn’t stay long. “Read it. Keep it.” Smile, nod. I keep watching that sweet twitchy little ass leaving the library, over & over, watching it. I haven’t seen her since.

But what’s fucking weird is that her disappearance isn’t a big shitting deal. Or her sister. Both are gone. Nobody knows much, or says much when I ask. Saw her the other day. Out sick? Something of something.

Alternate history, Jazz?

Facts are facts. Feelings are feelings. And the rest. *All that.*

I unfold & read the poem again.

She turned & looked at me that last time, & there was that smile which defenses me now. Not the “You’re watching my hot little ass” smile. This was sincere. Pretty, kind, affectionate. My heart cringed, cried, croaked.

Um, right, poem.

*There were moments, maybe three,
maybe fewer, when I uncoiled
back to root, into soil, into sunshine,
exhaled, & again, the world we
are drinking each other, the world
we lay in wordless song dreaming
at night, the world, the wings.*

I stop. Jesus. Did she know him? No wonder I got the knowing smiles.

I have read it before. I have. It's just *fuck*. Not fair. And I read on, it's like a ritual, this, to start & stop.

*inside my ribs, the web between
my toes, uncoiled through clouds
when I rained, fruit I was eaten
& shit seed back to earth—*

Oh. One of those nature guys. Smart. Like Thoreau or someone. I could see a girl like Jazz being interested. See it & hate it.

*Moments when the stars too were like
fruit, hanging impossibly from endless skies,
& what was left of me danced & died,
& what I was, & what I possessed,
& what made the world, & no reason why.*

I read it through to end & I just don't know. Her friend didn't know either. Her friend was drunk & trying to kiss me & I didn't know why. I wasn't the kind of guy who got hit on.

But talking about Jazz did something to her. Like she went into a sex trance. A party I shouldn't have been at, & a girl who ignored me as well as the next, & she's pulling my hand under her skirt?

I let it all happen a little, I knew the trick was coming, the suddenly arrived boyfriend or parent or whatever. The couch we were on wasn't that hidden.

"Ohh"

For a moment, a long moment, my finger stole inside a tight little panty & stroked a bare cunt lip, oh, two, & I felt her legs part a little to keep up, & I considered how drunk she was, how talking about Jazz had triggered this, & for one moment how it would have felt to bag a horny ungettable bitch like this, drunk or no, & then I remembered that smile & my finger withdraw & she gasped like I was just teasing, where is she? who? oh, yes, I fingered again, where is Jazz? ohh shit who, withdrew, ohh, Jazz? Where is she? I pushed back in hard, guessing by now, she almost yelled, where? that hotel, I don't know, two fingers now ohhh god, ohhh shit, withdraw a little, no no please don't, hotel what name, thrust, hotel what name, withdraw, hotel what name, hard thrust, Noah she says, fuck, fuck, & I want her to cum but more I want that fucking smile & a girl who liked me sober & daylight & library & everything—

I stand & she fucking yelps. Guess nobody's ever stopped before.

So all in all I'm here. I'm fucked but not. My fingers still resent me. My heart still figures she's slobbering Cosmic Early's nature-loving tree trunk. Or not. Nobody remembers you, Jazz, or Ashleigh. Alternate history. Is this it?

xxiv. / xliv. / lxxvii.

Not the Key, Maya, no.

No?

No. The thread. You're the thread through.

To where.

To the clearing when the Beast is.

You can't beat him, Raymond.

I don't want to.

What then?
 I want to meet him & ask that he follow me back.
 Follow?
 Back. Yes.
 What do you mean?
 This isn't a war, Maya. It's a failed collaboration.
 What?
 Me. The Beast. Dreamland. Benny. All of it. I want alliance. I want collaboration.
 Maya's look is strange, both uncomprehending & admiring.
 "Why not?"
 "I'm the thread."
 "You're the peace offering."
 Starts to nod. Oh.
 "It's a waste to say that you can't crush him."
 She nods.
 "Now . . . wake up!"

You are sitting with me in this room. I don't make to look younger or less crazy than I am. You look at me. I am in my armchair. You are on the couch. Neither exists here any longer. We nod.

"What then?" I motion to the notebook in your lap also. You pick up the pen. Not black. Hm. OK.

I let you, as we, then we do, then this:

Tonight's hungers are new & old, every face wears them, & looks to another to explain. Cities crackle by the sparkling crowds pushing shouting into taverns, & those awaiting a last hour,

(this universe a mist, a light, a shimmer)

& those fearing a familiar voice & its knowing hand.

I look up. Maya nods.

Tonight's hungers range canyon & jungle, green sea & white woods, & some fill bellies & some fuck whatever sweet they may—

(play one true note)

Tonight's hungers left us by a combustible god, or molecule, or alien starparent. Tonight the taverns ever more crowded, the rhythms beastier, the clothes tighter, the words exchanged more plain—

(I sat downtown from here, Maya, Christmas 2002, in a long gone place called Heaven)

Tonight's hungers draw us nearer the end, by weapon, by evolution, by return of whoever let us down here, seeming bid to wonder & wait—

"You're not writing"

"No."

"What then?"

“Go on. Finish.”

or by the obscurest thought hurling heart's shadows that nothing's to wait for, everything's to be done

“everything's to be done”

“we are the tinder that waits gathering”

“& the ignition”

“the tinder awaits gathering”

“& the ignition”

“the tinder”

“ignition”

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

*“The nature of things is in the habit
of concealing itself”
—Heraclitus, Fragment 54*

Maya nods again.

xxv. / xlv. / lxxvi.

“What of the Beast? I ask tonight. Release or keep caged? There seems to be no agreed rule, one is raised up by this place & time’s perspective, mixtured with one’s childhood authority figures, mixtured again with his experiential fortunes & those of the world by his years.

“Simple as caged or released? I don’t think so. When the beast rages, one’s inner skies fill with blood & cries. When caged, those skies clear, there is quiet. Perhaps this is deceptive too. And yet. And yet.”

Christina was paying more attention than the rest of the class, as usual. She’d started a little at his use of the world “tonight” but almost instantly realized he was probably referring to notes from the last night or some night. She speaks in their motel room darkness. He hasn’t moved from her grasp, made any effort to touch her, yet he’s been awake awhile.

“The Beast,” she says. He starts but she caresses his face in the dim & he relaxes.

“You talked about the Beast in our classes but never asked anyone what they thought.”

“Nobody was listening but you, Xtina.”

“No. Christina.”

“And I’m Kinley to you.”

She smiles so warmly he seems to see it. “Yes. Kinley.”

“Your Kinley?” She doesn’t reply, knows a trick.

“Why didn’t you ask?”

She thinks. “It never came up logically. It’s like you saw signs of the Beast sometimes, in books, nature, but I didn’t get it. But really,” she pauses. “Your face would contort a little. It was a hard topic.” He nods.

For a woman who’s been with men, knows their ways, likes their ways for the most part, Christina holds back, not passive but not letting the passions biting around her heart & loins take over.

“Dreamspace.” This time he nods. “Do you mean it like Jung, the collective unconscious & all that?” She feels like she’s showing off her college book smarts but she has to get over to him that her mind yearns his mind as much as the rest of her yearns him too.

“That’s not easy to answer.” She waits, silent. “The best I can say is that Dreamspace is real & figurative. We no more conceived it into being than we invented trees by naming them.” He shakes his head, his words not what he wants. She pats him lightly, using one small gesture for every dozen her body’s heart wants. She takes a chance.

“We belong to the world.” He nods. “And the Beast and Dreamspace are part of this.” Nods. She nods, not thinking she has the key now, but at least not a clumsy fool in the dark for once.

He sits up suddenly & caught off guard her hands fall away. Doesn’t like this.

“I’m not sure I spoke rightly before. I’m not kidnapping you. If you want to return, I won’t stop you.” He’s faltering, his mood shifting yet again.

“It’s OK. I’m here with you. I don’t get all this but I’m glad it happened.” They’re both faltering. The room is heavy with panic.

“Do you want to fuck me, Kinley?”

“Yes. Not tonight. The more I tell you, the more I will.”

OK. That’s the Kinley she knows. His twisty way of arriving somewhere. His ambiguity made of brick.

He makes a nest on the floor. A couple of pillows, one of the blankets. He curls into himself, like a dog.

Christina sleeps in the nude, usually, likes to masturbate herself slowly to sleep. Tonight, seeing his suitcase in the corner, a battered, heavy thing, she asks for one of his long shirts. He turns when she re-dresses in shirt & panties.

“You saw me naked, Kinley.”

He says nothing, resumes his doggy curl.

Lying in bed, her shaven cunt untouched, she wonders, Does Kinley become Genny’s Preacher? She looks at me, abed next to her. “How many of your girls & their teachers are the same?” I reach for it, she grasps my hand, then releases. Spreads her thighs wide, lets my fingers move in. Kinley is asleep. Unmoving, deep breathing. I talk softly as my fingers wet her up, poke in a little more, then two, her mouth opening wide, but still waiting her answer. “I can’t tell you. Same enough & different enough. One way wisdom & experience is conveyed. There are others.” I bring her close to climax, then swiftly pull out, motion her to finish. Her look is strange but she does, & takes awhile.

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

“I don’t know. I don’t know how this moment, or you or I, relate to that moment, written in my past, about your future.”

She cums hard, twice, quick, then slow. She reaches for me but I move away.

Reluctantly, she pulls her tangled panties back up & turns over to sleep.

xxvi. / xlv. / lxxv.

The worst of it, yet to come, was years ago, a shitty bar, shitty jukebox, shitty drinks. A naked Santa hangs upside down on the corner Christmas tree.

“The pills make it hurt less,” she says, steaming blue eyes, a soul of glowing auto wreck.

I nod. Listen vaguely.

“I was young. It felt like love cuz it was so hard & so often.” Sound of ice, slurping. Had a few already. She speaks softer, almost reverently. “Panties down, up against the couch.” Pauses a long time.

“He had a big one & he’d drive it in fast & hard then slow down & down, & he’d laugh. I knew he was going to cum because he would laugh this great big dirty bear’s laugh. He never laughed like that but when he was fucking me.”

More silence. “Feeling something’s good, right?”

“Yah, Jazz.”
 “It’s Jasmine. I told you already. Nobody calls me that anymore. Are you a fucking retard?”
 “Yah, that must be it.”
 “Ah, baby,” her voice gets all maudlin. “I’m just playing. You can call me Jazz anytime.” Hand slips onto my lap, I push it off, gently.
 “Don’t you like me?”
 “We’re not here for that”
 “Then what, baby?”
 “Are you happy?”
 “Sure. Why not?”
 “Are you happy?”
 “Fuck! You already asked me that.”
 “And you didn’t answer.”
 “What difference does it make? You know I got what you like.” Hand again, pushed off, less gently.
 Taps the bar, nods. Barman brings another.
 “Alternate history, Jazz,” I say, not kindly.
 “Fuck you!” she says & walks the fuck out.
 Returns a few minutes later. More sober than she should be.
 “OK. Tell me.” Looks at barman. Politely this time: “Coffee.”
 “You really want to know?”
 “No. But yah I do.”
 “You’ll lose everything between now &—”
 “All this, huh?”
 I look at her for the first time. It’s Jazz’s face, I see that. Pretty for all the wear & woe. Try to remember how it got like this.
 “We don’t have much time. You’re sure?”
 “Yah, Toby. I’m ready.”

xxvii. / xlvii. / lxxiv.

Sometimes No slips from his maintenance duties at the Noah Hotel & hides in one of the building’s more hidden stairwells. It is one that leads into the hotel’s auditorium, but this stairwell is little used. Discovered by chance, one bad day, hiding from his mocking friends on the job. Nobody has found him yet here. They’d start following him sometimes but he learned to go to the hotel’s library & wait till whoever it was gave up. He could easily imagine them saying to each other, “He’s a fucking reada’. Just figure that.”

No has been coming here more often lately. His friends mock but they don’t snitch. The bastards who run the place don’t deserve such respect.

