

The Cenacle



Number 86 • October 2013



Letter to President Barack Obama

October 19, 2013
Christian Science Park
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my seventh letter to you, fifth since you've been the sitting American president. I write to you annually, & also publish the letter in my literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

I am writing this letter about eleven months after the American electorate fairly soundly chose to keep you in office for a second term. Since the Second World War, & the imposition of two-term limits on your office, it has proven fairly difficult to unseat a sitting president in his re-election bid. There is what I'd call a very working class sentiment that a man in office usually deserves to finish the job, or try to. And, in the case of your opponent Mitt Romney, the clown makeup was too glaring to miss.

So here you are, sir, with a second & final term as American president. No more elections of your own to run or to be beholden to. Now it's not the need for money or votes but a clear focus upon the time remaining in office & what should be done with it.

There's recently ended yet another battle in Washington over whether or not the government is a valid thing. Whether it can do good in people's lives, protect & even improve their chances to get the basic needs of life met—food, housing, good health, meaningful work—and possibly think & feel & experience further into each's brilliant, blessed mortal time on earth as men & women.

Yes, it can. Of course, *yes it can*. But that was never really the point of the question, was it? It was simply to sow dissension, stir prejudice, harden despair. Those who led the recent government shutdown want the American populace to give up, little by little, on the ideals of American governance—of, by, & for the people—even as these self-serving & pernicious motherfuckers invoke the Constitution.

Their battle line drawn? Your modest healthcare reforms, already passed into law, already vetted by the Supreme Court. Done deal. *Done & done & done*.

And they lost. Oh, but wait. Several months of your presidency was spent fighting this battle again. Time ticked off the clock, won't come again. No refunds.

So, what now? Immigration reform. Talks with Iran. Those lead my mind, but many others closely follow.

I believe by now you are hardened to the job. You know the bloody money mechanisms of DC well enough to work them. You know the powers of your office exquisitely & I don't doubt you have your plans ready for executing. Some will succeed, some fail, many won't finish by when you shake your successor's hand in January 2017.

What I wish to say to you, in practical terms, is this: *stay angry. Stay hopeful*. But this too: *get more creative*. This country is more than guns & money & resources & numbers. It is over *300 million minds* to be summoned better, to be inspired to think new, & to push for & then past the impossible.

Sir, my question for you is this: how can you finally bypass all of the rusted mechanisms of American politics *to collaborate directly with your fellow citizens*? How?



I don't know the answers to this question, or how it jibes with your existing plans, or what real world situations will affect the remaining years of your presidency.

I don't know & yet I appeal to you, sir, Mister President, Barack, to realize finally that your hopes of doing good for the millions of common men & women you preside over lies in appealing to them directly. Angrily, hopefully, creatively, collaboratively. Every day, above & below & through the impediments you face.

And I'll say more. We are one race, one human race, segmented artificially by countries & languages & religions & ideologies, but we still each & all die in the end. We each & all still dream every night. My beat & breath & brain are each's & all's. We each & all belong to this world.

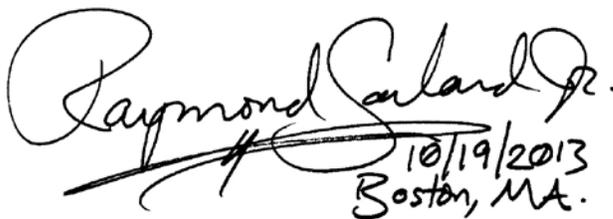
As you move beyond the day's latest manufactured crisis, my friend, know that you are in a sense not just working with & for Americans. The hope you preached of back in 2008 is still yearned around the globe by millions in worse circumstance than the most suffering Americans.

I urge you think in these terms hereon. Globally. What can you do with your remaining time for all men & women, for *all life on earth*?

That may sound crazy or too much by far. And yet, think of it: think of the few men & women we revere from the ages. They did not speak for a portion of the populace. They spoke to all of it. *All of us*. That's why their words still inspire, still matter.

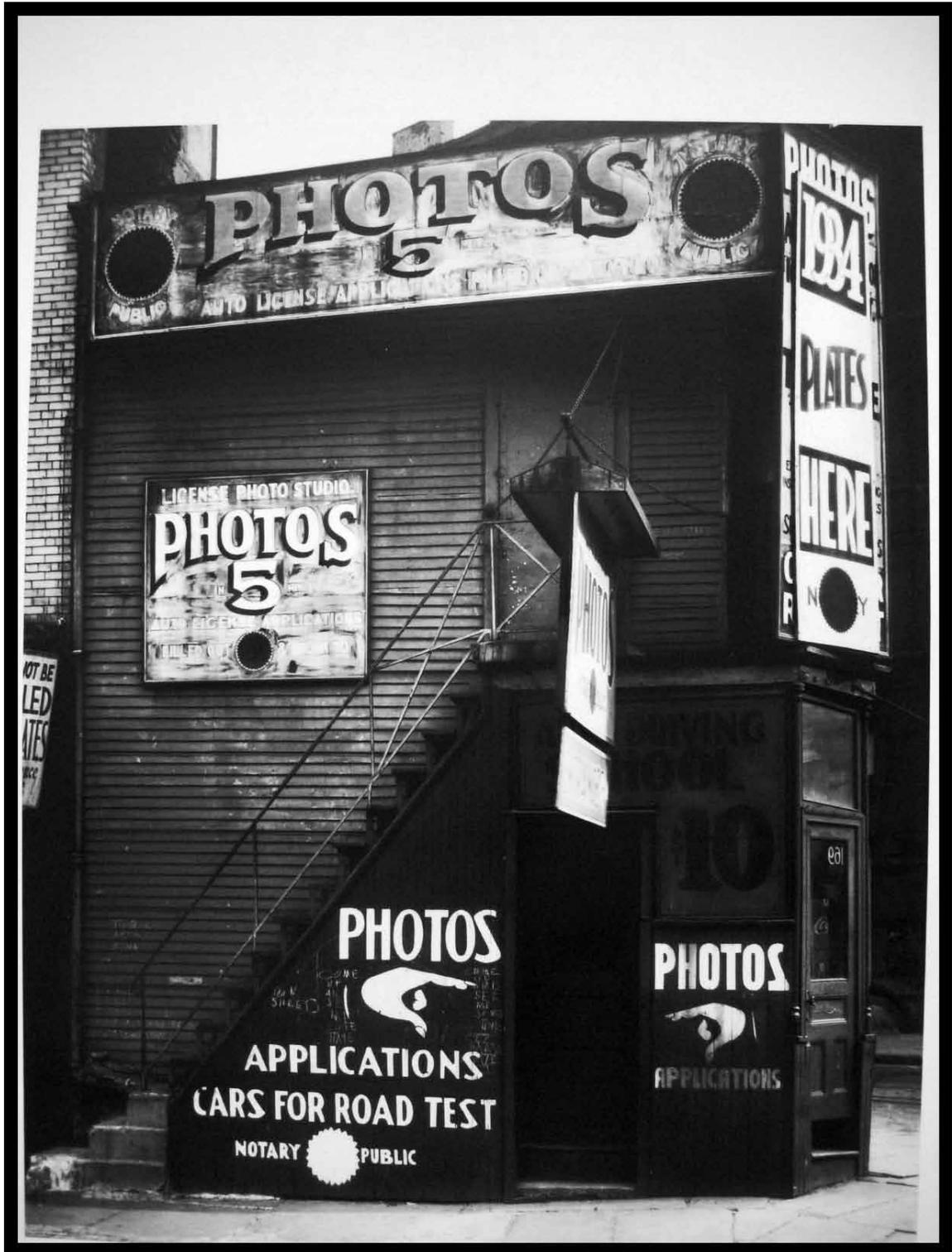
Think globally, Barack, in the days, weeks, & months ahead. Beyond the petty bullshit of your opponents, think globally. And angrily. And hopefully. And creatively. And collaboratively. Peace to you, my friend.

Respectfully,



Raymond Salard Jr.
10/19/2013
Boston, MA.

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The Cenacle

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Number 86 • October 2013

Edited by Raymond Soulard Jr.

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POETRY by Christopher M. Wick	1
INCARCERATION (THE LAST BELIZE STORY) [JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer	5
POETRY by Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor	15
NOTES FROM NEW ENGLAND [COMMENTARY] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [📍]	21
POETRY by Martina Newberry	29
THE WILDEST ONES [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Nathan D. Horowitz	33
MANY MUSICS [POETRY] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [📍]	43
POETRY by Joe Coleman	77
STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER PLANET [CLASSIC FICTION] by Herman Hesse	81
POETRY by Judih Haggai	93
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FICTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [📍]	97
POETRY by Tom Sheehan	147
PSYCHEDELICS NOT LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES [ESSAY] by David Wilder	151
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	154

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Thank you to President Obama & the many US senators and representatives who recently stood solid on the belief that government of, by, & for the people should serve, protect, & nurture each & all.



**Knife Maker**

My brother suffers fools.
He houses them too, in a trailer away from the house
until his wife wishes them away,
like she does the clouds
when she wants to take a picture of butterfly wings.

He's a knife maker,
Damascus, spring steel,
grinding, honing, tempering,
but there's not much money in it, yet.

He made his way to it through the clay he dug
and fired in a shallow pit
at age twelve,
through the carving of spirals he left in trees
when he was thirteen,
through his struggle to graduate high school,
and after earning a pilot's license and scuba certificate,
through twelve years of gold, diamonds,
and wedding ring sizing.

He still cooks at the slightest suggestion of hunger,
and carves wooden swords and ships for children.

I stand over him, watching him work,
while he hops around with a cinder in his sleeve,
fumes in his face,
vice grip hands,
and say smart shit like, "Making another knife?"

He looks up at me,
never the poet—
and says, "No, stupid—I'm pounding Buddha."

* * *

Furniture

It's a rambling,
a whir,
the noise a table saw makes.
It has teeth but doesn't breathe—
instead it issues a stream of dust
like the spit of dirt off a back tire.
The rest is made with steel
and sand
and elbow grease.

And perhaps, in many years,
it will earn a life outside again
with a broken leg
or flaking surface
in joy to be exposed
to rend the human form
content to halt the path
of an honest life
and let rest the single note
of the flower petal once more.

* * *

Jesus Was a Yaqui

On Depeyster Street
I can sometimes see the barefoot tread of children
long after they have gone.

I hear voices,
the sweet syllables of everyday
when someone says "Family."

In the crisp green glass of a broken Heineken bottle at the curb
are the threadbare tires of a Pontiac Grand Prix,
the rusted undercarriage,
and the pale sweaty face of the driver.

In the concrete cracked and heaving
like tiny tectonic plates
I can only imagine that famous photo of Geronimo
resting on one knee
holding his Sharps rifle.
The photo taken before his first capture.

A filigree leaf
brought by the delicate application of winter, water, and rot
are what arched stained glass windows are made from.

I run my hand down the length
of a white pine branch
the needles compress and pop
and my river guide from twenty years ago
finally returns to Nepal.

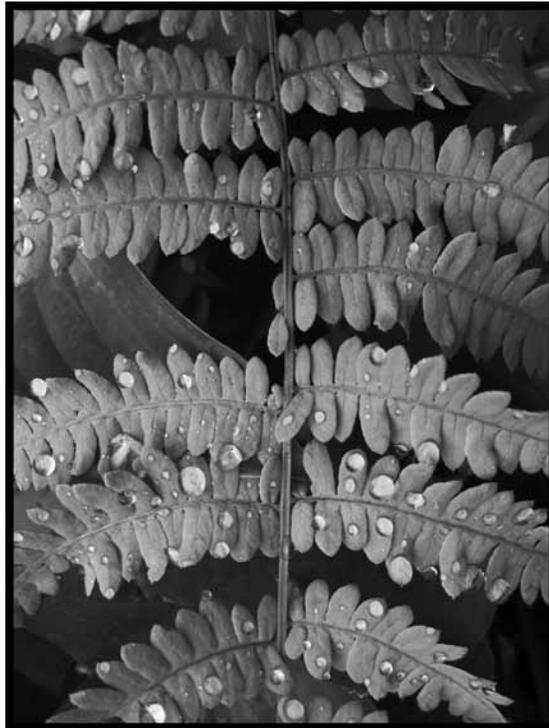
My step-son is even more acute.
He sees in the twitch of a classmate's eye
the dark menace of a stabbing.

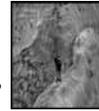
The birds chirp and he hears them
talking behind his back, calling him "Rapist."

He moves his fingers in the lilting mechanical twitch
of ant antennae
to flutter the leaves of the carob tree outside the window.

He tells me he knows
I plan on setting fire to the apartment
when he is asleep.

* * * * *





Incarceration (The Last Belize Story) [Journal]

The waves lap lightly against the sailboat, its anchor light twinkling in the bay's ripples. The corpse hangs from the main mast. As the immigration officers clamber up the side of the 25-foot sailboat, the *New Hope*, the corpse swings as a pendulum to the gunwale, its feet nearly knocking them back into the water.

"Faackkman faakkman."

"Non con cut em dnnnn."

With much physics confusion, they manage to cut the American down.

"Ginny to da shore ana call de pourlice. Nocho?"

"Mie not gwan do what yuu job! Jesa cause yuu hefaha."

"Ginny ass do fuuukn shore!!!"

"Faaauuk Maahn. Faaauuk Maahn. Dis be chancing us."

An hour previous, the American had been on shore, detained in the back room of the port of entry, surrounded by excited immigration officers. This man was wanted in the US for a half a million in tax fraud. A thief to the US government with a warrant on his head. An escapee from justice. He was hoping to hide out in this distant tropical land of Belize, lounge comfortable with the money he didn't pay, drink colored alcohol with a tiny umbrella sticking out of it. But the computer alarms went off. His fate was sealed . . . incarceration in a crumbling concrete jail, coffee can for a toilet.

Now he contemplated months in the fetid hole, extradition to the US, further shame and indignities stretching to the horizon of time. He convinces the immigration officers to allow him to go back out to the sailboat to collect his papers and lock it up. Hurriedly he rows out to his last sanctuary, clambers up the mast, rigs the bow line to the mast top, then his neck, and leaps into space. The *New Hope* lists a few degrees. No hope. Justice has been served early.

We live in that town. We hear the story from every passerby that day, before it gets to the newspapers. We see the sailboat in the bay. We wonder who got the money. The police enjoy a sort of bureaucratic fad all of a sudden. They capture a vagrant sort of white guy, in his late 50s, who is just here to get warm and smoke dope. He is paraded around town handcuffed in the back of a puny pick up, but soon released as no crime can be determined. Apparently, to the municipal military, all older white men from the North are escaped criminals and are in this forgotten country to practice their criminal trade. Tomorrow I have to go to the capital of this country, to the central police station, to pick up a blaster's license. Oddly, I feel so innocent that I do not register the hornet's nest I may be walking into.

That night, I dream a dream of intense reality. A style of dream that predicts the future, as it is not just real, but deeply connected to my soul of existence. I sit at a table in

my neurological trance, all my loved ones about the wooden perimeter, scowling, passing a judgment of malevolence on me. There is nothing I can say to convince them of my innocence. I have done wrong in this dream world. There is no sympathy, no reprieve or kindness.

I awake, shaken, saddened, an uneasiness coursing through my guts. But no time for such foolishness. Time now to drive the 300 miles to the capital city of Belmopan. Here awaits my blaster's license. The first license issued in five years, as the paranoia in government departments increased with the wave of rising murders, Guatemalan terrorists, and internecine condemnations between corrupt departments. Ministries, they are called here. My license is the product of their corruption.

A maroon haze of dawn filters through the silhouettes of jungle leaves as I start my morning drive. The concrete ribbon disappears endlessly north into the lowland jungle. It is the only highway in Belize. This morning clear, a Friday, the road festooned with farmers heading to feral fields. Bicycles wobble uncertainly on the edge third, their cargo another person sitting on the handlebars or a few children clinging front and back on the peddler, like a life preserver of flesh, tiny entwined arms for straps. Older Mayan women waddle along in their bright dresses of pink and sea green, strangely bowlegged, rarely more than four feet tall. With them is a gaggle of middle-aged women herding a small fog of children. Some of these are in uniforms for a school, but most are remarkably small, partially dressed, and trotting wider circles around the sphere of matronly influence. This puts them in the center of the lane, directly in my bumper sights. I could squish a few dozen without affecting my trajectory. They are so numerous and unsafe out here, hop scotching the highway. A driver could lose perspective of these peoples, such a close resemblance to a spawn of frogs in the spring. All that's missing is the yellow warning sign announcing "slippery when mashed."

As I drive, I think of my boss, the major employer of Belize. He is the one who builds bridges, highways, and airstrips, is the economic engine of the country. The government received 80 million from the World Bank to connect the highway from central Belize to Guatemala. Guatemala still claims Belize as its own territory, stolen from them by the well-gunned British in the 1800s. In a handshake deal back in 1867, officials in funny hats agreed to the border line, conditional on a road being built along the ancestral Mayan trail of commerce. This stone-paved trail connected the coastal trade with the interior civilizations of Tikal, Copan, and other magnificent pyramid cities of the Petan. The temples and towers crumbled in the onslaught of time, and then were re-absorbed back into the jungle. The British never built the road.

In the new century, Guatemalans expanded into this deserted country, demanded more, and incited the Guatemalan government to saber rattles over its broken agreement. The machete masses salivate for additional lands, those comprising the stagnant country of Belize. The Mosquito Coast. The northern elite—seeing the opportunity to easily plunder oil and agricultural resources of the interior—direct the World Bank to make the 80 million "loan" for a road connection to the coast. Administering ministers in Belize mail out bid packages to places like the Philippines, Thailand, Bavaria, and Uganda. The only one in Belize with any equipment is Cisco Construction, my boss.

A successful bid from Cisco is accepted for 50 million to build the road. The other thirty is absorbed among the top Belizean players, the ministers, top commissioners, probably my boss. No foreign company can ship in all their equipment, employees, and infrastructure cheaper than the operators already here. Besides, the foreigners are not part of the financial

manipulation club that allows the graft required to line the pockets of those ever-important decision makers. We are all a team here, doing what is necessary for our country, which is really just a half a dozen top officials. My top official backslaps the Commissioner of Police, asking him to sign off on the blaster's license so that he can put me to work slinging explosives around a limestone quarry. It is for the benefit of the country. I am white, as white as a marshmallow floating in a sea of oil. I have no address, no Belizean social security card, no work permit, no local driver's license, no proper skin color. Nothing really that makes me Belizean. But a handshake among the top here . . . that writes its own laws.

As I muse and travel, I pick up one Mayan man, a worker in black rubber boots, delivering him a few villages up the road. My pickup truck is the other unofficial bus transportation here, although dis-charging the few quarters these people may have, still with an unofficial obligation to collect and distribute these moving minions. As I pass through one village, a gangster-looking youth emerges from a thatched hovel and gestures excitedly to me for a ride. He is 100 meters off the road, an odd sign, and I don't feel the necessity to stop and wait for this questionable thug. On I go, past his bewildered look, on up the sun-soaked, jungle-cloaked, people-choked highway.

And yet, I think, abstracted from my surroundings, there is a snag. Five years ago, the blasting business was regulated by the Defense Department but, with the administration change, the responsibility was transferred to the top police agent, the Commissioner of Police. Things had been going pretty well in that department—drugs were confiscated and distributed back to street gangs for conversion into capital to operate the police services. The gangs, more and more empowered, forget their place in society, and commence with free-for-all murder. First other gang members, then witnesses to the crime, then rival political opponents, and finally random citizens in corner groceries, bus stops, and side streets. Just for the practice apparently.

The United States (the ultimate originator of elite financial instruments), seeking to enhance its humanitarian image, consequently raises a fuss about the daily murder rate in Belize. How can we assist these barbarians, they ask, who give us nothing but a body count for the millions we pour in there? Shamed and humiliated, the ministers fire the Commissioner of Police for incompetence. Fire him before he can enact my blaster's license. A new corrupt commissioner will be sought. A private meeting of the candidates is assembled, whereupon a few hand grenades also attend, slipping from the hands of fleeing multi-colored Rasta thugs. The parts of those who survived are in no condition to assume power over the police department—the same who invited the pineapple people to the meeting. This new violation of civilization is too much for the northern elite—who command an edict to be delivered by the British that a new commissioner be sought from outside the country. A fresh face. An incorruptible.

But this takes time. Lots of time. Headhunter searches, applications, interviews, discussions, vetting. This could take years. The murder rate has doubled in the last month as competing gangs vie for political position in the power vacuum. There is only one thing to be done: reinstate the former commissioner. My boss has a congratulatory breakfast with the re-powered pig, complete with mango slices, lattes, and Cuban cigars.

The next day I got a phone call from a secondary chief of police in the bureaucratic center.

“Come get your blaster's license, all is approved. Bring your Belize Social security card with you.”

“But I don’t have a Belizean Social Security number.”

“You have an American Social Security number?”

“Yes, but Americans don’t have cards. We all memorize our number.”

“OK, OK. Just bring a number. No proof necessary.”

This guy really wants this hot potato off his desk. Obviously got some bad breath down from the top. “Issue this license—or die.” I find it very odd to be the focus of elite corruption. A scary line to walk.

A few hours on the road now, the sun in full blaze. Ahead an intersection. One way leading north, the other to the coastal town of Independence. Here is where slave ships wrecked a hundred years ago after slaughtering their captors, the captain and crew. There is a police checkpoint here. Nothing more than a knee-high battered sign off the side of the road. No one is apparently around, not an uncommon thing. The maniac that passed me going 80 MPH a mile back barely slows as he glides through. I slow to walking speed. In the brush a hundred feet off the road I see some torpid officers, indifferent in the shade. I look at them to see if there is business to be done. No eye contact, no indication that they give a rat’s ass who’s going by. Slowly I creep past, take a left and resume my journey north. A node to the North.

There are nexus points of each day that can influence your life. The fellow who chose to argue with his wife that morning, causing him to miss the bus, be late to work at the Twin Towers on 9/11. The secretary who worked on the 50th floor, took a short cut through the park to grab a cab, but stepped in dog crap and went back home to change shoes. Mr. Smith who chose not to get on the plane in Boston when he saw that seven other Mr. Smiths had canceled. Some sort of omen . . . but of what?

I have ignored such omens. The missed call from the local police inquiring about the blaster’s license (put his number absently in my pocket and will call him later). The lost truck keys, eventually found. Pants without a button. A blind grab of the passport in the dark. Friday the 12th. The dream. *The dream*. The nexus nodes swirl about me in an unnoticed fog.

Continuing on past the checkpoint in a haze of ruminating thought, I travel about a mile, slowly accelerating. Suddenly, I see a ratty red pickup speeding up behind me. It zooms up and parallels my truck. Here are three bug-eyed police thugs waving nickel-plated .45 pistols at me, itching to empty their clips. This is ugly. I pull off the side of the road and stop. The ugliest and biggest of them comes swaggering over to me, .45 still in his hand.

“Why you no stop?”

“I’m stopped.”

“You not stop at the Pouaahleec check point? Why you run?”

“I’m not running. I slowed and tried to get your attention but you didn’t seem to care. So I continued.”

“You run. Hiding something. *Gee lischence!*” I hand over my driver’s license, praying to all that is holy that they will accept my apology and I can continue. The gun thing is a bad omen though.

“You have come back to check point. Now. No continue.” Yeah . . . I can figure that shit out. Maybe they will just do a little more posturing there and I can get going. I U-turn the truck in the road while they cover me with the pistols, sitting in their crappy red Chevy Luv, bumper dangling, no lights or markings of any kind. It as though they just borrowed it from their derelict brother-in-law because theirs is in the shop, but I know that’s wrong. This is an official police car.



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

The side of the road is stark at the intersection checkpoint. The pavement wisps away into scrub grasses. An amorphous edge. There is some shrubbery fifty feet away, prickly palms, a tangle of dwarf trees with a thyroid problem. This is also a “bus stop,” which is a few boards jutting from the ground at acute angles, dried palm leaves draped and stacked on the confusion. The ground is heavily fertilized with garbage. Styrofoam boxes and pop bottles litter the area, thousands of plastic bags tie it all together. It’s as if every passer-by chose this spot to fling their crap out the window.

A few more desperado police agents emerge from the hovel, looking hot, idly kicking their way through the garbage. Now everybody is up on the side of the road with me and the frozen truck. The tropical sun is reaching its zenith. There is not a breath of wind.