No is indeed reading but not a book from the hotel library. A paperback, no cover, torn some, about something he’d never heard of before. “Imaginal Space.” It’s his hope now.

He read: *“When I was a very young man, I lived in a great Eastern city, in a single room. A bed, a writing table, a wash stand, an icebox. My books I arranged on a makeshift bookshelf made of planks & concrete blocks. I bought candles, many of them, & sometimes filled my night time hours with only their light as I sat & thought & wrote.*

“I felt pure. It was a new feeling. I hadn’t always felt that way, but in that room I felt pure. I was doing work I cared for in my free hours.

“My job paid little. It was the same job cloaked beneath changing guises over time. Pushing a mop or brooming. Waiting tables. Carrying boxes. I smiled and said little at these jobs. People smiled & called me

a 'thinker' or frowned & said I was a 'brooder.' I did nothing to dispel any of it.

"One job in particular stands out, in part because it was the last job of this stretch of youth, but also because it changed over time.

"I was to guard a building at night. A simple job done with a flashlight & clipboard, done sitting at a desk & staying awake. There was little to it, & a telephone to call a supervisor at any hour if there was trouble, or even a question. I didn't use the phone for a long time. There was no need. Nothing happened. At least, until I caused it."

No leans forward, surrounds his ragged volume, feels what he needs is coming next.

"The struggle in a man often occurs because he feels trapped, more than he really is. What hours of freedom he possesses, what moves he could make, he squanders, obsessing over the slights of others, their motives, how the world does not seem to acknowledge him or shift luckily his way."

No pauses, nods.

"There is no one answer that ever & always works. No magic, no certainty."

No shifts uncertainly. Closes the book, afraid of what will come next, what won't. His stairwell is decayed, neglected, not dirty but simply unnoticed.

Uncertainly, stands, moves planless, always the stealthy peek before back into the hallway, a little quick this time, & keeps moving—

No has come to believe that once he was not a paid servant in this hotel but a welcomed guest. Once he held court, so to say, & people gathered & listened to him. That he surrounded himself with others as special as himself, & there were many mornings when the glittery words & laughter glowed golden—

But what the path from then to now? How long ago was that? What happened that he cannot remember?

He's been crossing over, to the guests' part of the hotel, a forbidden act save when uniformed & on duty. It was not easy but No was not the simple man others labeled him.

No had skills, one of which was a kind of special sight into things. He saw doors others didn't, hallways & stairwells & strange rooms behind them. For a long time he'd not believed his eyes, or feared consequence. Now he did not.

It was a dream that had turned his view, & not along after he found the book. His crossing forays had been tentative until now.

But this moment, the book his key in hand, his special sight peering for a door others could not see—yes, he would cross over, & he would not be coming back, & whatever this book was going to reveal, he'd act—

xxviii. / xlviii. / lxxii.

"Crossing flesh through"—No suddenly reads this phrase—He is sitting on a bench many floors up, the bench is beneath a window, next to a bank of elevators—the floor he has chosen is closed off—for renovation—he'd stolen an elevator key that allowed access to this floor—

There is no renovation going on—none—he's already looked—but all the doors to guest rooms are padlocked—old, thick, dusty padlocks, long untouched—

Why this floor? He didn't know—maybe simple as it's closed off—maybe it was that dream—There is a low light source throughout the floor, but no light source he can determine—

Simple also is that the floor attracts him to it & then spooks him on arrival—so he stays on



bench near bank of elevators—

“Crossing flesh through”—rather than resume reading, he opened up the book at random—& blinked—& snatched that phrase up—& closed the book—

What now.

Breathe, Noah, in & out. In & out. Close your eyes. Let this floor, let that phrase, let the fragment you are to yourself twist something up—

He calms. He thinks. He remembers something, & holds his book close while he remembers. It goes like this:

We were both close to homeless, him living in an RV, me living in a rooming house—it was near Christmas, we sat together on a bench. It was cold but not snowing.

We talked about love, about what falls away with clothes, what doesn't. I was often both sad & smiling in his company. He would nod, make me laugh. Sometimes cops would sniff around though we were never smoking or drinking anything—

Well, he might have been high, & by then I had known the mushrooms, worked with them in Dreamspace—but we weren't sitting there in a cloud of smoke regardless—

“You're going to have to choose”

“Choose what?”

“Between her & Dreamland”

“Why?”

He'd nod his head no, I knew he meant no, but there he was nodding his head no. We both knew I was fighting for a lost romance, & yet fight on I did for a long time, & his hand on my shoulder as he'd leave me would always help me hold on.

Then that last time & what he said to me, those last words, I had no other friends, so I kept them close & found them odder & odder versus all the rest—

It was a bookstore we saw each other—a grand old beast of a bookstore, the kind nobody learns the whole of—it was in the coffeeshop where students & freaks & artists & tourists would crowd together in a jocular noisy mingle—

“She wrote to me”

“No!”

“She's in pain without me, so sad. Misses me.”

He nodded, smiling. But he nodded yes, it threw me off. But I didn't care, I was so heart-hungry, so—

We touched hands, smiled some more—

“All things are possible” he said—

At the time I accepted the gift of his sentiment. It was true. My times of agony were going to be redeemed—

What happened next was . . . nothing. She didn't write again, she didn't call, for days. I guarded my building & more often simply came home. I had never turned on the little black & white TV in my room, but I did. And I watched & I watched. Watched just about every night until I fell asleep. I watched—

But the phone rings.

She's nearby. She sounds wrong but she wants to meet. Now tonight please.

It's a coffeehouse I don't know. Strange & large. She is sitting alone in one of the interior rooms. There are two old armchairs against one wall, & two small chairs against the other, a slender table, a blue vase. A saw this on—

"You came" I think I hear as she pulls me into the armchair as we embrace, as she seamlessly wriggles into my lap, as she holds me, as her mouth gnaws at mine with a moan—I—

Our hands are clasped yet I feel her grinding her ass against my responding cock—the light in the room is roseate—I don't know why I use the word—her frayed green sweater itself seems sentient in pulling my fingers under, in how I am gently cupping her breasts, no bra & another moan—I—then—

He laughs & I would have let her leap from me but she locks me in grasp, right down to my finger resting on one of her nipples—

He's deep in the next room, & I see he has a computer. He's laughing at its screen—I am frozen, groping her, fuck what, but he is not watching & she leans into me, I feel her heat like a tide in my blood blinding me, she seems about to undress us enough to fuck when—

There's a voice. She relaxes. I'm lost in this. But there's a voice & that focuses me. Forget the laughing man. OK. She leans against me softly, bonelessly, & listens. It is the first time I have held her, not her hunger. Whatever this is, it is gift. This is what led to the rest. This is it as best I can explain—

"Where once a fountain in Cement Park, a great bluebird's wings rise into the air, for protection of the weak, for help in flying to their goals—

"The Bluebird Insurance Company is not what it has been for a long time, that is, a blindly amoral corporate consumer of people's wills & blood—

"Something deep in its structure changed it profoundly & with it the visible change in Cement Park, so called by these stories, Bluebird Concourse by all others—"

Is this what she hears too? Does it make sense to her? She is relaxed, intent, completely present—

This is what she hears:

"What festers & mosses between these floors? The man who lived here a century ago, when this coffeehouse was just a maze of dirty rooms, his long nights of prayer for healing, crazed willing to take his disease the faster if God would just give a word back? Just one?"

She nods. She sighs. She is listening with something like relief now. It was right to come here, come to him.

She nods. She listens. The voice continues.

"If all these things do, indeed, exist? Then any blazing day of unity, any final calling of all hands to one, any let go & release to the universal music must be rooted in the withering suffering & sometime ecstasies of all who lived brief or long yet fell a day or an hour just short—"

She returns from there & is in his grasp as before, feels how she has locked her body onto his, clamped his legs & fingers to her various tender parts, he is watching her, what he'd heard had long ended—

"We have a choice, darling No"

"What is it?"

"We can have now, tonight, maybe a little bit more—"

"Or—?"

She looks at me in sadness & love & longing & other things I don't know, & strangely, she laughs.

"I don't know. Do you trust me?"

Before I can answer she grips my hand still cupping her breast. Eyes closed, lips open. Her ass slowly grinds me too. Fuck.

"Something else. Somewhere else. Free & forever. Always yours. Always, always yours."

"But not now," I gasp weakly.

He laughs again in that other room, & again, & her grip on me, our clasp loosens. She says one last thing. Quietly.

"Turn your head away when I go. That's how I'll return to you too."

xxix. / xlix. / lxxii.

I leave him & walk slowly back to my RV among the few white flakes falling from Christmastime skies. Not a storm, not even really close.

My RV is parked in the same place as the last two nights. In this city, three nights is maxing out & so I'll be starting up in the morning. I suppose it being Christmas tomorrow I could push it another day, but I don't want to. I need to keep sharp, keep moving.

It's not that I know precisely what will happen between N. & that girl, but I know more than logically I should.

I know a version of her in Dreamland, & this version has given me to know at least some of her truths.

Have I fucked this version? Yes. It's what any of her versions do with men. A hunger, strangely both dark & fun.

She makes clear from the first: she loves & cannot have him yet, maybe ever, & I am to comfort him & she will fuck me—when she fucks me, grinding her hips impossibly hard against mine, moaning, biting, she is fucking him, every time, every moment, every time she orgasms—

I met her, used to think, by chance, at a cafeteria I'd gone to a few times in my worst days, & was returning to, to remember, sit where I sat, honor the pain I'd felt here, & how I'd survived, & here I was again, more healed, knowing I was a bit smaller for it—sitting here—writing vague lines to someone lost—

*I remember now by your absence—
by the vagueness of who you were—
I remember because most flakes away false—
Because you were no truer than others—
Because we smiled, touched hands—
Because I forgave you—& lost something—
Because I am still reaching despite,
for better & worse—*

I stop, look up, there she is, & for a moment she is who I was writing to over impossible years—& then not but slowly—

“What are you writing?”

“A sort of poem.”

“About what?”

“Who not what. It’s a poem about remembering someone.”

“Someone you loved.”

“Yes. A long time ago.”

“She broke your heart?”

“And hers too.”

She pauses. Thinks. Usually when someone queries me like that they quickly lose interest. She’s not. She’s thinking.

I sniff, don’t mean to, but I do, I sniff, barely noticeable, I sniff. Never smelled anything like it. As solid as a handful of earth, a full glare of sunshine in a deep forest. Sex, yes & no. I blink to keep still. Everything about me is taut & near to fleeing—

“I love someone too.”

“That’s good.”

“He loves me too.”

“That’s better.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Why?”

“I can’t have him.”

“Ever?”

She blinks at me, stumbled.

“Not now.”

I nod.

The smell gestates colors, almost pictures, but not quite, noises almost music. She’s quiet again. I turn my page toward her, smile. She reads, slowly.

“Where’s the rest?”

“I don’t know if there is more.”

She nods. “There is more.” Reaches across the table, takes my hand, the smile . . . calms. It flows between us. We look vaguely past each other, quiet. She’s waiting.

She’s strangely pretty. Young, but I don’t ask. Don’t ask name either. She’s slender but her breasts are not. Her dress is typical, short shorts, deeply scooped blouse, sandals. I’m thrown hard by what she says next.

“You can have me for an hour or the whole night.”

My mouth opens & shuts.

“I’ll be her for you, like it was. Even better. We’ll take our time.”

“And I’ll be him?”

She shakes her head. “No. Not exactly.”

“I don’t understand.”

“He’s not gone, like she is. So it can’t be the same.”

I nod. “Why am I paying you?”

She wriggles a little in her seat, moves nearer, *makes me look*. I nod.

Maybe the first time you were her, the one gone. I fucked you like I was always afraid to fuck her; too busy protecting her, too busy “being in love” with her.

But less the next time. And the time after that. Now you were you, & I was N. But I wasn’t.

All she would say was that he had to get famous first, & then fall, & then they could.