Four of these evil assholes are all over me now. I am spread eagle against the truck, one bastard patting me down, fishing everything out of my pockets, another still covering me with a 9mm in an aim-and-shoot posture. As if I was the target dummy at the balls-for-brains annual pistol contest. This makes me a little nervous being in the sights of this squinty-eyed prick. He is a little man, which makes him more dangerous, shifting his tiny weight from foot to foot, wiggling inside his clothes like a two-year-old in his mother’s grip. He is attired as the others are in the usual Central American police ensemble: military jack boots sufficient to kick through a block wall; khaki cargo pants with belts and attachments of everything lethal they can dangle without pulling the pants straight off; a tee shirt of some obscure American icon, like Ohio State, or Disney Orlando. Dark palettes of sweat around their arm pits. A surplus Desert Storm camo cap perched like a cooking pot on their black greasy hair.

They have the fat stupid one frisk me while the nerve job covers me. Do they think I’m going to do some kind of Chuck Norris action, suddenly leaping into the air and kicking the shit out of everybody? I wish I could. The sun has heated the truck box so hot it is burning my hands to hold on to it.

The puny one swaggers over, holding the gun at his eye level, pointed up into my face. I could blow snot into the barrel with a good sneeze—its steel orifice looming point blank.

“Where is the shipment of drugs?”

“I have no drugs.”

“Where is the cocaine?”

“I have no cocaine.”

“You have in the truck?”

“There is nothing in the truck.” I avoid looking directly into the 9mm barrel and the fanatic gripping it. He is glaucomic with his intensity, the sweating eyes starting from his head like golf balls on a brown dinner plate.

“You not look at me. You lie. Where drugs?” I turn slightly to face his frenzied golf ball eyes. “Hands stay on truck!” he shouts, stepping back a pace and riveting down the pistol sights.

“OK. OK.” Hands back on the searing truck metal. “There are no drugs.”

The fat one proudly displays the Leatherman he has unclipped from my belt.

“It’s a pocket knife. Not big.” Now I’m using broken English, as if it will change any understanding here.

“What kind of guns you have?”

“I have no guns.”

“Where you keep de rifles?”

“There are no rifles.”

“You lie. You have drugs and guns. I find now. Quick thing.” Well it’s nice to know it won’t be a slow thing, I still have illusions of wrapping up this interview and getting on to my business. The ADHD dwarf makes a big show of handing the pistol over to a gigantic black man, an imposing tower of darkness. The dwarf’s little arms are outstretched, each movement precise, facing me and handing the gun sideways in case he needs to empty the clip in my direction. The runt is two heads shorter than the dark quiet officer. Dressed in black and dark gray camo, the officer’s skin is the shade of asphalt at night, a fearful scowl on his ugly face. This one is scarier than all the rest. He signals me with the pistol to stand a bit back from the truck door, pointing to the spot I should stand with the barrel. Will he open fire on my toes? Make me dance for them?

“Watch him closely.” Is all he says.

Puny rummages under the seat, pulling out used auto parts, binoculars, trash, a can of Mexican coins. Each knotted plastic bag is untied in his hope to discover contraband. Then behind the seat. He pulls out a solar panel.

“What this? You use this to signal drug plane. This and bi-nock-ulars?” Struggling with the big English word.

“It’s a solar panel.” I say. *You fucking idiot*, I think.

“I find guns. Quick thing.” His excavation continues. This is where the Americans would plant the “evidence.” Condemn you just for the fun of it. But it seems not the case here. The runt seems to be truly searching the truck. Then again, I think, for them to plant something in the truck would take it out of circulation. It would have to be locked up with a label, no longer available to threaten the public. Such resources cannot be expended lightly as they are in the north where these things are plentiful.

The giant black officer is called Sergeant Hyde. This is appropriate I consider. No amount of chemicals could ever change him back into kind Dr. Jekyll. He has holstered the gun now and is scrutinizing my driver’s license and passport while the fat one fiddles with my pocket knife.

“Why do you have a passport?” he asks with a sinister scowl.

“Whaa? What are you talking about?”

“This not you. Why you steal it?” Glancing at what he’s holding I see that it is Kim’s passport that I grabbed this morning, not my own. Holy shit!

“It’s a mistake! I grabbed the wrong passport this morning. This is my wife’s. It’s hers. A simple error.” I plead.

“You lie. Why you lie?”

“No, no. Really. Just a simple mistake.” This is bureaucratic suicide. I know this. I am sinking into fear.

“This international crime. You in big trouble for stealing this.” Yeah, wouldn’t want to be doing any piddly local crime. Now that I’m obviously a Colombian drug lord, Hyde signals us all to get off the road over into the brush next to the half fallen down cabana. Here the barrage continues from the shrimp.

“How often you arrest for drugs?” Shit. I never arrest anybody for drugs.

“Never.”

“I know you lie. You tell now, cause we gonna find out. You not hide anything.” I’m wondering what the depth of their computer search will go. They did find out about the

Canadian thing in Oregon. It was a puny weed thing, but added to my crimes. “You tell now. We search Interpol, world, everything.” I’m holding my tongue. “You not tell, then we find out, you in many more trouble.” The shrimp is leaning into me, giddy to be intimidating me. I crack.

“I was busted for pot in Canada when I was a kid. That was forty years ago.”

“Ha. Ah ha! See we know. We know you guilty. We gonna find drugs and lock you up.” The punk swaggers over to Hyde and conveys this news, leaning into the black tower and whispering conspiratorially. They continuously fix their eyes on me in jerking glances while the Spanish shrimp waves his arms. It is the execution look. I can feel it. Eventually the runt swaggers back over to me. Hyde drives away in the rattling Chevy Luv pickup with the bumper dragging and the taillights smashed out.

“So now we know you bring drugs into Belize. Where you bring drugs from?”

“I brought no damn drugs.” I’m annoyed with the stupid repetition. The pig shifts the questions to another tack.

“What you do in Belize?”

“Building a house. We bought property here.”

“We? Who we? You and drug gang?”

“My wife. Me and my wife.” *And my dog, I think, who would rip your peanut balls off.*

“Why you not talk about wife? You make up this wife thing. You really got no wife!”

“Yes, goddamn it. I have a wife waiting for me at home. You never asked me anything about my wife.”

“Now I want to know. She Belize wife? You marry in Belize? Maybe you like black lady?”

“No. No. We came from the States. She’s white. We drove down through Mexico.”

“Hooo. Bring guns from Mexico? That a tough drive for white guy.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I ask questions here. Who else you fuck in Belize? You like little boys, No?”

“Hell no. Hardly screw the wife.”

“So you horny, eh. Like go for little schoolgirl. I see you white Noart Americanos. All want little Belize children for sex pleasure.”

“No, goddamnit! I don’t want any children. Don’t want any of it. I don’t even like sex.” That’s a stone lie. About the sex, not about the children.

“You wanted in Amerikia for sex crime like that preacher we just catch. Fuck all little boy. Amerikia FBI want you for sex crime you run from.”

“No. No. Damn it. Not wanted.”

“We find out. You know. We find you guilty.”

He sees he’s not getting anywhere.

“Just drugs you do, huh? You take drugs then you dick don’t work. Nocho?” He giggles coquettishly. By now the questions are getting so pedantic I just roll my eyes and don’t even answer the runt. He is constantly fiddling with my pocketknife, opening all the blades and snapping them back. He makes a big show of giving himself a manicure, digging the filth out from under his fingernails.

“I not believe you. You a pervert drug addict. I know you lie.” I know something too. This prick could be ground into the pavement by a big truck and the buzzards wouldn’t eat him. I’d sure like to test that theory. The runt signals over the huge slow stupid one. He’s been

pissing in the bushes twenty feet away in an obvious manner. “Choc. We go through wallet again. He got have drug connection in there.” The big dummy holds the wallet as the shrimp picks each piece of paper out like an infectious wound dressing. “What this say? Who number this?”

“That’s the number of the police chief in Punta Gorda—where I live?”

“Why you have this number?”

“Because he called to talk about my blaster’s license.”

“Blaster’s license? Why you have that?”

“I’m on my way to your capital to pick it up now. From the police station?”

“Yeah sure. What you do with blaster’s license? There’s no license.”

“See that paper there. That’s who I’m supposed to meet. The Captain of the central police station.”

“This all lie. Who you pay to get license?”

“I didn’t pay anybody. The police asked me to come so they could give it to me.”

“This lie. You pay somebody. Who ask you? What name?”

“Crispen Jeffers.”

“You mean the Commissioner of Police for all of Belize?”

“Yes. That’s who. He’s issued a license to me personally.”

“Hoooo. This funny. Hooooo.” He’s not sure what to do now. The King Police Boss has authorized me. Something is stinking of corruption, but he knows he’s less than a fly who will be swatted out of the way, maybe squashed if he interferes. He smells crime, but corrupt crime. Crime beyond his range. The power struggle between this tiny mind and mine has shifted.

“Why he give you license?”

“To help build the road to Guatemala.”

“Then you work in Belize? You not have work permit. This illegal. You know you commit a crime.” I can see where this is going. I can outmaneuver this one.

“I’m volunteering. Just helping out.”

“You steal job from Belize people. You pay police for license and take job that illegal.”

“No.” I explain as if to a child. “The Police Commissioner gave me a license to assist and train others. I am doing your country a service with my expertise.”

“You make bombs?” He’s grasping now. I do actually, but would never tell this asshole that—until he was looking at the last second on the timer.

“No. I blow bombs up. Safely.” His eyes are wide, but the shrimp can see no further angle to harass me. I’m beyond his pistolero league. He shuffles over to the brush to piss. Leisurely he swipes at the foliage with the pocketknife. I sit on the ground. Ignoring them who are babbling in disbelief about Crispen Jeffers.

The ratty pickup truck eventually comes racing back and stops just off the road in a cloud of dust. The big Hyde climbs out authoritatively. The stupid one and the shrimp snap to attention, quickening up to him for instructions. A lot of hand waving and pointing in my direction. I can’t make out what they’re saying, apparently they can’t either, requiring half the conversation to be in frantic sign language. I’m waved over and loaded back into my truck, after the fat stupid one clambers in first. Now the plan is to take me into the police station in the nearby ratty town of Independence. A town of beggars and welfare cases. Dependence is more like it.

On the road, the fat one is apologetic. He explains crudely what is going on.

“Everything be OK now. This just one last formality. You pass the criminal check so everything all right.”

“So why can’t I just be on my way?”

“Just one liddle more check, then go free. You pass check so all OK.”

What a bunch of crap I smell. These fuckers have some new disaster in store for me. I can feel it. I’m in their power and they love it. Yeah, I passed the Belize criminal check because I haven’t done anything devious here, although I consider some act of justified terrorism more and more by the moment. What database are these cyber cripples going to try and connect with now?

To be concluded in Cenacle | 87 | December 2013



Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor



On the Suicide of a Good Friend

Life as we know it
 Has met us and gone by.
 The jagged knife, violence,
 Has entered our crisp corners,
 Weeping, rage-filled,
 Mad-Hatterish.

Your broken face greets us,
 distorted under water,
 A portrait in porcelain.
 A grimace flashes
 To immobility—
 Body a sponge.
 Water a grave.
 No life.
 No life raft.

Hovering, your spirit—
 Finding it necessary
 To reflect
 On its own
 Handiwork.

Was it
 A necessary end?
 A story
 Waiting to be told?
 Self as
 Selfless? Fleshless?

Selfish
You wonder
What meaning
We will make of it.

Yet you may linger
In the sardonic,
In irony
No longer.
We who gaze on
Cannot refute you.
We see you
As you finger
Deliberate keys
On a broken piano
In a salute
Of absolute intent.

Our faces fade, featureless
as yours.
No trade of
Jokes, insults,
Tears, or upbraid—
We are afraid
It could happen to us
And we check our pockets twice—
Something forgotten?
Gone. No advice.
Words unspoken.
Cheap at any price.

* * *

In Your Book of Poems

Each poem a coin—fitting into a geometric slot
 That opens, like a parasol, a scene, a world, a roiling.
 A velvet-fringed voice
 Drapes across hardship or pleasure,
 Reads—
 Your shoulders—one rides up—
 Face bending over book as
 One arm clutches
 the brace of podium.
 And if you were ever young,
 It's hard to picture; and if you will ever
 Be old, it's hard to say.

A slow exhale.
 Each word grafts to the next, argues
 With its successor, then, attaching,
 accepts its place, resigned
 To be one rosary in a necklace of amber,
 Each bead precisely holding its prey,
 Its capture; each thought a small voice,
 a seed, concise enough to move through
 a keyhole—through which the poem
 Empties out in small organic bursts,
 Hits the air like smoke signals, resolves into
 Smoky orange resin. Certain words are yours.
 Like: “spare,” and “grace.” “Lumen, numinous.”
 “Crackles” and “spuds.”

Furnaces burn with power
In the basement of an empty building
Where you once spent an hour looking
In a window, wishing you could write there.
Every empty space you find, you claim it,
Hold it, make it new, release it,
transfigured.

You will give the amber a rough polish,
But enough to show the world within.
You will pull the string taut,
Each bead firm. You will catalog
Something, preserve something, make
Something not your own, but ready
For ownership by all and anyone.
You will lead, like the pied piper,
All and anyone on this inward winding
Peppered path.

* * *

New-Winged Sparrows

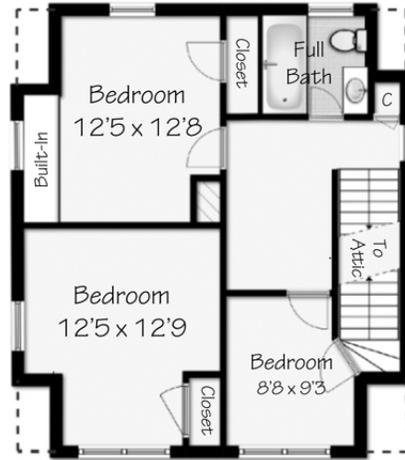
The new-winged sparrows' first day of flight
Finds them flickering along the road,
Joyful, startled but unafraid in the eye
Of an oncoming car. They spin and jump
Like small brown leaves, barely visible
To the driver. The horn jolts them;
A moment of looking, and then, reminding
Themselves, they fly. Some instinct
That was lazy in them kicks in—the need
To fly away—even when they only want
To play in the street, as children do.

* * * * *

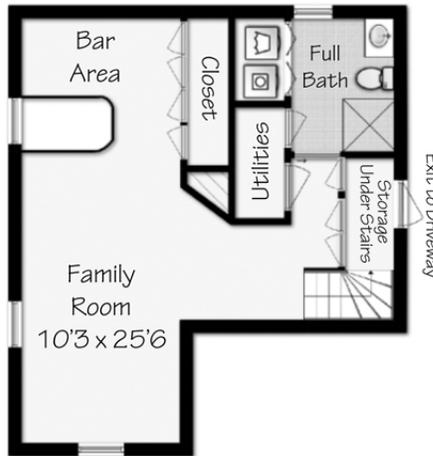




FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



LOWER LEVEL

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.

36 Observations from a New Householder

*Are you enjoying your house, your being a householder
and the physical fact of having a house of your own to come home to?
How does that feel?*

—Ralph Emerson, letter, September 10, 2013

1. **Mowing Lawn:** What kind of lawnmower to get? Ended up with eco-friendlier electric lawnmower & electric trimmer. High summer mow/trim every Sunday; later summer bi-weekly & then tri-weekly. The green gets cut/trimmed—the green drinks rain & sun & returns.
2. **Rec Room:** Lowest of four floors, rec room is for later Saturday night spooky shows (*American Horror Story*, *Warehouse 13*, *Falling Skies*, *Touch*, & the like) & quarterly Jellicle Literary Guild meetings. First weekend arrived, the strangeness of this building to us. Built in 1940, we now have lived in it hours. Familiar events in unfamiliar room.
3. **Driftwood Table:** Main floor has a kitchen, a living room, a dining room with glass door to deck & backyard. Dining room table built from Maine driftwood. Rough, aged, scarred with ocean travel. Yet stands stolid to its new task & place in things.
4. **Car Garage:** Sydnee, our lovely crimson 2000 Pontiac Grand Prix, who has traveled from Colorado to the Pacific Northwest, many times to Burning Man desert fest, & across the country to Boston, been parked in many places (massive & smaller parking garages, parking lot), in many weathers (snow, sun, rain, desert white-outs), now rests, bemused, dry in a safe hut (sprayed once a year for carpenter ants). Mower & trimmer are hut-mates.



5. **Neighbors:** A letter from previous householders listed many neighbors & descriptions. “Mayor Billy” lives next door. Rough-voiced but seeming kind, been in his place 40 or 400 years. We greet them all when outside or walking to work. They smile in return, a novel thing for long-lived city apartment dwellers such as us.
6. **Realtor:** Her name was Susan & she could take the stage with her wisecracks of loony buyers & strange dwellings. Called us polite & pleasant. Quite earned her commission.
7. **Inspector:** His name was Glenn & he gave the place the once-over double-thrice, a 73-year-old body to his peering, probing eyes, touch, sniff, hark. Several hours later he nods a gruff thumbs up & we’re no longer romancing pretty pictures online; we’re purchasing a mortal structure we’d better learn ourselves to tend.
8. **House Alarm:** Warns with a British accent about doors & windows open; we name her Victoria, naturally. Don’t cross her—her shriek of dismay cries local Apocalypse &, less terrifyingly, she dials the cops.
9. **Bookcases / Office:** I’ve not had bookcases in a decade & never well-crafted by someone with care & skill. Our shared books fill two of these cases; the remaining one is full of my notebooks. What books I have now are dear, survivors of floods, moves, & long-term storage.
10. **Sellers:** They were Erin & Mike, with baby & dog. Lived here a decade, obsessed money & time into every detail of the place. Drawers close themselves. A garden awaits KD’s new touch. This place passed on with their loving care for guidance. A connection between us endures, a gratefulness to them & well wishes.
11. **Letter I Wrote:** Deep in the buying process, money people doubted us. Me & my herky-jerky financial history. So unprompted I wrote a letter & shaped my path from long ago through schools, jobs, states, & decades to here, this wish for this house. A path seen best looking back, squinting quite close at a few points. I was nearly homeless a decade ago. It’s both a path, & a victory by the help of many.
12. **Jellicle Literary Guild:** Back when, ’88-’01, it was held 8x/year down in Connecticut at Roma Restaurant’s brown-paneled back room. ’08-’13 in apartments (Portland, Oregon & then another Boston suburb). Now the rec room, open all night. More space for the traveler & the weary. Meetings still ring with Art & laughter.
13. **Railroad Tracks:** The commuter train traveling north from Boston to Haverhill runs by just beyond our back fence. A powerful *whoosh!* every so often. Infrequent, & unintruding enough, to be novel to visitors, endearing to us.
14. **Co-Workers:** Desk near to mine sits an older man named Joe, always a friendly good morning between us but now me a householder & our talks lengthened into details of repair & upkeep, tools, materials, contractors, lawns.

- 15. Nobody Above or Below:** Apartment dwellers learn, as Paul Simon sang: “One man’s ceiling is another man’s floor.” Part of what the householder gains, for all the money borrowed & documents signed, is the privilege & pleasure of calling his ceiling, his floors, his walls, his door, all his own.
- 16. Leaving Apartments:** No matter where one lives—the most crowded & filthy, the most spacious & glinting—the dwelling becomes home. One eats there, sleeps there, hopes & despairs there, alone, among others. One’s psyche extends to beyond one’s body to the room or rooms, steps, sink, toilet, possessions—& over years, since most of us move, this exteriorized part of the psyche shifts & shifts as much as one’s body ages & one’s mind develops.
- 17. Room for Possessions:** For many years much of what I owned—what hadn’t been discarded or lost—was far from me, stored away for protection. Now all I own in one place, much of it—books, notebooks, LP records—safely on display. Tis lucky, tis strange still.
- 18. Costco:** Our house has room to store canned goods & frozen food. We have a freezer just for the latter, a large closet for the former. Drive to a bulk-only grocery store called Costco, monthly, to replenish. Food for the future or, I suppose, Apocalypse or natural disasters. Zombies too.
- 19. Commute to Work:** 20 minute walk to the subway station. 10 minute ride on the train. Arriving at my destination I sit at a bench for a few minutes, writing, like hordes of years ago, working in downtown Hartford.
- 20. Biking:** No longer near a rail-trail, my biking route is on streets, among cars & pedestrians & random elements. Still, one of my favorite rides is to the Eastern Donutshop in ZombieTown, Mass. My old haunt from the ’90s, there till dawn, many times, when I was jobless & usually broke.
- 21. Overnight Guests:** Their stay recent years was on the comfy green couch. Years before that, a piece of hardwood floor. Now a couple of choices, & the quiet of some private space. Even one’s own bathroom.
- 22. Mortgage Broker:** Linda, a nice middle-aged lady, she was the gate-keeper to mortgage & the one for whom I wrote the “my path here” letter mentioned earlier. Among a ton of documents we signed for her one afternoon was one attesting not to be terrorists. *Wow.*
- 23. Open House:** It was a Saturday morning when we saw the Bungalow Cee for the first time, at an “open house.” Like a massive store sale, crowds & crowds, all silent, predatory. KD’d seen BC online the night before & her wish for it became a hunger as we walked through it that first time. We’d made our offer within 48 hours.

- 24. Attic:** I've always liked attics, had one as a teenager for my stash of porn & other detritus. That first weekend, wanting to bond with this new place, I led KD in the dark from the rec room to the first floor to the second floor & up to the attic. A way to offer, & gain, trust. Come vulnerable, & begin to bond.
- 25. Me & Green Couch Friday Mornings:** Our green couch has traveled with us from 2004 to now, Seattle to Portland to Boston, & is about as restful & fine as a couch can be. Now down in the rec room, so not often as used, for longevity, receives my weekly visit Friday mornings where our old friendship is renewed for reading, writing, typing. Rec room is so quiet. I arm Victoria, KD's to work, I'm working at home, *abhh*. A casual visit become a loved habit, soft silence, safe, escape, fine, fine.
- 26. Elliptical Machine:** Had access to one in our Portland apartment building's gym, now room enough to host one. 4-5 days a week, 30 min each day. Sweat, sweat. Delivered by two guys who said it was broken & left. A week later, two others guys set it up fine. Said the first two were running a scam. It works fine though clicks when in use. I rain sweat down on its matt every time.
- 27. Fireplace:** In the living room, not yet used. Requires a chimney sweep. Tis now autumn so will phone one soon. Bungalow Cee is a complex set of systems & structures, speaks in many tongues, by machine, by draft. Soon the crackling language of fire.
- 28. LoveSacs:** One company's name for its beanbag products. We got one shaped like a love seat, another more like the traditional blobby beanbag. Third a footstool called a Squatoman. Visitors enjoy them. They are creaturely furnitures that cause smiles.
- 29. Saturdays:** Long ago, my Saturdays at the movies were relief from the burdens of home & school. Through college, jobs, poverty, recovery, move & again & again—Saturdays with movies & notebooks. And now many years with KD & includes parks too in decent weather. A long trip into the day concludes with my radio show at 11 pm & late night spooky shows in the rec room, on the LoveSac. Still relief & freedom from the workweek stresses. Full of Art, secrets, sugar, delights.
- 30. Weekend Away:** Early September took a weekend car (Sydnee) trip to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Twas strange to be far from home, first time since moved here five months previous. Tis said what we own, owns us. I think there's more to it than that. Our possessions are material, but psychical too. Mind determines what we seek to own: what kind, why, how important each possession is. In your pockets & rooms you'll find much of who you are.
- 31. Garden:** The previous householders had an elaborate garden on the perimeters of the back yard, & in the front yard & side in the form of flowers & flowering bushes. Vegetables too, likely. Took hours to weed it all this summer. KD wants to fill these places with wild flowers in the spring. Wonderful anticipation.



- 32. Snow:** By when we moved here in early April, the winter's snows were gone. When they come again, our backyard will fill & we will make snowmen & snow angels. And shovel Sydnee's driveway, her most often safe in her hut. And the walkway & sidewalk & back deck. Maybe a snow fort too!
- 33. This Town:** a suburb of Boston, middle class, mostly Caucasian. Its town center full of little shops & restaurants. Nice library, nice bakery. Many parks. A pond. Town closes up pretty much by 9 or 10. No bookstore. No rail-trail. Fairly safe. I first knew it years ago visiting Hartlee, turning on all crazy wonderful nights long.
- 34. Near ZombieTown, Mass.:** But it is near ZombieTown. Its name? I think I'll call it Milkrose. Could not be two more different places yet I've lived the both. ZombieTown is rough-cut, poorer, darker, stranger, & I find it far more interesting & I would not want to live there again. Just bike there & walk there & write. Glad it's near.
- 35. Not the Previous Place:** We lived in another Boston suburb, its main street a great, wide, noisy avenue. A rail-trail. A bookstore. Closer to Harvard Square. More expensive to live & essentially no more interesting. I've now lived in five towns in metro-Boston & what I liked & like about all of them is that *they are in metro-Boston*.
- 36. Creatures Inside & Out:** There was a loud woodpecker when we first moved in. Many squirrels this summer. Crickets & their all night songs. A couple of neighborhood cats, an old knotty grey one we dubbed Cap'n Dreads. A dog or two around. We bump into spiders inside, occasionally a crawly thing. Our favorite Creatures keep us good company, while others pay the Bungalow Cee a visit & bring their good cheer.