“Anything we want. Everything.”

“So you’re waiting.”

“Yes.”

“And fucking men for money.”

“For him. For us. We’re going to leave & never come back.”

“And me?”

She’d smile, she’d curl around me, touching where I liked, where I hungered, & the smell wrapped us as one. “You’re going to be my spy. You’re going to find out everything for me.”

xxx. / l. / lxxi.

A breathy caesura, too full of words or maybe just one word: gratefulness. Where I write tonight I’ve long written but too rarely of recent years—

Regard. Behold. Wonder of wonders.

Seek connections in all directions of time & space & soul. How the leaves above, the dreams to come, the queer fact of cyberspace, the ragged, sure pulse in my torso—

I don’t know in so many ways, so many pages, ever less any answer, returning to the egg & its questions—

What then, what this question? Who was I those years, writing in this place, name it, Harvard Square, Au Bon Pain cafe courtyard, Cambridge, Massachusetts, I’m here, what question? I’ve been years & miles far, many of each, & here I am, & what the questions that led me away & returned me here tonight?

How to live, how to live, how to live, & why?

Yes? No? In truth, I do not know, not close, just a soaring, unreasonable gratefulness at writing these words, here tonight, a shifting, unfolding, many-colored, sing-song-simple gratefulness words—lights—voices—flesh—years—cars—buses—trees—brick floor—stars out there—what? And what? And: what?

I don’t know in so many ways, & so many pages, ever less any answer, the question carried by beat, by breath, it’s OK, by beat, by breath, relax

Alive, present, grateful, for all of it, what was, what will be, grateful—

Maya is writing too, & I notice Rebecca is drawing, there is synch, maybe path, fraternity, the fullness is the hunger, better than any sate is the hunger itself, the hunger’s music, in every finger, every sinew, *the hunger is the music itself*_____

* * *

xxxi. / li. / lxx.

“Tell me then.”

“Which?”

“Am I David Time or Cosmic Early or both or maybe consecutively?”

“Consecutively?”

“You like that one.”

“Tell.”

“He was famous. You wrote about his fame.”

“I did.”

“I’ve never been famous. Not really a poet like him either.”

“Did you know him? Do you know him?”

“Answer me something?”

“Sure.”

“Can I help Jasmine?”

“Help?”

“Not fuck. Help her.”

“Help Jazz . . .”

“She’s trapped with that boy & her sister.”

“For now. And sort of.”

“*Can I help her?*”

“I don’t know.”

“Why?”

“Help her what? Go home? Give Toby his hand job because he won’t actually fuck her, carry on?”

“Help her choose.”

“You’re dying.”

“Maybe.”

“Nothing’s final in fiction.”

“No it’s not.”

“Benny would have me.”

“Benny’s a fanatic.”

“Isn’t he Morpheus, the God of Sleep?”

I laugh.

“No. He was raised in Dreamland but he isn’t a god.”

“What then?”

“I don’t know. He lives in Dreamland. He seems independent of any one person dreaming him.”

“Dreamland is real beyond dreamers?”

“Benny is, you could say.”

“I want to help her.”

“You want to fuck her.”

“I want to help & fuck her.”

“Honesty.”

“Yes. But help matters more now. She’s in the White Woods. She doesn’t know how to free herself.”

“Ashley knows now too. She’ll help.”

“And the boy?”

“There’s more to him. He doesn’t know yet.”

“What.”

“You can have Jazz, if you win her, for as long as you win her. The price is the boy.”

“Keep him?”

“Find out who he is & decide then.”
 “And Benny?”
 “Benny will wait for now.”
 Early nods at me.
 “You can’t control it. The White Woods.”
 “Always there. Everywhere.”
 “Yes.”
 “They thin some with effort. And they can be used.”
 “Navigated?”
 “In a way. And as fuel.”
 “Burned?”
 “Not per se. Not burned down.”
 “What then.”
 “White Woods is mind.”
 “Dream? Dreamland.”
 “Not exactly no.”
 “What?”
 I shake my head. “A place. A way. An is, an ought, a could be. Literal & figurative both.”
 “Mind.”
 “Yes.”
 “But will alone is not enough.”
 “No. How you flesh out your hours, what you do.”
 “And?”
 “And more. Always more. The way sunlight slinks through, hits ends of fallen trunks long years soft.”
 “Woods.”
 “Pine cones. Root-broken paths. The air cooling with night.”
 “Where is the power? Where do I bring Jazz?”
 “She’ll bring you.”
 “How.”
 “She’ll lead them out. You too.”
 “Do I want out?”
 “Let’s see.”
 “See what?”
 “Behold this scenario. As the old hippy band sang, ‘behold & see.’”

xxxii. / lii. / lxix.

“World is home. Dreaming you safe in all—”
 He wears a bowtie & has wrinkles. Some of them say he’s gay. I don’t think so. I don’t feel it.
 Shit. What I feel isn’t close to that. And I know, I know, one more master I’m building in my
 mind.
 How long, Jazz? Jasmine, that’s your fucking name. Anyway, there’s girls in this class years
 younger than you, they’re what these men want. You were one. One of the best. And now you’re not.
 His smile lingers on me, can tell I’m not following. He does that, & then looks away.
 “Of course Early could come at the same question from another angle. A bluntly different
 angle. *‘Dust, a violent hour, endurance. This is why you suffer.’*” A girl raises her hand, Suzy D-Cups I call
 before telling myself not to.
 “Are they equal for him?”
 “What do you mean?”



“Despair & hope,” she says. Hesitating. I’ve watched her do this in three classes now. The hesitancy is where the teacher distracted by her well-plated tits will jump in & help her.

He doesn’t. Sees the tits, thinks that thought I want to crush & have for my own, but doesn’t pick up on her words. In fact, goes on with the poem.

“*Failure to feel your suffering in my heart, breach the lies of kings & preachers, the market’s easy delight in slinging new ass.*”

Her shoulders shift but she says nothing. Nobody beats him. It’s why they think he’s gay.

Not in my bed, not between my thighs. Not when my lights are out & I’m touching down there with purpose. No sirree, he’s doing what I like & I’m liking it & so is he. Takes his time, in my mind. I cum so slowly, so long, I almost pass out, I think I do, I’m young again, he wants me—

When he asks me to dinner, after the semester is over, the grades turned in, of course, I’m still surprised.

“I don’t see a band.”

“Or on yours.”

“I’m not gay.”

“You started that rumor. The others are just stupid enough to believe it or care.”

“And you.”

I laugh. He laughs.

“You dress like an old woman.”

“I am. Nearly a quarter century.”

“Is that what you think?”

“That I’m old? Sometimes.”

“No. That you’re . . . that old.”

“I’ve got a birth certificate to show.”

“Show me.”

I laugh. He doesn’t.

“OK.”

“Here. Look,” he says.

I do. O shit.

He nods.

Shit, Jazz.

I won’t let him take me home. Or leave me alone. I won’t let him not bring me to his bed.

“Not yet, Jazz.”

“Why not? You brought me here. This is yours. It’s OK. I’m ready for you.”

He resists, really resists. “What then?”

“How did you end up in my class?”

“I don’t know. But it seemed real. I was old . . . older. I felt like I didn’t matter somehow anymore. I was tired.”

“Now what?”

“I’m with you.”

“Look at me. Think! Who am I?”

“You’re Cosmic Early.”

“Where’s Ashleigh & Toby?”

I start to panic & now he grasps me. I still half-want him despite all this. Maybe because. But he is just keeping me near.

“I don’t know. This is Dreamland?”

I’m silent.

“Tell me.”

“We need to return to that class. You need to trust me.”

We're back. Oh. Hm. I'm not sure what to do. I feel my usual self again, I think. Look slyly down at me yah. All that. Not as hot as Ashleigh but hotter than that one.

She's heated too. Damn. Got her new designer frames on & those icky gold sandals I see—

Jazz.

What.

Jazz!

What!

It's your fucking brain calling.

Yah.

He needs your help.

Yah.

What?

Why can't I just fuck him?

I look at you.

“Why don't we just fuck?”

There's a gasp, a silence, & a laugh.

He looks at me. I wait. She's waiting too.

Now I'm wondering at this.

“Who is she?”

Now he's looking mad at me.

“Who. What am I in here, Cosmic?”

She looks at me. Pretty face, an obvious one.

I can't think she would—for him—

I look at him—he nods—OK—

“I met her on a train a long time ago—she was sitting by herself—headphones on—a strange smile on her face—”

she smiles at me—I don't see much strange about it—but—

“This was before she became famous for her comic strip—she doodled—sometimes they were more than doodles—”

“Wait—comic strip?”

“She did it for 50 years, Jasmine. Never a word in it till the last panel of the last strip when she says ‘And then—’ & it's over.”

“Oh”

“She was already becoming a famous painter—she had shows all over the world—until that stopped too”

“Too?”

“First the strips. Then the paintings. She retired. Pretty much disappeared.”

“I'm trying to follow”

“Yes.”

“You met her on a train.”

“Yes.”

“Not a classroom.”

“Not till later.”

“Later?”

“Toward the end she took my class”

“Oh”

“She was trying to understand the man she kept seeing on the trains.”

This is starting to get retarded but I nod. For a brilliant man, Cosmic is describing this girl like he’s 14 & acne-covered. I almost giggle at the thought of that. I bet he was cute then. Shit, that leads me to remember him now and—

“Jazmine—”

“Yah—sorry—”

She smiles at me too—not strangely either—& not like someone who’s going to make comic strips & paintings & so on for fifty-plus years & then retire like anyone will care—

“You’re jealous”

“I’m *here* because of *him*.”

She nods. Smile. OK, it *is* a little strange but I don’t like it, still or anyway. I look at Cosmic. “Man on trains?”

He seems to need to tell me this, to follow through.

He would appear on crowded trains, suddenly, & start talking, suddenly. A sort of nondescript man, average build, clean unmemorable clothes.

“Excuse me, I don’t like to be a nuisance but I am trying to earn money for an ID badge. I’ve been homeless-living-on-the-streets & I just got a job at Filene’s but it cost five dollars for an employee ID badge & so I’m not tryin’ to botha anyone just get myself an employee ID badge so I can start working”

or:

“I don wanna bother anyone but last night I was sleeping in the streets & they took all my clothes & left me with only one shoe, I need five dollars to get a pair of shoes at the thrift store”

I nod. I wait.

“She wanted to hear me in class. I wasn’t teaching much anymore. Just one class. She told me to bring it up. Like it was my experience. So I did. I listened to her tell it & then I took it into the class, with her now auditing in the front row where she could distract me the most—”

I look at her. “Because you’re jealous.”

She looks at me. Less of a smile.

So I start in. But I don’t focus on the man. I focus on the reaction. I instruct her not to say a word during class. Just listen.

“He never makes any money. Why?”

“They don’t believe him?”

“Why?”

“Too cynical? Or maybe it seems too scripted? Like an actor from a school?”

“But why?”

The class silences. They wait, like they do when their initial burst falls flat with him.

She speaks up anyway.

“You think it’s fear.”

“I’m not sure.”

“You think they’re avoiding him because he’s not so different. Why him & not any of them? Why not?”

I look at her.

“You think it’s just about me?”

Cosmic looks at me. I wait.

“Because I keep seeing him? And he talks & talks, a different train, a new story, but nobody listens every time? It’s me? Right?”

I look at Cosmic Early. Bluntly.

I think & talk simultaneously so to hold nothing back.

“Are you saying we need to find her or you’re still hung up on her or what?”

He looks at me. Twice. I can tell from the broken wonder in his voice he’s talking honestly now.

“I didn’t expect to meet you.”

“Me?”

“Someone like you.”

“Oh.”

“She still in the White Woods.”

“Still?”

“It’s why I came. Well, it was. I mean, it prompted me.”

“And now?”

He gives me an even stranger look & points to Ashleigh & Toby crowded into the classroom door. I look back & he’s gone.

Well, now.

xxxiii. / liii. / lxxviii.