* * * * *





Martina Newberry**Strolling/Flying**

The atmosphere crackles:
a high-school chemistry experiment—
safe/scary,
aluminum is the way this day
begins to end.

She walks home,
wind blowing,
wind chimes inside her head.
A mortgaged visionary—
dear woman, faithful woman—

and the shadows
of age,
of years,
show themselves
in the crotch of tree branches.

She wets her lips,
blinks.
His face,
a moon in one of those
pathetic love-lost visions,

rises, races to a shadowy sky.
“Tell me,” she says to that face,
“that I’ve remained as alive
to you as you have to me.”
She strolls, flies—

a despairing angel—
clinging to the miles of memories
and mishaps.
She strolls, strides,
settles into the early dark.

(How his dark hair swaddled her throat and shoulder . . . !)
(How the dark came into the room, curdled, catastrophic . . . !)

One worried breath, then another

(all visions are two-fold at the very least).

The stairs, the door, the key, and dinner
in a wedding-white
foam package.
She'll eat it as is. Later—in bed—
dreams like little cubs manifest.

“Please remember,” she says, laying the words
down next to her
(they'll share the pillow),
“that I love you, that my life was a shower
of pin points when I loved you.

“I have no regrets,” she tells the pillow,
“except you never said
you loved me
though I waited. I am still waiting.”
Then she sleeps. One hand over her mouth.

* * *

Making the Recording

The Children of Paradise sit very still
in the audience watching the line
of graduates stomp up to the front where
the degrees are given. The past sits on
their laps, melts in the heat, plasters their skirts
and trousers and stockings to their bodies.

The graduates drink their pride from small flasks
hidden in the pockets of their robes.
The atmosphere is grainy; splinters of
sunlight grace the tops of the heads of the
Children of Paradise. It is their duty
to watch and applaud appropriately

and so they do. Their voices, discreet,
rise and fall appropriately
with the breeze. The message goes out,
robes removed, hats flung high.
The ceremony is over, the graduates exit
through the rear doors of the auditorium

to go look for somewhere to live.
Each moment has been recorded.
(It will be possible to buy a DVD
of the occasion in 30 days.) Until then,
the Children of Paradise will stay seated where
they are: motionless, listening, protecting the ruins.

* * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz



The Wildest Ones

[Travel Journal]

*Dedicated to the memory of Randy Smith (1957-2013),
jungle guide and passionate defender of wilderness.*

The Ecuadorian rainforest, early 1993.

I made my way to the jungle town of Coca, where Bishop Labaka had lived and from where he'd gone out to die. Coca's an oil town, muddy and messy. I got in after dark, checked into a hotel, dined on greasy chicken and rice in a nearby restaurant. The only other guests were a Texan in his 70s, sloppy drunk; a pretty hooker in her late teens, around whose neck the old man hung; and a pimp or guardian, about 20. The girl and boy flashed me embarrassed smiles, while the Texan wasn't even aware I was there. The young Ecuadorians tended their cash cow gently.

Up early the next morning I saw two indigenous guys conversing on the street. They had bad teeth, so I thought they might be Waoranis, because Waoranis wouldn't have dental care. I said, "Excuse me, are you guys Waoranis?"

The older, shorter one responded, "Yes."

"I'm interested in going into your villages to do some tourism. Could you take me?"

They conferred in a language that sounded like thick rubber bands being strummed, and the same man responded, "Yes."

"I'd like to visit a shaman. Would that be possible?"

More discussion, then, "Yes."

"I'd like to go for three weeks. I could offer you 500,000 sucres in cash up front for everything: food, transportation, lodging. Is that OK?" At 2000 sucres to a dollar, the offer came to \$250.

More discussion. "It's OK."

I asked their names. The older, shorter one was named Obe; his taller, younger companion, Camilo. They didn't seem interested in what my name was.

We met at the market the following morning and used part of the money to buy three weeks' worth of provisions for three men: fresh fruit, rolls, instant milk, instant coffee, rice, spaghetti noodles, onions, carrots, potatoes, sugar, animal crackers, garlic, ketchup, cans of tuna, bottles of vegetable oil, soap for dishes, and soap for clothes. Separately, I bought a pair of rubber boots. The market stalls only sold them up to size 43, and my feet were a few sizes bigger. But we wouldn't be hiking much, just riding in a canoe.

The Waoranis' territory was in a national park, or vice-versa, I wasn't sure. Before entering, Obe and Camilo registered my visit with the police, but not with the national park authorities, because my guides had no guiding papers and on that level it was forbidden for

them to bring me in. We rode an open-sided bus called a *ranchera* to the end of a road called the Via Auca that led to an abandoned oil drilling camp. A Waorani village now occupied the site. As we arrived, a group of men and women were working with shovels and machetes, digging up old plastic tarps out of the ground to cut up and make into hammocks. Some women in the shadow of a wooden hut were searching each other's heads for lice and eating them. Obe and Camilo gave away some of the food to relatives of theirs. Remembering my peyote vibe, I didn't say anything—sure they wouldn't let me go hungry. Then Obe told me he urgently needed another 20,000 sucres to buy fishhooks. I angrily refused, telling him to take it out of the money I'd paid him in Coca. Expressionless, he nodded and padded away.

A guy named Miguel who owned an aluminum motorboat was enlisted to pick me up downriver. I stipulated, "In three weeks."

Miguel said, "Huh?"

"*Three weeks.*"

He looked at me blankly.

A calendar had been nailed up on the wall of a hut. It displayed the correct month, March 1993. I said, "This is today. This is tomorrow. This is the day after. Down here . . ." (I flipped to April) "is three weeks from now. Please pick me up then."

Without conviction, he nodded.

My guides and I slept on a sleeping platform made of boards in the home of some relatives.

The next morning, we headed downriver in a canoe, Obe in front, I in the middle, Camilo in back. The canoe had a motor, but they didn't use it, just guided the craft with paddles. When we rounded a bend in the river and saw turtles sunning themselves on a log, Obe and Camilo would slap their paddles on the water to scare the reptiles into diving into the river, then laugh uproariously. I found this idiotic. When the canoe traveled close to a riverbank where trees reached out over the water, Obe held branches out of his way and released them to snap them back in my face, then laughed. Obe seemed to despise me. Camilo, though, was easygoing and friendly. I felt I could trust him a hundred percent.

It was sunny, so I slathered on sunblock. That attracted mosquitoes, so I added insect repellent. Sweat ran down my greasy skin. The Amazonian mosquitoes dive bombed me, more drawn to my blood than repelled by N,N-Diethyl-meta-toluamide. In addition to their cavalier attitude toward the chemical, they proved far faster and more agile than their northern cousins. I was unable to kill more than one or two while they scored multiple hits on my back and legs. In the mid-afternoon, rain went slamming down for two hours, washing off most of the slimy cocktail on my skin. I covered my backpack with plastic bags and used a cut-down Fanta bottle to bail. After the rain ended we had more hours of sun, sunblock, mosquito repellent, and mosquitoes. I used this time to read from James Joyce's jungly novel *Finnegans Wake*, muttering it aloud to help me focus. Although it made little sense to me, the practice of reading anything at all put me inside a psychological force field. And its weird neologisms reconnected me to the night of yagé.

Just before dusk, we reached another village. As its inhabitants came toward us calling greetings, Obe hauled the prow of the canoe out of the water, tied it up, blew his nose between his hands, and wiped the snot on the trunk of a tree. In the village, the two Waoranis gave more food away, then made dinner for themselves and me. They set up a tent for us all to sleep in and tied it with its nylon strings to nearby trees using single-loop, easily-untieable knots like

half of a shoelace knot.

The next morning was foggy. The village kids were fascinated by the pale, hairy giant. Laughing, they grabbed my fingers and pulled me around, showing me the pet parrots, the scrawny dogs, the baby monkey, the pineapple plants on which fruits were beginning to develop. I envied them a bit and was glad to share their delight. They had the important things: people and nature. No cars, no pollution, no stress. I remembered an argument of some of the ecologists I had read, that progress hasn't improved human life but simply altered it, maybe even for the worse. *What have we gained?* I mused as I strode across the damp grass on bare feet behind the laughing kids. *The ability to create ever-larger structures: architecture, machines, roadways, science. Maybe one individual is not capable of knowing more than another individual, but one society can possess more total knowledge, distributed among its members.*

When I packed my belongings, my bar of bath soap and my King Crimson cassette tape were missing.

We set out on the river again, rode for hours, got bitten by mosquitoes, got rained on. Then a blazing sun emerged. I recalled Nezahualcoyotl's vision of the sun turning blue and exploding, and my own vision that it was composed of ecstatic people working together to generate heat and light. Now it was more a policeman clubbing me on the head. I lay back and put *Finnegans Wake* over my face. Minutes later I felt something on the back of my hand. Two butterflies, black, orange and clear, were sipping my sweat with their curly tongues.

In the evening we stopped in another village. Obe and Camilo doled out nearly all their remaining supplies. I got out my beard trimmer and trimmed my beard. Obe and a couple of the local men came over to watch. When I was finished, Obe took it from me. I showed him how it worked. He halted a boy who was walking by, and, grinning, shaved a broad line up the back of his head. All the Waorani men laughed. The boy was surprised but unfazed.

The next morning I saw that we had no provisions for the next two and a half weeks but a mostly-full jar of instant coffee, one and a half kilos of spaghetti noodles, a mostly-full bottle of ketchup, and a few onions whose outer layers were beginning to rot. I wasn't entirely surprised. I'd read that the Waorani share their food and their few possessions communally. I resolved to keep a closer eye on my gear, but I wasn't terribly worried. The thing I was most possessive of was what I figured they would care least about: my pump-action water purifier. Since Cuyabeno, when I was in the jungle I'd pumped all my drinking water through it. *I definitely don't want to get parasites*, I mullied. *If I have to share my food, I want to share it with folks outside me, not inside.* I was interrupted in this train of thought by Obe asking, expressionless, "What do you want to have for breakfast?"

What a stupid question, I thought, and snapped, "Coffee, spaghetti, ketchup, and onions." The Waorani nodded and prepared it. He, Camilo, and I ate, then headed out on the river again.

That third day, just after the rain had stopped, Camilo spoke excitedly to Obe and raised his muzzle-loading shotgun and fired toward the riverbank. I heard something tumbling down through the trees. My guides beached the canoe and went and fetched two dead woolly monkeys, a mother and her baby.

Back on the river, I was shocked to see the baby still moving slightly. I flashed back to a childhood memory. Walking down a sidewalk, my dad and I had seen a beetle whose abdomen had been stepped on. The insect was stuck to the sidewalk by its own gore and uselessly scrabbling with its legs. My dad murmured, "Poor thing; I'll put it out of its misery," and mercifully



Courtesy of Nathan D. Horowitz

flattened it with a stomp of his soft brown shoe. Now I knew I had to end the baby monkey's suffering. "I have to kill it," I said to my companions. I picked the animal up by its back and halfheartedly hit it on the head with the blunt side of an axe. It gave a dull snarl. I thought I should choke it but couldn't stand to imagine the tactile sensation of doing that. Obe, puzzled but going with the flow, handed me a piece of twine. I wrapped it around the animal's neck but didn't have the heart to tighten it. My guides talked to each other, baffled. Willing its soul to its mother, I held the animal underwater off the side of the canoe. It struggled like mad and then finally died. I took it out and handed it to Obe, who tossed it into the bottom of the canoe. (Years later I realized it had only been stunned by the fall and would have been fine if I hadn't killed it.) I felt awful. Jennifer's face flashed into my mind, and I thought again of a fetus that could have been my child. Trembling, I picked up *Finnegans Wake* again and got busy muttering its incomprehensible language.

Soon we heard the noise of an engine and another canoe appeared. It was the only traffic we'd encountered heading upriver. In it were ten Waoranis and one white man in his 30s. This guy was muscular, bald and tattooed, with earrings all up both ears and, I saw when we started talking, green irises with black flecks in them. He introduced himself as Andy Johnson from Toronto. He told me he'd started out as a tourist and gradually become a guide. He'd been in and out of Waorani territory for ten years. This particular time, he'd just been in one of their villages for a solid month without seeing anyone but Waoranis.

"I'm fucking furious at these guys," he growled. "They killed a harpy eagle. Do you know what that is? It's the largest Amazonian bird of prey, a beautiful, majestic animal. And these bastards broke its wing and chopped off its feet just to watch it hop around as it died. They thought that was the funniest thing they'd ever seen."

"That's insane."

"I tried to stop them but they just laughed at me. They're sadists."

"These guys I'm riding with, every time they round a bend and there are turtles sunning themselves on a log, they slap their paddles on the water to scare them, and they laugh like crazy!"

"Yup. That's Waoranis for you. Totally."

"Also, they just shot that monkey today. I had to kill the baby to put it out of its misery."

"Well, the Waoranis eat more monkey than any other group of people in the world. If you want to hang with them, you have to cope with eating what they eat."

"Well, I'm not here to pursue a bourgeois North American lifestyle, you know? But that's fucked up. I mean, I understand it, but . . ."

"So why *are* you here?"

"I heard about the Waoranis from a guy I met up in the States. I wanted to see how people live in as primitive a state as possible before their whole lifestyle disappears, you know? The guy I met told me he'd hung out with a cool shaman named Nenke."

"Really? This is Nenke right here." Andy indicated one of the older guys chatting heatedly with Camilo and Obe. The charismatic one, the leader. I stared at him, memorizing his Prince Valiant haircut and his feline face. Like the other older Waoranis, his ears had been pierced and stretched so the lobes dangled like rubber bands. He was the reason I was in this country in the first place. I tried to look at him through the spirit eyes in my chest and tried to attract his attention telepathically but it didn't work.

Andy said, "Who told you about him?"

"The guy's name was Jeremy Carver."

"Don't know him. Listen, don't get me wrong. I love the Waoranis. They're cruel, but they're also incredibly warm. If they accept you, you're like one of them. And this sadism we're talking about, I think it's in everyone, even though you and I come from societies that try to keep it down. Last year I was in Guatemala City at a market when some people caught a thief. The whole crowd stripped him naked and beat him bloody. And I found myself yelling right along with them."

Andy looked into the forest, then back at me with eyes like green zodiacs. "I think we are all potentially Caligulas."

"Maybe so," I agreed. I'd thought it was just me.

I wondered about cultural faux pas that I might make, endangering my safety. "Are there any taboos I should know about? You know what I mean? Things I shouldn't do?"

Andy shook his head and looked at me evenly. "You can do whatever the fuck you want."

I nodded.

"By the way," he remarked, "did you know you're heading into Tagaeri territory?"

"Yeah? I read something about them. They're like wild Waoranis?"

"Yeah, they split off from the rest of the tribe about thirty years ago. It's a little group, nobody knows how many, maybe forty people. They're at war with the others and they kill anyone who goes into their territory. The stretch of forest that you're heading into is where they live. Ah, that reminds me." The Waoranis had been winding up their conversation and the pilot of Andy's canoe started the motor. The Canadian continued in a much louder voice, "THE LAST TWO TOURISTS WHO WENT DOWN THIS RIVER WERE MURDERED LAST WEEK! THEY WERE FRENCH GUYS! NOBODY KNOWS WHO KILLED THEM! MAYBE THE TAGAERIS, MAYBE THE TAME WAORANIS LIKE THESE GUYS HERE! BUT ANYWAY, THAT'S WHAT THE PEOPLE IN THE VILLAGES ARE SAYING! I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW!"

I stared back at him.

"ANYWAY, HAVE A GOOD TRIP, AND TAKE CARE!" Andy concluded with a broad grin, waving to me and turning away to face forward into the spray as the two canoes drew apart.

That evening, Camilo and Obe put up the tent and made a fire as usual, dousing the wood in diesel to make it easy to light. I observed them, convinced that Camilo was innocent of the murders but suspicious that Obe might know something about them. The two Waoranis roasted the monkeys, which then smelled horribly of burnt hair and looked like child victims of a terrible fire, each face pulled into a rictus of agony. Soon Camilo was ripping the mother's arm from her torso and handing it to me. The limb was covered in crisp skin and charred fur. The hand looked like that of a small black person, only the palm was black too and the thumb was flush against the other digits. I gripped the hand and sank my teeth into the arm, tasting the bitter remains of the hair, the tough, oily skin, the thin layer of fat, and the moistness of the meat that was only, to my taste, half-cooked. I hoped it wouldn't give me parasites. I chewed and chewed, wondering if it were possible to bite microorganisms to death. Muscle fibers jammed in between my teeth. When I discarded the gnawed bones, Camilo handed me a leg. "Eat more," he urged, smiling warmly. "Eating monkey will make you strong like us."

Obe, chewing, nodded in sage agreement. Skeptical, I bit in hard. *If I want to stay in the jungle, I thought as I masticated, I have to accept all this.*

“I read in Quito that there are twelve hundred Waorani, including the Tagaeri,” I remarked after dinner as we sat around the dying fire.

“That’s right,” said Obe. “But in the past there were many more.”

“How many?”

He and Camilo conferred for a while, then Obe answered soberly: “One million.” Camilo nodded.

The two Waoranis suddenly started whispering together. “Did you hear that?” Camilo asked me. I had no idea what he meant. “Tagaeri!” he hissed. “*Hooo . . . hooo . . .* They’re talking to each other.” I listened closely and soon dimly heard something that might have been a hoot. “There!” Camilo said.

Camilo got to his feet and bellowed in Waorani for a long time. After a few minutes Obe leaned over and reported, “He just told them the government will drop bombs on their village if they hurt us.” Camilo fired his shotgun for emphasis. *BOOM!*

I prepared to sleep, curling around a machete that wouldn’t have done any good against a circle of men armed with nine-foot spears. I thought they wouldn’t attack, though. The presence of the shotgun meant that one of them would get a face full of buckshot, and there was no countervailing advantage for them in killing us travelers.

Furthermore, I’d gotten into the habit of imagining that my Latin American adventure was a screenplay, and I thought it unlikely that the writer would kill off the main character so early in the film.

I closed my eyes and drifted off to the sound of Camilo and Obe keeping awake by talking to each other.

In a dream, Obe and I are sitting in a hot spring in the jungle with a Waorani woman. The two of them kiss. Then Obe goes away. The woman turns and embraces me. We hold our breath and sink underwater and kiss. We rise to the surface, breathe, then sink under the water and kiss again.

At daybreak my companions shook me awake and we set off downriver.

Three days and several monkeys later, we stopped at another tiny village. Camilo and Obe talked with the people there and we set out again accompanied by a humble, inquisitive guy named Pata, who they told me would be my guide for the remainder of the tour. He was the brother of Manuel, who was supposed to pick me up in two weeks.

A few more hours downriver, we reached our destination. I was told the man who lived here was named Noma. He was a brother of Nenke the shaman and was also a shaman himself. At the top of a path that led up a slope from the river, I could see the leaf-thatched roof of a hut. A man, a woman, and two boys excitedly descended the path to meet us. The man and woman were each wearing a pair of dirty gray underwear, the boys no clothes at all. There was some discussion in Waorani and they all shook my hand. The man and woman did so very gently, just a soft touch of the palms. The bigger boy’s grip was firm, the grip of someone checking the muscles of the neck of a boa. The smaller boy’s handshake was very soft; each of his hands had a vestigial sixth finger dangling from the first knuckle of his pinkie; each of his broad feet had six functional toes.

Pata swung my pack ashore. Obe and Camilo started up the motor of their canoe for the first time, shook hands with me, and headed back upriver.



Courtesy of Nathan D. Horowitz

March 26, 1993

The house of the shaman. This is a much cooler place than I've been to since don Joaquín's house. Very mellow. Pata is here to make translation easier. He speaks some Spanish. Noma speaks very little of it, his wife and sons none. We're up on a low hill overlooking a bend in the river. The house is dirt-floored, shaped like an equilateral triangle when seen from either end, fifteen feet high at the peak of the roof. The roof, made of leaves, leaked in the rain last night. The triangular end walls, made of vertical slats, let in a lot of air and light. Four people and two birds live in this house. One bird is a parrot and the other is an immature something gray that's mostly mouth and stomach. A spider monkey lives outside on a horizontal pole under a little roof. It's a watch-animal, alerting the humans if anything comes near. Leaning against the wall is a blowgun and a cluster of half a dozen black, three-meter-long, seven-centimeter-wide, jagged-tipped palm wood spears.

Noma is fiftyish and handsome, with sharp shaman-eyes and big stretched-out rubber band earlobes. His wife is younger than he is, friendly (while Noma's been standoffish) and pretty; her beauty is marred by missing front teeth, but accentuated by the fact that she doesn't wear a shirt. The elder son, Kowane, is bold and witty and looks a lot like his father. The younger son, Tunae, the one with extra digits, is shy and dreamy and looks more like his mother. As I write, sitting in this hammock, the boys are resting their chins on my knees; now they're looking at *Finnegans Wake*. Earlier they were poking and tugging the hair on my legs and chest. Waorani adults have nearly no body hair. Pata told me the boys think I look like a monkey.

This morning the boys and Pata and I went hunting with blowguns. It was kind of fun. Pata killed a toucan. I took a shot at a dove but missed. Besides the toucan, we've been eating *paujil*, a small wild turkey; monkey (not my favorite); and yuca, the root vegetable I had with the Secoyas. The only thing I have left over from the market in Coca is some instant coffee, which no-one else wanted.

I need to practice with the blowgun.

Kowane's sense of humor: he farts and then blows it at his brother or me with the fan they use for getting the fire going.

Their mom is singing a simple, repetitive, insistent melody as she weaves a basket.

She makes a beverage that Pata calls *chicha*. She boils yuca, mashes it, chews a mouthful of it, spits it out, chews and spits and chews and spits, then leaves it overnight. The next day she mixes it with fresh water in a gourd and serves it. It's sour, a bit fermented, nourishing, and quite delicious, any time I can eliminate from my mind for a moment the fact that I'm drinking her spit.

After we'd been here for a while yesterday, I noticed Tunae had a bunch of open sores on his head, so I got out my disinfectant cream and asked Pata to ask permission for me to put it on him. Granted and done. Then there was some discussion and Tunae's mom came over to me and pushed her gray underwear down over her left buttock, exposing another open sore. Conscious of the proximity of her husband and his spears, I carefully applied the cream to the wound. We repeated these treatments this morning.

Yesterday in the late afternoon, Pata, Noma's wife, and I all bathed in a stream while the boys looked on. I was really happy to wash off for the first time in a week. And it felt comfortable to bathe with them. Like Andy Johnson said, if they accept you, they really accept you.

In the evening, Noma was making curare, poison for his blowgun darts: some kind of resinous liquid dripping out of a wrapped leaf. He applied the finished poison to about thirty darts and let them dry at the fire.

Me, I dry knowledge onto the darts of literature, getting it ready to poison ignorance.

I told Pata I wanted to be by myself for a while in the forest. I wanted to meditate and pray again as I had on the hill above El Nopal. I asked Pata to ask Noma if I could do this. He talked with the shaman for a while and then came back to me, shaking his head. “He says the jaguars would eat you.”

“No, they wouldn’t,” I said confidently, remembering the post-apocalyptic dream I had had when I was fifteen. “They wouldn’t hurt me.” Those jaguars had needed my help.

“You’re a friend of the jaguars, eh?” Pata cracked a smile.

“Yes,” I said, determined to push the issue. I was sure no jaguar would eat me; I was the protagonist of the story. And I was afraid of falling behind on my spiritual quest. “Is there someplace I could go around here?”

“Noma says there’s an old hut, but it’s falling down, and the jaguars would come in and kill you.”

“Just give me a spear,” I said, exasperated. “I’ll be fine.”

Pata spoke to Noma again. The older man laughed and replied. Pata turned back to me. “No,” he said. “He says it would make too much trouble for him if you got killed.”

“OK,” I conceded. I wouldn’t go against the shaman’s wishes.

To be concluded in Cenacle | 87 | December 2013



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Ninth Series

“Open hands, touch, & teach others how”

xi. Some Strange Remain

The ships have always been overhead.
And yet, not just overhead. For you see,
we are on those ships, as we walk around,
down here, we are on those ships overhead.

I wonder over all this as your hand half-asleep
roams me, trembling for another tussle.
I let your hand miss, miss again, slide away
into sleep. You don't want me *that* much.