He’s looking at me oddly, this young Preacher, not-yet-Preacher. I’m not sure how I look to him. I want to ask but . . . don’t.

I listened to him & the rest drum in the dawn, it never quits, the drumming, though eventually he moved out of the circle & another eventually took his drum.

Asked him for a cigarette. He smiled “Sorry I don’t smoke.” Another guy heard us, sat down, smiled, a cigarette. There’s always another guy sniffing around if the current one isn’t providing.

I light up though I don’t smoke, then ignore the other guy completely.

He talks. He smiles. His eyes slide down my face toward, then yank back up. I giggle inside.

This all *is* bad.

“How was your night?”

“It was good.” I pause. I feel the words coming. The kind of words I used to say. The kinds of things I used to feel.

He’s waiting.

I feel myself manifesting more. I feel the younger, tauter self. Shit, this is *not* fair. The hair in dreads. The hemp tank top & shorts. Ha, the thong & everything shaven down there too. Not *that* much of a hippy chick. No wonder he’s patient. I was fucking hot back then. Now. Shit.

I think quickly. “I felt connected,” I say vaguely. He nods.

With a body like I had I could turn this boy to powder.

“It’s like we were all sharing it, everywhere. All over the woods & all.”

He nods, more. Getting excited.

I want to. I can't. My body, this . . . younger body, wants to. I can't.

I can't. Whatever is me no matter the tricks.

I stand suddenly. He stands too.

Woa.

He's taller than me. I can smell his sweat. This young body is ready, amazingly ready. Was this me?

It was.

I can't. And shouldn't. We didn't.

That is, don't. Now I don't know.

"Can I read you what I wrote last night."

I nod.

We sit again. The other guy left. I didn't notice. He was smart.

He has a leather book, it's well-worn. He's reading from halfway in.

*When passing this water I thought
of you passing yours. Torrents of blood,
hidden waterfalls, the very key to the world
found in summing all & dividing by one.*

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

What, Preacher? What is this?

He's looking at me, less shyly. Reading his writing does something to him. Turns him on & me too, more, & he feels my attention sharpen.

What is this?

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

"No." I say out loud.

He smiles.

"No." I say to you.

"No?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"No! And yes."

He nods. Closes his book.

"What now, Preacher?"

He doesn't flinch at being called that.

"What now?"

"We go, Genny. We go."

xxxiv. / liv. / lxvii.

Deep space: one late night I will be gone, it will be hours or days later. My books have crumbled, my deeds blurred.

Deep space: what I was tonight, writing as though never to cease, breaching my heart for music to salve & share, become bones & dust, & the final opening of this path from a few mad cracking years to what it feels like to dream forever.

Deep space: that's what this dreaming can be like. I was with you again, there, driving, & it's how it became later, a series of collapsing echoes suddenly distorted by moments of anguished sexual frenzy—

What you became, I let go. Where you were, I remember from too far.

Deep space: this was one of those fully drowning dreams, no other, no outside-of-it, here we were in a strange sexual clinch brambled with time passed, & many regrets, & no why, not even close, not ever fucking close—

& I look at you from this high place & look at you in that dream place & say why?

& you say I don't know

& I nod. We were driven by the same demons. It's how we passed those days. It was a love of distant, desperate, thinking beasts.

But here's the thing—still talking to you in deep space—I could see back to my waking life—the woman who succeeded you—who became what you did not—

but here—from this high place—I look toward you—down in Dreamland—

& I think: did I almost do it? Was I almost awake in that dream? Does it have to get that personal? I remember groping you, more than love, hate, words, I wanted to feel you, feel your breast, that hunger is old & remains, & I know it's not you alone, a woman's touched flesh never leaves, it's the danger, what leaving music in touch, the scald—

Deep space: so why do I keep this dream days later? It's because I am getting closer & every time I do it's intensely personal, it hurts, still, deep, & this kind of dream connects me almost to lucidity—close—

I look at you.

(Benny snickers)

(Deep, deep space)

(Deep deep pussy)

How?

How what?

I look at you both.

How.

How?

Connect waking to psychedelia to dreams.

Connect? Yes. Write it from the inside & outside.

She nods. I will help. As I was. How you wish.

I nod—the pain is what wakes me in them. *The pain*—regret—loss—

I nod again. To myself. Whatever this is, I get it better now.

xxxv. / lv. / lxvi.

What it feels like to dream forever. Put another way, the map before the pathways laid.

Well, yes, OK.

I remember that night in that cash only motel we came to by taxi & the bed in the dark it was so late & here you were ready to fuck me & I wasn't, we didn't

“Why didn't you want me?”

“I was afraid”

“Of my youth?”

“Of *everything*.”

“I loved you. I really did.”

“None of that matters now.”

“What does?”

“Sometimes I show up in these stories. Sometimes it's smooth, sometimes I intrude.”

“OK.”

“I need your help now. I am struggling.”

“How can I help.”

“First, by knowing that I don't care for what you became. You survived, moved on, people do. None of that concerns me. Just what you were. You showed up in my fucking dreams & I nearly fucking lucidly dreamed. Nearly.”

“What can I do?”

“Keep appearing. Help me break through.”

“How?”

“Keep appearing. The pain of seeing you starts me. It might work.”

“Do you love me?”

“Now? No. You betrayed me. Over & over. You broke my heart. I chose my Art over you. That was it.”

“But you did?”

“Till you broke me.”

“Does this help?”

“If I break through. That's what I want. I want to lucid dream & know how & do it. You're my signal.”

“What then?”

“Then?”

“Is there more?”

“No.”

“There could be.”

“What I want in Dreamland isn't you.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to find answers I can use. A deeper knowing. A power to shape & create & influence. A conjuring hand against the helplessness. *Do you understand?*”



“I think so. You don’t want me.”

“I want you to do this for me. Help me to achieve this.”

“Nothing more?”

“No.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“There’s more. I know there is. I feel it still.”

“I don’t.”

“Why?”

“Because my heart is devoted to another. You are a component of my Art, that’s all. Come to me in dreams as you were & wake me up in them. Simple. It’s what I want & no else.”

“OK. Even if I don’t believe you.”

“Good”

Benny.

Yah, dad.

Let this happen.

Who, me?

Yah.

I can’t stop you.

I need a turn. A way to grasp & wield more of my own power.

Yah, dad.

You don’t think much of waking hours.

Me? Nah.

They matter to me. But I need to do better, more & better. I’m not enough.

It’ll help. But you still have to do it. It’s your world.

I think it’s all of a piece. Waking, dreaming, tripping. I just haven’t figured how to work them all together yet. She’s going to help me.

Your old broken heart.

Yah. I think it has to involve pain for me to break through. Heartbreak.

“It won’t be the same after.”

“Nothing is. I need this to happen.”

“OK, Charlie. For you, dad.”

xxxvi. / lvi. / lxv.

The last night guarding that building Dylan finally dozed off—& the dream he had should have told him all he needed to know to understand that he & Maya would meet again—but it was terrifying & off—& then the building burned down & he was able to create a gap from it—

(Later he wondered how he got out. The whole building burned & he didn’t remember leaving. Still later he couldn’t find the corner the building had been on. The two streets no longer intersected.)

It was late. The building would get quiet enough for Dylan to hear every creak & breeze & soon he’d be drifting, eyes closed until that last time to elsewhere—usually nice ones—never very specific—creaks might become shore, slight drafts breezes, & sometimes Maya would seem near & sometimes not—never near enough—could not smell her—until that last time—

He remembered later he could sniff her scent & it overwhelmed him & he followed through an unclarity, a place where movement felt like it was by mind alone—

He sniffed & pushed & sniffed some more. Didn’t think to speak or reach out but kept sniffing & pushing. Maya smelled . . . clean . . . not the soap & water kind, he was eating her smell as he pushed

along—

Eventually a hallway, & a figure & a voice, or someone writing, out loud pages, something, it wasn't Maya, it was an old man, sort of, stuff of dreams so both heavy & drifting both—

Dylan realized later it was the Noah Hotel though he never met the old man again by waking or dreams—

but this dream—it sprang out a world Dylan inhabited as—it seems—something combusted in the building he was guarding, flame begat flame, tinder caught & more of it, following some wordless, ancient perfected path of ignition & spread—

The old man lived alone in the hotel, had lived there for years, had come full of passions & hurts, people looking for him, mail looking for him, phones ringing, knocks at door, came before every new guest had to hand over IDs & credit cards (even now that still wasn't strictly true, a person with some cash & a real need, of various kinds, could still rent a room, stay, ride that cash nameless for a long stretch), & he eventually shed the name he'd given, whatever name it had been, & eventually he was able to change rooms on an unpredictable basis as a general part of things—

What had he shed, & who, & who? wondered Dylan as he followed the man over time from room to room, he'd once found a scrap of writing abandoned by the man, read part of it before following: *“Would knowing help? Watching that day again walk itself through? Remember: heart's unspent music bound for colliding with that hour. The breath before, the decision to go. Laughter. You came as one, left as another. Hungers so long held, long shaped, a new mold, now perhaps a new stuff entirely! Nearing, yes.”*

(And he asks me, later, what difference would it have made? And I answer: *I earned her*. My pain & suffering earned the chance, & I followed through. I had *nothing* to offer but my smile & my youth, but *I earned her*, that's what. The years don't undercut that. Do they for you? He shakes his head. My pain was real but I was kind still, I was such a raw want, & I still live there, I still draw new from that old well—)

It seemed he did & did not turn to Dylan to recite the rest: *“you are nearing, the word, the glance, colors & breath mass into a name, a jacket, a vehicle. How God & dreams look to another. You are young, the nights immortal. Even the talk of trifles excites you. Give back this hour?”*

(I sit in your room sometimes, I am you & not you, because that's how everything is. Sometimes she sits with us. She is not old. That's on me. You said let's get a look at her now. I said no, she's nothing now. She's an old I-don't-give-a-fuck now—Why anything, you ask? Because she had the power & left the fucking mark. I bear the mark yet find no beauty in it, in so much of it then & thereafter, the pattern of want & sniff & chase, want & sniff & chase, elude & kiss & gone, & again, & I want to say the pointless & the sad of it all, yet the shaping hand of genetics & evolution made this the way of things, that humanity would continue to hunt & seed & die while climbing to clearer places, reach in moments & in rare lives toward something waiting in the world, some potential both real & the stuff of myth—Because she wouldn't fuck you? Because she & none of them would take me fucking seriously, & none would side with me so I could learn—I did not know & none taught me—& I learned ugly &—fuck her, go on, there she is, there's the bed—she looks at me, smiles shyly, I'm not him, I'm what he became—)

Dylan follows the old man from room to room, day to day, & eventually follows him to Gravy's coffee shop where he will eventually work—but what happens next is that the building he is sleeping in while on duty burns down & disappears completely gone.

(Give back this hour? No. I don't suppose so. You were early lesson in how what one really needs most in others may or may not come. I learned to keep returning to Art for all but everything—all but—)

(the old man is real—is moving rooms again tonight—his possessions the old books & notebooks, the portable phonograph, the few clothes—

More interesting is the poster he always puts on the room's wall near his bed—might seem odd such a twisty old fuck, tall but little potent, would put such a spirally psychedelic work up, or even own it, or bear any interest—& yet—& yet—this was his portal to Dreamland, to the White Woods, to elsewhere—he often wonders why was such a powerful device given him so late in life? He hadn't come here to wield new power. He'd come here to regret & regret, & eventually to die—

Yet no—he found it in the very first room & its faint penciled instruction—“*you are not alone—keep moving*”

He was able to move through the portal or let it move through him—Dylan he induced by dream to follow him & thus to discover the No-Tell—other situations were different—

The portal allowed him travel & also altered costume. He could move in time & space & as another or others—

“*Keep moving*”—part of why was the portal would degrade, would become eventually an old poster, inert, unpretty—& this was because of “*you are not alone*”—he had to keep the portal moving because of this—followed by a who or a what? He didn't know—

One day would he would not return, in one way or another, & he wanted Dylan to take the portal but—

he knew she would be the only payment he would take—payment, not gift, her delivery to him—how to deliver the thread, the conduit herself?

xxxvii. / lvii. / lxiv.