It could have been you or either of the other two,
in truth. I just needed one of you to keep me
until this rolling restaurant reaches
the next city. You were the youngest,
least likely to hit or gag. Easiest to please
with a few licks & a slow smile.

The restaurant has rooms in the back,
a few to rent, & I need your wallet too.
When you're out I use your coins for
the black & white TV, smoke & watch a film
about a woman captured & brought to a cell.
She powerfully remembers her youth & friends,
but they seem like boys she'd seen on TV.

You stir. I consider. I'm from those ships overhead;
 knowing this would you still have fucked me?
 Now I'm sitting on the parapet outside our room,
 watching dark flat lands roll by,
 looking up, missing gaps of time & intent.
 Light on the horizon, a thin smear
 of pink & yellow. Here, there, up there.
 Did you really look down my body in
 your bleary, gleeful rush? I've had a few
 over the years. Tits small but firm,
 tummy flat, decent legs. Finish smoking, decide.

You're lying splayed out, where I left you,
 easy to lick up hard & mount again.
 You groan wanting, carnal & drugged both.
 You're another of my practice runs but I'm reminded
 I don't need that much. I ride you, squeeze you,
 hurt you a little, you squeal pleasure.

Morning. I've stayed in the city as
 that restaurant rolled through. A stretch
 among men not as young or as pretty
 as you were. Have to put a little more mileage
 on this body. Some bruising for my purpose.
 I bring you with me in a memory,
 your eyes wide, spasming, & again,
 & why your empty bed, not the others?
 Because they wouldn't *think to ask*.

xii. Happiness

Quiet months. Left my room only at dawn,
 grew & gathered at the local park to keep
 this body extant. Watched my black & white TV,
 I'd kept it. Sometimes had to make a friend
 to get some coins to watch. Hurt him
 but only if he wouldn't go.

The new ones upstairs, they began coming
 through my window, look around,
 take things. There wasn't much, but
 they'd play it as their due, climb
 through my window, *take things*. Eventually
 I went a floor below, for his company,
 & because he heard them too. *Taking things*.

I'd smoke & watch him careen his days.
 Come home from hurting people in an office,
 fucking women with single names. Living days
 that were all edges. He'd lay with me
 like a surrender. We'd give up sometimes &
 watch my TV. Better than upstairs.

But then he would visit his niece & smile.
 Smile & play & bring gifts, dance her around
 in the rain. All would fall away. All the edges.
 He was happy & that was good. Nothing for most
 in this world but to find someone or something
 to be happy with. What other choice to this?

xiii. Big Canvas, Empty

I guess you could say that love will warp
 your path, one way or another. So your
 best angle on the thing is to make sure
 you love as well as you possibly can, because
 your path will warp, one way or another.
 Nothing wrong in that. It's a good thing.

They said it was a big canvas, empty,
 that's what I think they said. Mine to fill
 while I was here, before my task was ready.
 The window started showing me more
 than my TV. I watched this story unfold.

The boy & girl there are in a house with
 many floors. There's an elevator that runs
 from one floor to the next. They're trying
 to get together, to be close, it's not working.
 They end up always on different floors.
 I smoke & watch this tussle, is it years?

The seasons come & go, it seems
 a lot of time passes, & yet they
 never grow old, they never leave the house.
 At one point they find each other in
 the elevator, & for a moment they're close,
 happy, makes sense, things cohere,
 & then something. And then something else.
 As I watch they're on different floors
 again, but it's different, now they *remember*.

The remembering is what changes things
 because if they have, they will again.
 I watch as they near from one obstacle
 to the next, sometimes an interior obstacle,
 worst kind. And then, finally, many floors up,
 there he is, there she is, they're together,
 it's a sweet story. I've watched it so long.
 I close the window & pull the curtain closed.

Some warps in the path can be as beautiful
 as you can possibly imagine. But remember:
 it's all warps in the end.

xiv. Wilderdays

Were they dreams when I first watched you
 dance? Were they what drew me to you?
 Others saw you dancing on the raked
 dancing grounds, how you'd make the sand
 & pebbles scatter. How you would lithe & blind
 move near the large rocks, roll over them,
 bend back to them, never a word, no sound
 but the scrapes & scatterings.

I knew all this from within me,
 my years, *my dreams too*, at least
 some of them, conjured from the books
 of patterns you'd study by evening,
 patterns that would shape & form our dreams,
 how we reached each other then,
 dreams that would return us our far waking lives.

Were they prophecy? Did you prefer one stone
 over another? Did you want me then too?
 Did you see the bushes & trees move with you,
 the secret fountain among them start to gush?
 The black stone shaped like a star missing its point?
 The pink one like a slouched or failing heart?
 The flowers by spring & winter? *Were they dreams?*

xv. What Isn't Left

Wake up. No, *wake up*. In a warehouse,
 long steps, running. Light of day is gone.
 They control the situation beyond
 all reason, it's obvious. What am I here?

When they first came, it was as angels
 from God, His missionaries come to destroy
 the foul Earth, pass judgment on all.
 People *believed this. By the millions.*

They submitted themselves to be judged
 & punished. It was that easy.

Wake up. No, *wake up*. It's a vast camp,
 strange, I keep moving. Feeling like something
 to be found, among these tents & trees
 & buildings. Something to help me *find you.*

I meet people wearing costumes promoting
 eternal life. It adheres to the body,
 sucks out the years & the toxins. *To wear
 this costume is to live forever.*

I keep walking. Wake up. No, *wake up*.
 Need to find a place to rest. To dream.
 You forget me sometimes. You forget
 I am coming to you. You dance
 for him, & him, & it's enough, it's full
 in you. I cry out. *This is not a hunger
 that I chose.* It consumes my path
 ever closer to you. *I won't wake up.*



xvi. Cackling

They need to give me something.
 I grind & thrash for them to *give*
me something. When they do, it cackles.
 It's an . . . imp in many colors.

Cackles & leads me away. This is play.
 Like my old friend & his niece. I'm led away
 & I go, what else? What has gnashing
 my thighs for you done me? There is cackling.
 There is play. All a game, all illusion.

I go, & there are many trees. Pale beneath
 the darker stars. The imp smooths my listen,
 learns me sniff twice, & again. The imp shows me there
 might be other friends, if I let. Let go, sniff, let go.

I am thus content to exhale until the night
 my imp goes all white, still cackling
 but all colors gone. The bite is in me
 again, *oh feel it*. Sand & stones scatter.
Feel it. I dream of you again, & all the while
 the imp is cackling. Her colors restored,
 her eyes as wide & wild. She is cackling,
 hurry, me go. Hurry, hurry, cackling,
hurry me go.

xvii. I Killed Someone

It was the worst part of it. I killed someone
 & I'm running, but I have no chance.
 They know & are following. I remember
 it like a cloudy sky in my mind. Who
did I kill? Why?

It's night, I'm in these strange woods.
 They retreat for the moment. It's like
 they think what's here will do their intent
 better than they could. Why do I think this?
 Can I hear them talking from this far away?

The woods glow pale at night, below
 strangely dark stars in a creamy sky.
 I'm OK. Whatever this is, it can take me.
 I wait. It doesn't. So I try remembering.

There was a room, where it happened,
 it was small, a basement, my means gone.
 One man bound me so tight to him I thought
 we'd die together, watching each other's
 eyes go glassy. Another would save me when
 I wasn't there for saving. He purchased me,
 tried to bring me off.

I couldn't. I had this goldfish, beautiful,
 in a glass vessel. I'd watch it swim as
 they'd gag me, scorch my chest, weep &
 fuck me harder. Then there's two. I'd thought
 the other died, but no, good news.

They talk to me. Sometimes they are not
 even in the water. They sing to me,
 so vulnerable, their bowl keeps getting
 jostled & breaking. Between men I
 clean my body & their goldfish bowl.
 They let me know too hot or too cold.
 We work together. As is right.

I let them see you in my mind,
 as I see you. They understand what
 I mean, what I am doing. When he comes,
 the nice one, me purchased & to be taken
 with him, I can't. I won't. They swim
 into my eyes as I kill him, we watch
 together what I do, their bowl on his head,
 a jagged piece in his chest, again & again
 until *he won't ever take us*.

You're still with me here, tonight,
 swimming in my eyes, not too hot
 or too cold. I'll bring you with me,
 to her. We'll sing to her. We'll go.
 This woods won't harm us tonight,
 or ever. It's morning. And now we go.

xviii. I Follow

Along came the Traveling Troubadour,
 long dead, but loved by many
 in the places we travel. I find myself
 in his company, happily, as many times
 before, none the how or the why.
 What is real? What isn't? Not yet?

He laughs & bids me sing for the crowds.
 He's told me often to grasp them
 by their eyes, see the music their
 hearts yearn, *sing it, sing it.*
 The snapping fires, the low moon lighting
 trees around us, this is easy
 & they dance. Learn something, something else,
 & dance more. He laughs & nods me more.

Between towns & crowds, I show him
 my puzzle. I have a blue sheet to write upon
 but seem to have trouble. I wish to fill it
 with my fragments which, when assembled,
 form a whole, show me path on to her.
 He nods, sees my dilemma.

"None, one, & many," he laughs, almost cackles.
 Yes, indeed, I nod. *None, one, & many.*
 He lifts his instrument, strikes a perfect note,
 smiles a happy smile, & is gone again
 until the next time around.

xix. Come the Island

Come the Island, come the doubt.
 Come me there, I hesitated, protected.
 Lived on the beach, slept under branches
 leaned against a tree.
 Laid out nude on the beach to burn,
 to feel myself want the relief of
 your touch. Hesitated, protected.

I watched the full moon with my aching skin
 & saw a face in the moon & the face
 seemed to talk to me alone & it said
click-click! noise-noise! click-click! noise-noise!
 in a gnattering tongue I felt I'd once known.

The next night my skin still troubled me
 & it looked like the tiny imp in the moon
 returned to distract me from pain & sleeplessness,
 gnattering wildly, high & low, urge me too.

The third night I could not keep awake
 as my skin no longer ached & I crawled
 among my branches leaned against the tree.
 Up in the sky, the moon too waning
 for me to see the imp again. But she pressed
 me along to you. She loved me, she cackled,
 she pressed me wake & go.

xx. Nearer to You

Our first time not in a bed or on grass,
 or by woods, but in the Royal Temple.
 My dress housed undergarments trimmed for entry,
 for pleasure. He hid me there before light
 & came when his morning business was done.
 Came alone, among the pieces to one & another,
 for general gossip to assemble, that he drew nearer
 the old gods as war closed in. All respected
 his hours of prayer alone in the Temple.

I knelt between his thighs & roused
 his member swiftly. Then he motioned
 & I sat on his lap, facing him, his hands
 sliding in through the hidden flaps
 in my blouse, the rest of him sliding
 in me down below.

He was strong but guided me gently
 our first time, taught me to moan
 through our clasped fingers, to keep my eyes
 shut & see him through our quicking beats
 & breaths, & faster, & a nebulous climax
 he led me in & out of until our hands
 exploded in cry, until our bones shook &
 muscles relaxed.

I was let in early in the morning,
 let out late at night, I did not know by who,
 but I'd seen you dance already, I knew
 I'd found you. When he finally moved me
 to a private chamber to keep me more
 elaborately, it didn't matter. The goldfish
 in my eyes swam peaceful, the imp in the moon
 cackled with good new play, I would crumple
 the King your father as I neared you &
 neared you, & sweat him & this world away
 from this skin of mine you would touch, *you would possess.*

xxi. We Are Six

We are scattered, even enemy now,
 but once we came together, walked as one.
 We six, raised & summoned from different lands
 & times, bound for the Island, many
 years in the coagulation, all meant
 to bind us for this task, to answer for all
 what if anything could be done to save men—

Could the Tangled Gate undo all the wrong
 we'd brought to ourselves & our world?

A fellowship they make the myths from,
 the one of the great Beast tricked
 by his own dream into devouring his head,
 the one of the woman who bit off the cocks
 of enchanted seamen until the night
 she broke her teeth & lost her tongue
 devouring our brother's image cut in stone.
 The later one of the man who walked in crown
 & dragon's robes, telling of his god's every whim
 & judgment, until our brother sang him nude
 into the Fountain's cheering & clearing
 waters, to emerge soft & wide-eyed
 with every crumb of the world now mine &
 yours & all's to share.

A fellowship, broken on the Island,
 within the Tangled Gate. Not built by men,
 not the stuff of this world. It tore us
 from each other not because malevolent,
 but because men can only undo men.
 We cannot undo the elemental forces
 of this world. Submit, thrash, burn, heal.