Oh these later days of the year, the clear cool air, those grey gorgeous clouds, power beyond the physical, not sure what—the looking leads to pointing, to trying to think into music with words embedded, gems in the skin of seeing—

Christa knows how a woman often helps a man—her touch, her soft voice, her giving body—& yes, she has & will again with Bowie—but more—she learned, maybe before experience itself—a man can go deep or deeper—sometimes a smile & wiggle of ass is his hunger's reach—& fuck, sometimes it's nice to be bluntly wanted & feel that hard rock enter *her*, want *her*, only *her*, blow it wide for *her*—sure, sure—

With Bowie, though, something way else—those clouds above—that moon—

The Ampitheatre interested her for awhile, she saw how much was going on there, how it was a crossroads of a kind, she saw things because she hadn't come expecting or distracted, & she walked around watching quietly, & that was fine, & then she felt more & more, & was this Bowie?

Finally she found herself in a woods some distance from the clearing with the drums, sitting against a tree, watching shadows pass by her, & there were words of course, always words—

“it would be the same for any god, nothing learned in the hundreds kneeling or mouthing the sacred songs” oh this *“nothing found in face smiling to face on the high holiday, the cheerful choirs, the best-washed virgins smoothly singing of sin & penance”* always that Christa nodded, listening *“& the fine thoughts of each in his or her creased white uniform”* she nods again & says aloud “blessed be blessed be blessed be” someone pauses, in the shadows, hearing her voice—

Christa shakes her head, no, none of this, not right, no enough,
not helping Bowie—

She knows she can do something right now to help him, this far, now to help him, this far, that isn't far at all, she's already let him know that's her task, she can & will—

She nods. “I was brought there to be the next minister. Bowie didn’t know this when he took me, when he kept them from bringing me back. He didn’t know. I knew & I wasn’t supposed to know. I was only supposed to be training like a lot others. I found out.”

Someone might be listening in the shadows. She continues.

“I was to be the first female minister. It was new, all of it, & resisted, but it had to happen. The decay was almost too far gone. But not yet. I was going to renew everything. I was the compromise.”

She repeats, again aloud, the words that had gone stale by when she learned them “*Fumble down into the mystery, the careening hungry hour, flesh gnawing for flesh, & one god a thousand thousand miles away*” Christa talking louder now “*& another near, so near, that hand’s knowing touch on skin*” when had it been alive? these words—“*the laugh & cry in shedding clothes, feel that god as the breathing twins, as sinews bind hearts, the few words, hard, touch, how the god would learn*”—these were good words, solid, Christa was now half-crouched, talking a little louder still, half-singing—

She’s standing, talking, “Do I have to go back?”

The figure in the shadow moves, lights up a cigarette. Passes it to her. Sticky green, most kind.

“Maybe not. But it doesn’t have to be abandonment either.”

Christa nods. “You’ll get them a message?” Nod in return.

She recites, singing, “*what rises with next light, stained & crumpled uniforms, blessed be, blessed be, blessed always.*”—he joins her in singing—“*Was it sin or new love or a darling good fuck?*”—their singing twists tighter—“*The god would listen to the words as limbs untangle, a breast to its harness, a cock into its sheath.*”—their voices now powerfully carrying, shadows near, paused, listening on all sides—“*uncertain words, because that moment, those sacred songs, the strange way each & all bind & undo so easily*”—

She nods him off—he goes—singing the song together was instruction, heresy, enough

For Bowie, this, is her one thought—

xxxviii. / lviii. / lxiii.

Nothing unbinds again, space conjured is space real, no matter the bursts of darkness, the diminishing years, how touch hungers & sates & mercifully forgets—

Well & I keep wondering back to this—how much is forgotten—or how much is knitted in—I keep wondering over long gone days & even longer gone days, & the autumn comes again, & I remember—impossibly, I do, & I remember, & because so I seem to move forward & backward in time simultaneously—

I write now, recently, “*I know nothing & keep learning to sing. Nothing unbinds again, the lesson of drowned woods & old hearts.*” I did not write like this then, not even close, my mind did not work language in such ways, conjuration, singing—

But when then? Those few long echoing nights, I can’t have them back & here is a new November, its gloried death of colors, its brilliant shivering nights, *this pen, this page*—

I know nothing & keep learning to sing.

And my fear: that I will forget or unaccountably stop. Lose myself to—what? to more hours not spent writing. More hours not doing what I most love.

And why? Because tonight is both new & old. The hungers are new & old. The pains. The moves toward & away from music.

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

“The web weaves forward & back”

She nods, sure, unsure.

“I suppose that’s my task, figure how to do this, again, better, new—”

Nods again.

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

“A web?” She cracks, giggling.

I nod. “Suppose.”

“What then?”

“Sometimes the web is people, often it’s place.”

“Why?”

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

She peers into my notebook, the *Labyrinthine* manuscript. “Is it reporting?” “Umm.” “We’re sitting in this corner of this bright-lit shop, at dusk, traffic going by, talking, & you write it down. So is it reporting?” I shake off her question.

“You live in the world & outside it, & sometimes you create a moment when they cross” I nod, closer “So I’m still living in the pages of the notebook but in your world too” “No too” “What then?” “The border opens, no separation. Sometimes I call it imaginal space. A place from two.”

She nods. “Why show me?”

“You’re my counterpart.”

“Not Rebecca?”

“No. She’s my conscience.”

“Counterpart?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Code & key too? Conduit? Thread?”

“Thread.”

“Thread & counterpart?”

I nod.

“Does it help?”

“What?”

“To keep shifting like this?”

I look at her. “I remember sitting here long years ago listening to the vice-presidential debate. Another time, very high, writing furiously into my notebooks, sad, lonely, trying to summon the ruined truths of love with another. Here til near dawn often, often took a piss in alley across the street. It mattered. I came here today to web back & forth. We’ll be here again.”

She nods. Counterpart.

xxxix. / lix. / lxii.

Bells ring, little, nothing. Ring again, & a drum, & another. Something beats, something breathes, there is movement if not dancing. Weave the web forward & backward, I believe this strengthens it.

A question: what had Rosie seen in those Oregon woods the day she & Paula went looking for



mushrooms?

They'd become separated, the first time since they left home. The promise between them of "no boys" had been a hard one to keep. Each a potent girlish force & together an overwhelm. On the busses from New Mexico to Oregon, boys had smiled, had tried to chat. Men too, one that each would have tried further with, had not there been the promise. But some other page's topic.

The bus ride was long, "so friggin long, man," said Paula, who was unsure of their objective anyway.

"We smoke pot, Rosie, but magic mushrooms? That's like those crazy old Indians who eat peyote buttons. Hardcore shit."

Rosie nodded.

"You ever eaten peyote with them?"

"Not with."

What a time to find out on the bus. She hadn't asked before. Shit, she was too afraid. But here they were, getting closer all the time to a town called Astoria where Rosie said they would get off & walk or hitch the rest of the way.

"Alone."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"They said not to."

"Who? Those crazy Injuns?"

"No. The ones in the visions."

"When was this?"

"Last summer, when you were visiting your biological mother."

Paula cringed inside. What a *stupid* idea that had been. And her step-parents had been so damned nice about it. And Rosie *had* been different when she got back but . . . she was always weird. She could have coasted along but her brain was better than her ass, & her ass was pretty good.

"The . . . peyote visions told you not to tell me?"

"Or anyone. I wanted to. But they said no. They kept coming to me, in dreams & reminding me."

"But why?"

"They said I could tell you once we were on our way to Oregon."

"You mean now?"

Rosie nodded. "I mean, I said, Paula's gonna ask me. First it will be this big adventure & all, but at some point she's gonna say, why the frig are we going to Oregon to find magic mushrooms anyway?"

Paula laughs. "Pretty smart for injun peyote visions."

Rosie is quiet. "The Indians told me once I ate the peyote I couldn't go back."

"Red pill or blue pill?"

"Yah." She laughs. One day they'd skipped school to stay home, smoke weed & watch all the *Matrix* movies.

"Thing is, I *don't care*. I don't want to go back. To before. I want to understand things. I don't just want to have a bunch of babies & get fat & old."

"What's wrong with that?" Paula was laughing too.

"The Lights" they both said.

"And my dreams," Rosie said after.

"Where did you eat them?"

"In the desert like you're supposed to."

"Shit, Rosie! By yourself!"

"Yah. I camped out. Way out there."

"What happened?"

Quiet, again. “It’s hard to describe in order. At one point I was naked & dancing & whooping around like I was an Indian. Then another point I was saying over & over to the Universe: ‘Why suffering? Why suffering? Why suffering?’”

“What did the peyote visions say?”

“At first they just repeated the words back to me. ‘Why suffering?’ I ask. ‘Why suffering?’ they replied. Back & forth. Back & forth. Then I got more mad then scared. I got real mad & I yelled, ‘Why suffering? Tell me!’ & they said back ‘Why suffering, & why its glorious songs?’ I didn’t know what they meant.

“Then I heard bells ringing, softly at first, then deeper & louder. They were coming from everywhere & nowhere. Both. I know it sounds nuts but it’s true.”

There was more. Rosie knew in life there’s always more. But she saw Paula was tired & a little freaked so she put her arms around Paula & cuddled her, humming to her, *relax, relax, now sleep, now sleep . . .*

xl. / lx. / lxi.

*I ask the Universe: why suffering?
Why music? & behold this world my answer.*

Tis night. Night is when the danger is most distant. At its rest, between its days of ceaseless ferocity.

I think: this is protection in time, not space. The bastards haven’t moved an inch; it’s just the hour for sleep, humans sleep, even the ones who cause so much suffering. It is strange. My heart beating. Yours. Every one, now, &, long enough from now, not beating, & we are gone. There are others then, small now, or not yet come to the world.

*I ask the Universe: why suffering?
Why music? & behold the world my answer.*

Why music? Why music. Why music!
None quite the complete way to say.
Ask. Declare. Exclaim. All of them.

I think tonight that maybe why suffering’s answer is music & why music’s answer is suffering & the world is the result of this. Sensible or not.

Tonight on the radio I heard bright men with despairing hearts, & I suppose despair is the likely result of looking around the world with too much empathy & curiosity—
Strange: my heart beating. Yours.
The hearts of these despairing men.

The danger is distant tonight, & near too. The suffering caused by a few upon many is one kind. The voluntary loss of the music is the other.

What else is dreaming & who would protect one against a world even more indifferent than hostile—

*I ask the Universe:
why suffering?
why music?
& behold this world
my answer*

It came embedded in a dream: old love, old helplessness, a power wielded poorly, with mocking, & I hustled after, teach me, tell me, give me a kind word, I love you, this isn't the best of me, the part that laughs & urges the rest, the part looks ever to arc the gap from sweet to serious, give me a word, cohere for a fucking moment, & give me a word, reck your own power & regret its poor wield, as I have, as I often do, I reckon & regret but not always, I knew the word, I said the word, at least sometimes, but all you did in this dream was lure & elude, kept along it, it felt good, it felt nasty, maybe it wasn't nasty enough, if my adore wasn't enough, would I go back & change it, give you a dirtier it, I wonder, & what then? what then—

*why suffering
to learn to survive
to learn a stone kindness will stay
why music?
to remind to urge
to feed the prisoned heart*

*why suffering
because mortal
because conscious
because no why explained
yet born to a world of
explaining men, the ones with
soft fingers, the one with fists*

*why music?
because the explanations
all break sooner or later &
all left is the rhythm of breath
& the melody of beat—*

Find myself sitting at Luna T's Cafe's bar, seems to be holiday time again—Mr. Bob the barman always gets up the decorations, nothing too pushy—strings of lights around the bar—a green wreath with ribbon on the outside of the bar entrance door—maybe a picture of Santa Claus or reindeer—no crosses, no manger, no infants in rags—

“Tell me”

“Ask”

“Are you a Christian?”

He laughs. Takes off his spectacles to clean them off, delay, think on my question a moment—

“There's kindness in it. Some hope. People suffer a lot. Sometimes the explanation needs to be hard.”

“Accuse? Explain by accusing.”

He nods, I think. “If we're all sinners, at least I have company.”

I nod to the TV, a news program, soldiers arriving home for the holiday, a reprieve from the current War.

“So it lines up with that. War isn't for perfected souls. But sinners? Sure, OK. Sinners hurt each other.”

He looks me over. “Sinners laugh at dirty jokes too. Get drunk & loud. Snore in bed.”

“Cum too quickly. Roll over & fall asleep. Forget birthdays.”

He shakes his head.

“And so sin explains how we are, or does it excuse it? That’s what I don’t know.”

He waits.

“What I’m saying is that I think the explanation alienates those it badly suckles. Makes sin the standard, it’s like starting a game down points just because. Because someone had a weak moment. And then, to feel guilty because another one came along to make things right, & was mercilessly killed for it.

“The rest is reaction, afterward. At best, an in-between all that & an end-time when, again, someone else will call the shots, decide.

“It’s like your life is sacred, well, sorta, because you’re a sinner, but, well, there are a set of rules to help out with that, but not without a continued humiliation & prostration.

“Life filtered through all this. Sin. Redemption. Myths. Life among humans the only important thing, the human world all that matters. This world of the fallen & the otherwise inconsequential, save as fuel, building material, product to be processed & marketed.

“The stars not real, just lights in the sky, otherwise also unimportant. The human mind narrowed to prejudice, blunt sensation, getting from here to there & back home.”

Mr. Bob walks off to fetch some beers, but I can see he’s thinking.

When back, he says, “What then. What’s this book for?”

I speak ‘fore any good words come. “Something else. I don’t know. Something good. Fill my hours & show me if nobody else that I’m *fucking trying*.”

Nods.

“I don’t see most of my doors closing yet. Not sure why, but I *don’t*. I still think in possibles. There’s some I’ve known, I don’t know if they do still.”

Waits.

“There’s value in looking back, remembering. And planning things out, but here’s *this moment, this hour*, here. Not exclusive of the rest but part of it. Matters as much as the rest. When I stumble, I lose this, this . . . *psychedelic sense* that here is somewhere & nowhere & everywhere—”

I stop. A couple of the drinkers raise mugs to me, nod. One smiles.

“The world roars & whispers with music. In as many costumes & manners as one could wish. Losing the sense of wonder & awe & gratefulness to one of sin—one where sin is the predominant fact—how one accounts more or less for one’s soul—no—I really don’t think so—music reaches every ear, color falls upon every eye, taste touch smell, the mystery isn’t for an age or a place, for a great man or woman alone, for one group of believers—or not another—the world’s melodies tickle every & all—”

“What then? Take down the lights? No more *Charlie Brown Xmas* on the TV?” he’s laughing as he says.

“I don’t believe the world is meant to be a permanent War. But there’s a powerful force everywhere that pushes for that idea. Not as faith, but truth. War is truth. Cats kill mice. Men war forever.

“There’s something else, present, among. A choice. Another.”

“What then?” he’s still smiling.

A friendly hand settles on my shoulder. The smiling face of Jim Reality III. “Hey guy.”

We repair to the roof of the parking garage atop Luna T’s Cafe. The security guard is down in the bar, sipping his dinner, watching the news. Nodded to us as we left. “It’s 4:20 somewhere” he said.

Jim lights one up as we lean on the safety fence at the edge of the garage. Sweet smell of cannabis.

“How do you not give up or keep fighting on?”

Puff, puff, pass.

“Keep playing. Just keep playing.”

I nod.

I look out on the night of the city & for a stretch know not which city. The tall buildings, the lights of the highway. The hurrying crowds on the downtown streets.

“Another hit?” I take one & shake off another. He sees I’m withdrawing & pats my shoulder again, makes to leave.

I sit. But what. But then.

*I ask the Universe: why suffering?
Why music? & behold this world my answer.*

I am joined on this empty parking garage roof on this frigid December night by others. Maya sits cross-legged in her beat blue jeans & her Jimi Hendrix tie-dye shirt. Bowie, thin, elusive but for the two colors of eyes, one a mushroom, it seems. Jasmine, a scrawny, delectable thing, figuring this is a White Woods phantom scene. Others. Sit near me, stand looking at the city. Neither really present nor absent.

I address them. “I’m supposed to do finely by each & all of you. I can. I will. I look around at the faces & see the dullness of years spent waiting, obeying, learning, rebelling a little, growing heavier & slower with the weights of experience & expectation.”

Nobody speaks. Yet.

“What is this book for? It’s a game, an example, a warning. *A long fucking song*. It’s dirty, stupid, obvious, & sometimes what keeps me remembering who I am.

“It’s my revolt, my affirmation, my confession, my great years-long shit of words. It’s the next in a long series & I don’t think the last.”

“What can we do?” someone asks. I don’t determine who.

“Know you matter. Know you matter a fucking lot & more than most—”

“But—”

“I know. All matters. Each & all matters. *You matter more than most—*”

Maya crawls in my lap, bonelessly. Weaves among my loose grasp. The rest go, maybe at her signal.

I feel her slender torso. Her long hair. Her light breathing. Her shiver.

“No”

“What?”

“I’m fine. I’m not too cold & I’m not here to seduce you”

“Here. This time.”

“Either.”

We grasp & I grow comfortable.

“Code. Conduit. Key.”

She nods into my chest.

“Any ideas?”

Shakes her head.

“Dylan.”

Nods again.

I think we doze like that, in the freeze, again the parking garage roof exterior wall. Don't move, aren't harmed.

In this dream we share, I am walking with her & Dylan. Woods, pretty. We three are holding hands. I feel others near, like breath, like distant lights, no quarrel, just loved. Near.

It seems impossible but yet we are dreaming this, me as surely as her. Perhaps Dylan, too, at his distance.

"Is this answer, clue?"

"It's just walking. A stop, another. What's nearby. No quarrel."

I nod, hold Maya as we dream together. As night gathers in the dream, the sun begins to light up the city beyond the rooftop. Opening my eyes, I find Maya gone. After a breath, after a beat, I am too.



To be continued in Cenacle | 81 | June 2012

* * * * *



Martina Newberry

Ghosts

If you believe in ghosts,
I think you must believe
that earth's good smells live on
and that the dead will act
on fury and on fear.

You must believe that, while
the dead are under the
dirt or parked in urns, they
still have a plan. They want
to see their favorite movies

again and scratch their dogs'
bellies, make love in warm places
and buy chocolate at the market.
I've sensed ghosts now and then,
turned to where I thought

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

in ghosts, you must believe
that living is not a huge
salt sea, but a shallow
stream in which most things, like
the restless dead, stay afloat.

* * *

Surviving Sundown

for M.W.

Suppose the river you are watching
fills with magnolias and all up and

down the river bank are white petals
so large, like flags, coating the river

bank and sharing absence of color
with abundance of perfume. Suppose

the sun wells up over this river
and does not set for days and days,

shines warm enough to weary you so
that you fall into a deep sleep and

forget the sinking of the sun—how
it looks diminished—an ember from

a raging fire—how it seduces
darkness. Suppose you sleep so long that

you forget what darkness is and why
it is. Suppose when your sleep is done,

you look up past the magnolias and
the river bank, through the piney trees

and you know the sun has warmed away
all that was unimportant. It will

wait for you—you only—to grow strong,
just strong enough to survive sundown.

* * * * *

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Tom Sheehan

The Last Flags of the River

Dangers are everywhere about the river:
the porous bog whose underworld has
softened for centuries, the jungles of cat-
o-nine tails leap up into. Once, six new
houses ago, a new street along the edge,
two boys went to sea on a block of ice.
They're sailing yet, their last flag a jacket
shook out in dusk hiding in Decembers
never letting go of them every year.

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

A truck driver, dumping December's snow,
backed out too far, went too deep. His son
stutters when snow falls. His wife hung
a wreath at the town garage. At the all-night
diner a waitress remembers how many times
she put dark liquid in his nightly coffee.
When she hears a Reo or a Mack engine
big as those old Walters Sno-Plows were,
she tastes the hard sense of late whiskeys.
He had honest hunger, an honest thirst,
and thick eyebrows, she remembers, thick,
thick eyebrows.

* * *

Child of the Canal

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

Parents, rooted, twined, came
part of the moaning adrift
on darkness, wind and water
at turmoil. This was her
great step forward, escape
from smaller joys, a mouth
of water at elsewhere sears
away the parching, leaks down
through the dry scars of July,
a throat driven arid by August
with its harsh fistfuls.

At another time she ladled
the worn pewter cup at well,
cooled her lips with a moment
of deep rock, roots shifting
underground, years of sediment
from up this other rocky throat.

Stars shine there, passing
softly through the bucket handle,
where the Seven Sisters see
Seven Sisters in that low field.

Oh, we raked her in from the stars.

* * *

The Lilac Run

For twelve years the lilac
sat still. Each spring I
waited for lavender odors

to uproot the air, carve
a name across an evening,
break subtle barriers.

The last bloom was yours.
When you shook it loose
in the kitchen, wet it,

the square room softened
and wore wings only lilacs
enfranchise. You died too soon.

Purple hosannas leaped today,
up sang the lilac choir
from the twelve year silences.

All night your voice
sounds like perfume
escaping the flask,

sits thick as gun-
powder near wounds
hardly worth healing.

* * *

A Sweater Too Long Hung

A sweater too long hung
on an iron spike near leather
goods of an old horse, tells tales.

One glove, fractured at wrist
and thumb, three gardens old,
capped on a spade handle, clues.

Scythe handle, spine scattered
to every degree, two blades dead,
holds a hundred years of sweat

waiting raccoon's discovery
the slow night of a full moon
and wheat fields curling wet.

Size eleven khaki waders,
hung to dry ten years ago,
exhibit river remembrance

in deep-scarred veins
the way lake bottoms dry,
and whisper of accidents.

A red and black lumberjacket,
buoyant exclamation mark
beside the cellar door,

rigid as winter pond
yet soft behind my eyes, holds
the last day my brother knew.

If I were to gather all
these moderate artifacts,
the yield would be tender.

* * * * *

John Perry Barlow



How LSD Destroyed God's (and Dad's) Rigid Authority and Ended the Dull 1950s

[Essay]

The following essay is adapted from the foreword to Birth of a Psychedelic Culture: Conversations about Leary, the Harvard Experiments, Millbrook and the Sixties, by Ram Dass and Ralph Metzner with Gary Bravo, from Synergetic Press. This essay can be found online at: <http://goo.gl/ilvwb>.

LSD is a drug that produces fear in people who don't take it.

—Timothy Leary

It's now almost half a century since that day in September 1961 when a mysterious fellow named Michael Hollingshead made an appointment to meet Professor Timothy Leary over lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club. When they met in the foyer, Hollingshead was carrying with him a quart jar of sugar paste into which he had infused a gram of Sandoz LSD. He had smeared this goo all over his own increasingly abstract consciousness and it still contained, by his own reckoning, 4,975 strong (200 mcg) doses of LSD. The mouth of that jar became perhaps the most significant of the fumaroles from which the '60s blew forth.

Everybody who continues to obsess on the hilariously terrifying cultural epoch known as the '60s—which is to say, most everybody from “my ge-ge-generation,” the post-War demographic bulge that achieved permanent adolescence during that era—has his or her own sense of when the '60s really began. There are a lot of candidates: the blossoming pink cloud in the Zapruder film, Mario Savio's first speech in Sproul Plaza, the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Beatles' first appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, the first Acid Test, the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park, the release of the song “Good Vibrations,” the day Jerry Garcia got kicked out of the army. But as often as not, if you are a Boomer, the '60s began for surreal on the day you dropped acid. And if that is when the shit hit your personal fan, you may owe a debt of ambiguous gratitude to the appealingly demonic young sociopath who conveyed the Stark Bolt of Chemical Revelation to the nice young gentlemen of the Harvard Psilocybin Project.

In some of the photographs of members of the Project, taken prior to the arrival of Mr. Hollingshead and his Magic Mayonnaise Jar, the learned investigators are actually whacked on psilocybin and yet their narrow black ties are still neatly knotted, their horn-rimmed glasses are on straight, their earnest civilization is still visibly intact.

Consider that Dr. Richard Alpert (now Ram Dass)'s first impulse, upon regaining the ability to walk during his first psychedelic experience, was to head off through the snow to his parents' house and start shoveling their driveway. Upon being discovered, his defiant response was to dance a jig. This is truly a rebel without claws. But a few days after that fateful lunch

with Hollingshead, Timothy Leary dropped acid and everything changed. The sober, scientific center of the Harvard Psilocybin Project lost its hold on the centripetal edge. The past started to end and the future started to begin. Their ties loosened and disappeared, along with belief in any such prosaic artifact as objective reality and the social conventions that accompanied it. As Leary later wrote in *High Priest*: “From the date of this session it was inevitable that we would leave Harvard, that we would leave American society, and that we would spend the rest of our lives as mutants, faithfully following the instructions of our internal blueprints, and tenderly, gently disregarding the parochial social inanities.”

Ram Dass had a somewhat more alarmed reaction. “When Tim first took LSD, he didn’t speak for weeks. I went around saying, ‘We’ve lost Timothy, we’ve lost Timothy.’ I was warning everybody to not take that drug, because Tim wasn’t talking and he was sort of dull When I took it, I felt it went so far beyond the astral, beyond form, to pure energy. It showed me that in previous psychedelic sessions, I had been screwing around in the astral plane. LSD was no nonsense. If you weren’t grounded somewhere, you’d go out on this drug.”

They were both right, of course. These were by no means unusual responses to the experience. Thanks in very large part to the subsequent exertions of Drs. Leary, Alpert and Ralph Metzner, the experience was one shared over the following decade by tens of millions of Americans, the larger part of whom found it difficult ever after to take seriously the verities that few in Eisenhower’s America would have questioned. Our paradigm got fucking well shifted. At least mine certainly did. And so, I would venture, did that of the United States of America, during the trip we took between 1961 and 1972.

One can make a non-ludicrous case that the most important event in the cultural history of America since the 1860s was the introduction of LSD. Before acid hit American culture, even the rebels believed, as Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman implicitly did, in something like God-given authority. Authority, all agreed, derived from a system wherein God or Dad (or, more often, both) was on top and you were on the bottom. And it was no joke. Whatever else one might think of authority, it was not funny. But after one had rewired one’s self with LSD, authority—with its preening pomp, its affection for ridiculous rituals of office, its fulsome grandiloquence, and eventually, and sublimely, its tarantella around Mutually Assured Destruction—became hilarious to us and there wasn’t much we could do about it.

No matter how huge and fearsome the puppets, once one’s perceptions were wiped clean enough by the psychedelic solvent to behold their strings and the mechanical jerkiness of their behavior, it was hard to suppress the giggles. Though our hilarity has since been leavened with tragedy, loss, and a more appropriate sense of our own foolishness, we’re laughing still.

Before delightedly steering the train off its rails, we were given a glimpse of grace and infinity. But like all that is utterly true, the lightning was brief and the thunder rolls still. In the beginning for me—and for many of us—there was the realization that religion was mostly the creation of God in man’s own image. Just as Tim Leary became furious at Catholicism shortly after hitting West Point, I bought a little Honda motorcycle and found that my dopily consoling Mormonism couldn’t seem to ride along. Like the maddeningly glib Dick Alpert—and believe me, he was a man of many words in those days—I left monotheism for sex and velocity. But there had been, even in a book as weird as the one the Angel Moroni purportedly gave Joseph Smith (Mark Twain called it “chloroform in print”), a spark of something. It was not religion, but you could almost see it from there.

I sped around with a longing for the Spirit that seemed inaccessible until sometime in

1964 when I read about the “Good Friday Experiment” in which, on Good Friday of 1962, Walter Pahnke, Tim Leary, Ram Dass, and Ralph Metzner, had given psilocybin to some divinity students in Boston University’s Marsh chapel and—*mirabile dictu!*—they fucking saw God or something like It. And all because somebody gave them a pill.

Like most people raised by hick kids in the mountains, I was a mystic without ever having heard the word. If I could have a direct experience of The Thing Itself, without all that regulatory obligation wrapped around it, I would become whole again. After that, I read everything I could find about mystico-mimetic chemicals: Gordon Wasson’s 1957 article for *Life* magazine about magic mushrooms, Aldous Huxley’s *Doors of Perception*, Bill Burroughs’s *Yage Letters*, etc. I wanted a piece of that communion wafer and so did a lot of other kids raised around the dreary wasteland of American piety.

In the fall of 1965, I entered Wesleyan University where both the man who was to become Ram Dass, as well as the man who sheltered and then spurned the Harvard Psilocybin Project, Dave McClelland, had taught shortly before. I knew about Leary, Alpert and Metzner and had my own copy of *The Psychedelic Experience*. But I thought they were still at Harvard. I was going to go find them.

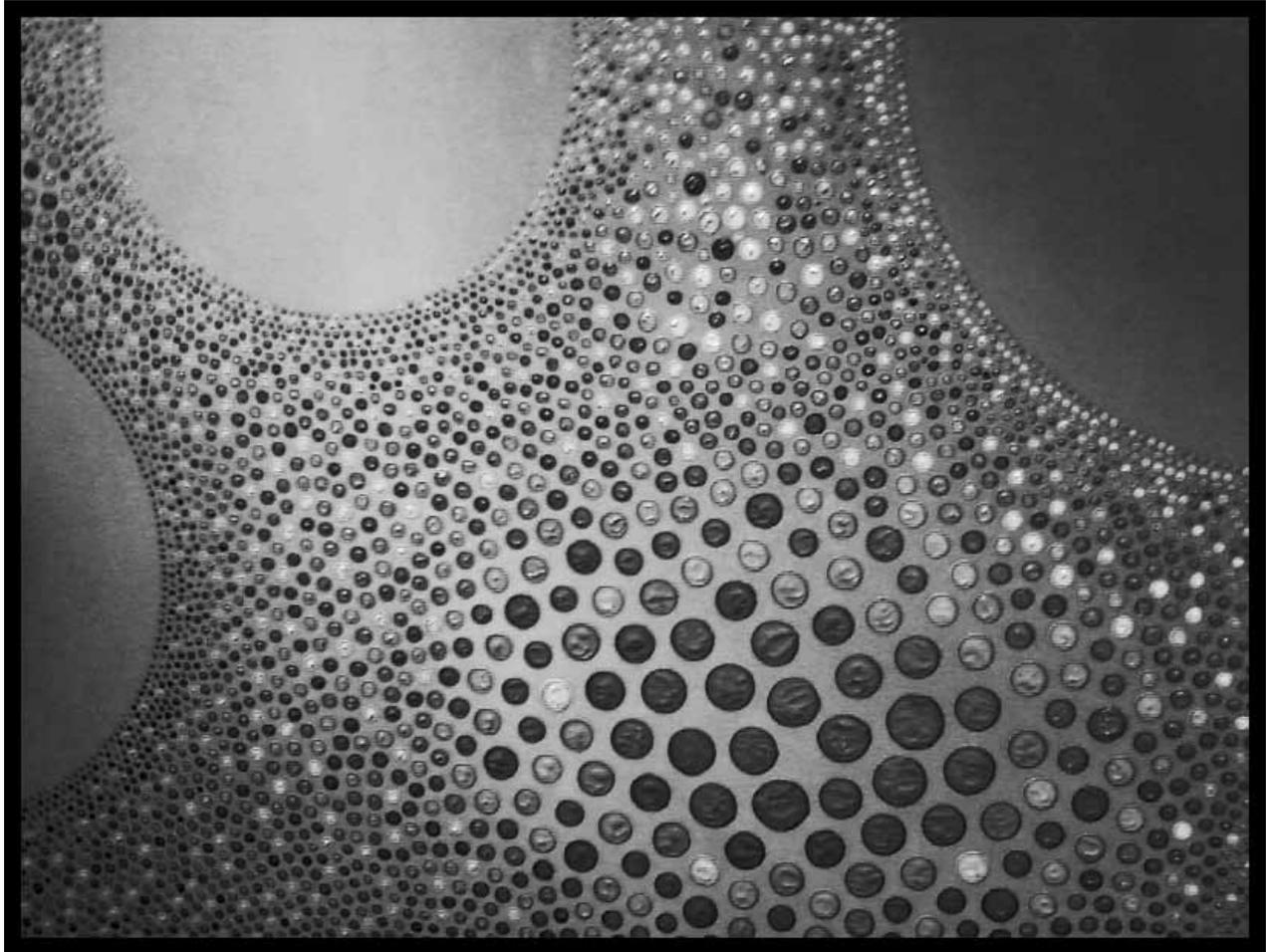
Before I could get around to that pilgrimage, I found myself at a Vassar mixer one late night in late 1965 and met a strangely luminous Indian Brahmin fellow who stood apart. He asked me if I could give him a ride to the “religious retreat” where he was staying not far from Poughkeepsie and I agreed. So we wheeled around shiny narrow roads to Millbrook in a truly Biblical downpour and the next thing I knew I was looking at the headquarters of the Castalia Foundation.

He invited me in. I didn’t know who lived there. Now, at that point, my heroes had not only been cast out of Harvard, but paradise as well. Inside the house it was not such a pretty sight. The social order had been whupped upside the head too many times already, but that didn’t bother me. I had Forrest Gumped my way into the Temple of Delphi.

Not long after that, I was fully enrolled in the Eastern Orthodox Church of LSD. A great deal more could be said about my initiation and the adventures that followed, but this is not about my long, strange trip. Besides, there are better stories about the perception of *mysterium tremendum* and its effect upon mere mortals. (Understanding the legend of Dr. Faustus might not be a bad start either.)

I will say that there was a night in late 1966, I think, when I rode a motorcycle from Millbrook to Middletown during an ice storm and was, because of the acid, convinced that I could no more leave the road than an electron could escape the centerline of a linear accelerator. I will also say that by then I’d switched my academic focus from physics to phenomenology with a particular focus on Medieval Christian mystics like St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, and Meister Eckhart. I had a sign on my dorm room door displaying the following formula: [picture of me] + [skeletal schematic representation of the LSD-25 molecule] = [picture of the Buddha].

The acid was working. What I didn’t know then was that my best friend from prep school, a kid named Bob Weir, who had been strangely incommunicado since shortly after he worked on my family’s ranch, had been right next to another great fumarole of pharmaceutical whacketydoodah, the Acid Tests. His little band, the Grateful Dead, had been part of an experiment in mass hallucination which seemed, from our East Coast view, to make Millbrook look like a Trappist monastery. It sounded to me like what these West Coast people were doing



was a particularly blasphemous form of drug abuse, the spiritual equivalent of breaking into Chartres Cathedral and getting drunk on the communion wine.

But, while we were looking down our long patrician noses at these barbaric shenanigans, they were apparently producing transformations similar to our own. Five years later, Hunter S. Thompson recalled 1965 and 1966 in San Francisco like this (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*):

There was madness in any direction, at any hour . . . You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning. And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail.

Yes. That seemed right. Even as we were dismantling the monotheistic model of God as Abusive Father, we were assembling another one—in our own image of course—more personally available through mysticism and generally more immanent than the Previous Dude, but still inclined to lend special sanction to the actions of a particular socio-political cohort which, happily, turned out to be ours. God, or Something Like It, was on our side this time. The fact that God might turn up looking like a fat guy with an elephant head or as an aperture into pure, spirit-scalding Light, or even as Michael Hollingshead on a bad day, didn't matter to us. The Apocalypse was nigh. The Age of Aquarius had dawned, and God was no longer in his Heaven but getting down, right there inside of us and our holy pills.

By spring of 1967, Leary, Alpert, and Metzner had already started to feel the arrogance of this premise. All three had gone to India and two had come limping back. Personally, I was still accelerating into the radiant fog, and so was a large percentage of my swollen generational demographic.

The Gathering of the Tribes had taken place in Golden Gate Park in January of that year. Leary and Allen Ginsberg had turned up there along with the international press, and the coastal schism in the Church of Acid had been officially healed. Somewhere in there, *Time* magazine ran a cover story on “The Hippies.” A more attentive cultural observer than I would have known by that sign that we'd reached our high-water mark. Whatever my earlier misgivings about the Acid Tests, I had learned by then that my dear Weir had been part of this heresy.

I was tickled to hear that the Grateful Dead were going to play their first New York gig at a Bleecker Street disco called the Cafe Au GoGo in June. Early June 1967 was a mighty time, the reverberations of which are now as ubiquitous in American cultural history as is the Big Bang in the rest of the universe. As I remember it, the Dead played on June 6th. The Six Day war had broken out the day before. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* had been released five days before, as had the Grateful Dead's eponymous first record. I had helped make arrangements to take the Dead up to Millbrook the day after.

After the show, which was kind of forgettable, Weir and I wandered over to Washington Square Arch and were trying to debrief one another. It was steady work. It wasn't obvious that he had entirely passed the Acid Test. His eyes were all pupil, it seemed. He had the longest hair I'd ever seen on a human with a penis. And he'd become a fellow of very few words.

While we were struggling with the acquisition of a common language, a pale green

Ford Falcon station wagon leapt the curb fifteen feet away and, like evil clowns emerging in platoon strength from a tiny circus car, some ten Long Island toughs poured out of it and headed toward us. You could see with one eye that they weren't from our side of a culture war that had already gotten ugly in America. Like T cells in jackboots, they took us for antigens and meant us harm. As they were circling, Weir looked up and said mildly, "You know, I sense violence in you guys, and whenever I feel it in myself, there's a song I like to sing." (And I'm thinking, "??!") All of a sudden he's chanting "Hare Krishna," and what with my wondering ears should I hear but the toughs singing along. For about fifteen seconds. And then they beat the crap out of us.

So, as I drove my 550 horsepower Chevy Super Sport up the Taconic to Millbrook the next day, both Bobby and I looked like Wiley Coyote after a bad run-in with an Acme product. Also on board was a girl named Bos (over whom I was totally goofy at the time), Phil Lesh, and Frank Zappa's star chick singer, a hot number who called herself Uncle Meat. We listened to war news from the Holy Land on the radio and we had on board a copy of *Sgt. Pepper's*, which I'd bought on the way out of town and which none of us had heard yet.

I was trying to explain to my inamorata Bos, both of whose parents were Jewish psychiatrists, why I felt so moved by St. John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*. It was a moment in the '60s, that day was. When we got to the Hitchcock Mansion, it was pretty clear that whatever else the charming Dr. Leary was trying to tell the world, housekeeping tips were not being integrated into it.

Few of the regulars remained. Ralph, Tim, and even Michael Hollingshead had reached a point the year before when they'd found Dr. Alpert's manias so alarming that they'd sent him packing off to India. (Where he was, by this time, already in a dhoti and well on his way to becoming Baba Ram Dass. He dropped the Baba as soon as the wisdom actually kicked in.)

That night we all gathered in the second floor library and, with ecclesiastical ceremony, we put on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Nobody said a word while the record played. Many of us couldn't have if we'd wanted to. I was so high I could taste the music and found the purple notes a little hard to chew. When the London Philharmonic's last cacophonous notes trailed out of "A Day in the Life," there was a portentous silence and . . . Timmy intoned solemnly, "My work is complete."

Little did he know how right and how wrong he was. I say this because while he and the rest of us crazy angels had truly delivered some form of apocalypse, it could not actually take effect in a couple of years or even a couple of generations. No revelation so culturally shattering was going to be universally accepted overnight. No generation that called itself now was going to find lengthy evolution palatable, but that was what was on our plate nonetheless.

Yes, the Beatles had dropped acid and the whole world had noticed, but not everyone was pleased. The Empire was about to strike back. Moreover, we had, with our giddy carnival frenzies and darker madnesses soon to come, sown the seeds of our own disaster. There was a moment in the fall of 1967 that I myself became convinced, with passionate intensity, that we were that "rough beast" Yeats had described. We were leading society into such a quagmire of narcissistic, self-reaffirming subjectivism that if we continued to "Storm Heaven," as Jay Stevens put it, little of what might be a reasonable basis for polity or even what passes for civilization would survive our self-indulgence.

I went unhinged. I became psychotic and grandiose and decided to become what would have been America's first suicide bomber. I was prepared to sound a warning with my

own spattered flesh and that of innocent others. I would be the admonition on the front page of every paper that would slow the juggernaut of hideous Truth. I had the means and the moment. Fortunately, praise Providence, I was found out and stopped forty-five minutes short of my own vile apocalypse. I lived on Thorazine for a while after that. But my intended mission attracted other willing soldiers. In my stead, we got Charlie Manson and Altamont. We got the behavioral sink of the long autumn that followed the Summer of Love. We got the Chicago Democratic Convention, the Weather Underground, the Symbionese Liberation Front, the communes that turned into rural slums overnight.

What we got was the Bill. Hunter S. Thompson put it very harshly but with some accuracy a few years later in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: “All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole life-style that he helped to create . . . a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody . . . or at least some force—is tending the light at the end of the tunnel.

Who can blame the Rotarians of America for being alarmed? We became terrifying enough to scare ourselves. The Babbitry came down with a not ill-considered immune response that, however draconian its methods, was nevertheless their Apollonian duty just as appropriately as the creation of Dionysian chaos had seemed to be ours. But perhaps even more unsettling to the Powers That Had Been was the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, in addition to calling into question their version of God-given authority, we now found them amusing.

Since there is nothing authority hates worse than being laughed at, the authorities resolved to make themselves even less funny. The harder the acid heads laughed, the more bellicose, pig-headed, and, well . . . authoritarian the Powers became. And thus, instead of a quick abdication by the cultural forces that had been in charge of Western “Civilization” for two thousand years and a peaceful transfer of power to the laughing Aquarians, there commenced the forty year Mexican standoff that I call the War Between the Fifties and the Sixties.

Of course, this conflict had a lot of other names along the way, most of them delicious with the kind of dark irony it takes an acidhead to properly savor. There was the VietNam War, the War on Poverty, The War on Terror, both Wars on Iraq, and throughout, interwoven into every inch of American life, there was the War on (Some) Drugs. There was also, implicitly, the War on the Bill of Rights.

Whatever its other depraved social consequences—the millions jailed, the military dead and maimed, the deceit and denial at all levels of American society, particularly within the nuclear family—the War Between the Fifties and the Sixties endowed us with a golden age of irony. If you didn’t have a sense of irony, you were missing most of the fun, and, um, ironically, just about the only Americans who did have one were the acid heads. This created yet another badly hung loop as various iterations of “We had to destroy the village in order to save it” concatenated through the culture and, once again, we were the only ones laughing.

And then, lest we forget, throughout much of this period, and scarcely mentioned by anybody, acid head or Republican Whip, was the greatest surreality of all: the almost universal belief that somewhere and some time soon, someone would foul up and launch the nuclear storm that would glaze the planet with our elemental constituents. And if you couldn’t laugh

at that, what could you laugh at?

Now, it seems many of these horrors may be consigned to the history of a future that never happened. While new horrors surely await us, very few still believe we're likely to go "toe-toe with the Russkies" in nuclear combat as Slim Pickens put it in one of the most immortal lines of the 1960s.

Better still, the worst of the authoritarian prigs have so magnificently shot their wad during eight long years of Cheney/Bush that only those savagely beaten by their own fathers or the clergy support them now.

Aside from the coming kerfuffle over war crimes indictments and ongoing skirmishes along the Mason-Dixon Line, the War Between the Fifties and the Sixties may be finally drawing to an end. Indeed, as I write these words, the President of the United States, in addition to being black and self-admittedly smart and well-educated, strikes me as a fellow who probably dropped acid at some point. At the least, when asked if he "inhaled," he replied, "I thought that was the point."

Now that the worst of it may be over, perhaps it may become possible for various members of Congress, federal judges, ranked military officers, prominent clergy, and captains of industry—aside from the peculiarly honest Steve Jobs—to do as most of these, had they been brave enough, ought to have done decades ago and say in public: There was a moment, years ago, when I took LSD. And, whatever the immediate consequences, it made me a different person than I would have been and different in ways I have been grateful for all this time.

That would be a mighty moment. Those who still live are all now older and wiser than we were in those literally heady days, and we may finally be ready to tell such truths without setting off another round of conflict.

Ram Dass has come a long way along the path of the profound since I first met him as the maddeningly manipulative Dick Alpert. Indeed, at one point some years ago, I was having dinner with him and confessed to a moral dilemma that I was having a hard time teasing apart. I can't even remember what it was now, but he cut through it snickety-snack, like a sword through the Gordian Knot, with a few well-chosen words. "That's the problem with you, man," I said, and continued with a concession I would not have made even to Baba Ram Dass, who turned up first at Wesleyan when he returned from India, still pretty full of self-promoting nonsense, "You're just a lot wiser than I am." His eyes narrowed. "Don't you lay that wisdom shit on me, Barlow," he retorted, thereby defeating his own argument with its refutation.

But even before then, he had uttered a motto that has been far more important to carrying the essential message of the sixties than "Turn on. Tune in. Drop out" (which was actually coined by Marshall McLuhan and given to Tim Leary since it didn't fit McLuhan's rap). Ram Dass said, "Be here now." And here we all are. Now. Ready at last with the patience, forgiveness, contrition and self-amusement necessary to continue the work in earnest.

* * * * *

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Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in the pages of *The Cenacle*. He recently observed to me that “an altered emotional/psychic landscape is heavy and has its own schedule.” How true, brother.

John Perry Barlow lives in California. He wrote lyrics for the Grateful Dead, founded the Electronic Frontier Foundation (<http://eff.org>), & has been a long-time advocate for cyberspace civil liberties.

Charlie Beyer lives in Idaho, having recently returned to the US. He tells me that at least in the US, if you're jailed for no reason, “there's less chance they'll murder you, and the digs are nicer.” More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 78 | June 2011. He recently told me that if he had his ‘druthers, he'd be sleeping many of his days away. And swinging more on guitar & pen, I'd wager.

Judh Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>. She recently said to me that “sophistication isn't everything.” Haha!

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His poem in this issue, which is his first contribution to *The Cenacle* (and which previously appeared in the June 2011 issue of *Kritya*) reflects the many places he has lived. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Herman Melville was born in 1819 in New York City & died there in 1891. Among his many great books is *Moby-Dick*, considered one of the best American novels. His excellent short story in this issue was also re-published by Scriptor Press in 2001 as part of its Burning Man Books Series.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her website is <http://rollwiththechanges.org>. She responded immediately & warmly to the idea of this remembering issue. Thank you, Martina . . .

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His offer of comfort in my time of grieving means the world to me.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. As this issue goes to press, my birthday is arriving. She is my cake & candles & present & song, each and all.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. It's been six months since the last issue of this journal. This issue is dedicated to my friend Jim, who died in December, & to the many ways he taught me that Art will help salve wounds when there are no easy explanations or comforts.

Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor lives north of Boston, Massachusetts. She hosts the monthly Out Loud Open Mic gatherings (<http://www.outloudopenmike.com>). Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 77 | April 2011. Her poem in this issue was partly inspired by our friend Jim.

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"We were going to make a million dollars manufacturing objects
we had seen in dreams that night."

--Charles Simic, 1989.