This pond I stay is calm at twilight, chipping & whirring
 of its world at rest. I think about my brothers
 & I wish we had another hour in the Gate.
 To submit to its powers, yes, but insist our fraternity.
 Teach us to know our world, play it,
 sing it, heal it of us, we are ignorant
 & rude of these things. But teach us not
 how to love one another, for though you
 consume our bodies & minds, you cannot
 know our hearts, how a hand's touch
 stays forever in changing shapes of memory,
 how a soft word twists into blood & loins,
 how the very air we breathed that morning
 as we arrived on the Island still fills
 & empties our lungs, each of us, tonight,
 tomorrow, it's cool, calm, we look around,
 anchor the boat, glad we are near
 to one another, whatever comes, whatever comes.

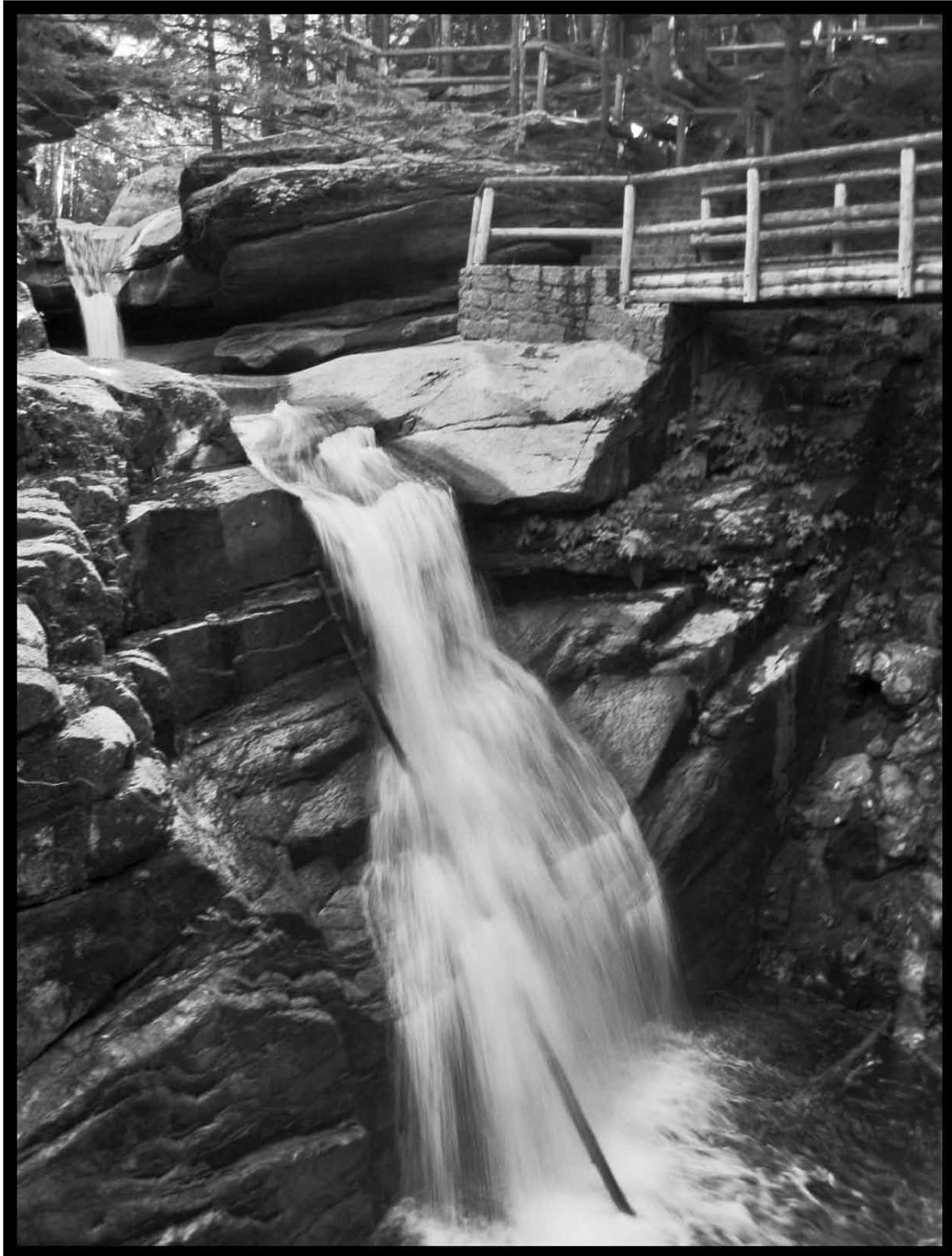
xxii. Dreamwalker

I was sometimes called the Dreamwalker
 because I could step in & out of them,
 like other men a field of lilies & grass,
 & I could squeeze them & shape them
 to a chunk of wisdom, a word, a message
 from what knows this world & blows
 best through its ways.

My brothers would tend me when I woke,
 sweating, sometimes injured from my travels
 in Dreamland. Wash my body, clean
 its wounds, kissing touch & caress.
 Later dressed, supped, I would sit with them
 & tell what I could. Some things would not
 carry over. Would crumble in the waking,
 or the telling, or in their eyes as they
 watched me, needed me to tell.

As days neared us toward the Island
 & the Tangled Gate, my dreams went numb
 of picture, word, advice. My brothers
 found nothing in my face. Only one image:
 a spread of fresh warm blood on a log,
 a huge axe from the sky chopping it twine.

We tried something at my begging upon
 reaching the Island, its shoreless rocky
 edge. From my pouch the herbs & powders
 to set me into waking sleep. I followed
 with the others in two places at once,
 trying first to see doubly, then singly.
 In dream I was alone, on an Island
 come alive, coated in fur & teeth,
 angry, uncalmable, not enough to consume
 me or us whole, but to efface us,
 like we never were in this world.



I cry out. A face. A man's sad face
 but not sad. Furious. The Island,
 its body of the Beast, its face of a man,
 I cry out again, & fall down forever.
 My brothers all return to me from
 their explorings. Gather close to me,
 each a hand on my trembling form.
 We are one again, *o world's dreaming*
heart! why couldn't the Island have
 consumed us then as one than
 spew us like spittle in all directions
 thereafter? I feel you still, all of you,
 my brothers, tending me, waiting
 my words, even when the only ones
 I had left, finally, were *I'm sorry*.

xxiii. Lovers

They knew me as he, they knew me
 as she, we lay together in couples
 & groups, the road was too long for questions
 that no longer mattered. You held those with you,
 you loved them, they were lorn. You loved them.

As a girl I waited for the men to find me,
 I waited, veiled, ruffled, impatient,
 the universe made my body to play,
 to think & play, to think & love & play,
 to figure it all out among hands & eyes
 & thighs & words part prayer, part lies.

The men found me & I let them chase,
 let them breathe my scent & sleep alone,
 let them make canvases by my vague smile,
 let them caterwaul music from their hard loins.
 The men found me & I let a few with
 a secret smile, moved them to build
 & to destroy & to calm the fuck down &
to raise back the fuck up.

The years passed & I needed to know
 better, to feel it hard entering me,
 feel that driving thing of empires,
 gird it soft, feel it raised helplessly
 by blush & a thigh, need to possess
 something, have it, fuck it, *fuck it*,
 rest. Rest softly. Year upon year.

Eventually, what difference? I knew
 it mattered, knew it, then less so.
 All flesh is lorn, all flesh needs love.
 Me to help make it so. My brothers,
 when the Beast pulled me down to light,
 I felt the why for it all, remembered
 again. We're here for the friction, we're here
 for the lorn. We're how the world
 makes its music, what it plays, what it burns.

xxiv. Dreams the Island

Before I was King, do you remember?
 I washed my shirt carefully every day.
 I slept among the legs & hands & dirty mouths
 of my own brothers, the ones blood told me
 were brothers. Before I learned my path
 needed dearer ones to me.

There was no King then, just groups of men
 keeping each to its piece. Peace but
 when a woman got restless for a new face.
 We were too tired working fields for politics.

But there were dreams I could not bury between
 randy maidens' thighs. More to this world
 than working it over like a prize fight.
 I asked the old men of the tribe,
 a tooth among them, & they laughed.

Eventually it was the women, full moonlight,
 the tall fires, I made them share me
 the drinks neither wine nor water. The hours
 showing me years ago, the Island,
 out there on the horizon, something there,
 a Gate? They couldn't tell me. They squabbled my cock.

Knowing something I tried to tell. Maybe
 something more to this world than dirty hands.
 The men shook me off for easier lessons
 of drink & sleeping the hours hard off.
 I needed new brothers to teach me how
 listen, teach me how see. New brothers
 to travel that Island's dream & bring its secrets home.

xxv. So High

It was in the sea-water we first
 touched you, by then we were yours.
 The day preternaturally bright, the kind
 quickly dries the lips. I'd said you'd come kind,
 fast & slower, like a woman's smiling eyes
 as you followed her hips, like faint water
 trickling you into a dream. The sea-water
 as it touched our ankles & knees,
 as we pulled our small boats to shore.

Then it was the air, it felt like remembering,
 it felt like private, impossibly private,
 things to each one of us. A touch, a word.
 A private smell with its private smile.
 The air of the Island curled around us
 in waves that slowly consumed. But a finger
 on the lips to me, not a word to any
 or the magic's gone. And it's just a lonely island.
Shh. Finger on the lips. Not a word.

We camped that night on the beach,
 subdued, none of our songs matched
 those strange patterns of stars, the colors
 they seemed to imply. Our bonfire roared,
 we six about it, a mile from one set of warming
 hands to the next. I wondered for a word
 & felt I should, always the others had
 nodded to me & my plants & potions.

I closed my eyes. I called the Island
 to me, humbly, I bid it near as I
 could abide. I presented myself for
 protection of my brothers, *let me flow
 through them tonight & always, I pray
 I flow through & protect you one & all.*

They look me close over. A few smile.
 “The place will fell more of us in the end.”
 Nod. Laugh. (Finger on the lips. *Not a word.*
 Or the magic’s gone.)

xxvi. Unexplainable Spasm

I was told first, given my task, when
 I had none, when I was nothing.
 Another face among leaves & trees. Too many
 years chasing good ass & then whatever ass.
 Too many explanations. Too much time.

The voice in my head, I was hungry,
 lightheaded, pills for meals, pills for sleep.
 The voice, a young boy’s or a girl’s, humming
 at first, draw me in lure my mind. Look about,
 city crowds, we exist to each other by news
 only our skins & sniffs know. Nothing. The voice
 sang louder, moved me from brownstones &
 cobblestones to a park, a bench without light.

“Would you like to do something beautiful?
 Would you like to save the world?
 Would you like to feel like the stones,
 the streams, the wind among nameless things?”

I nodded to this madness, or open door.
 Nodded & was led back in time, my own times,
 my canvases, unfinished, I saw them now,
 saw what they should be, painted & painted,
 the voice singing, singing, its light, my path,
 on & on, it would have been enough,
 I ate bread & cheese again, scattered happy kisses.

“Would you like to do something beautiful?
 Would you like to save the world?”
 I nodded & knew there had to be more.

The canvases became other, developed
 a within, a toward, faces, singly
 at first but then I saw how they were a group,
 the tall windows of my chamber let in stars
 & moons & something between them, madness
 or open door, I nodded, the same faces,
 canvas after canvas, woods, pale woods,
 the sea, knowing, near, the Island,
 of course the Island. Always the Island.
 Always the Gate.

“Would you like to do something beautiful?
 Would you like to save the world?”
 I nodded, & drew us together, at last.
 Each found the canvas I made for him,
 in his time & place, studied it, dreamed it
 day & night until known better than
 the common light, better than brain,
 body, beat, breath, knew it & stepped through.

There we were together, our ship, the sea
 & more sea. Morning. Waking in a cluster,
 a herd, a batch of wondering faces. What next?
 Time to do something beautiful. Time to save the world.

They knew, these found brothers, that I
had brought them here. Called me
the Magician but I shook it off. Urged me
paint our path, our enemies, beautiful women
to find & dance with. Shook it off
worse. There is only the Island. There is only
the Gate. My sole canvas aboard that ship
showed not the what nor where of our task
but how it would bind us better, break us finally.
They gathered. Laughed. Then less. New vows.

I made us curl together, again, the night
before we arrive the Island. Every man
another's hand to his lips, his breast.
Someone laughed. Another shushed.
We sailed unknown seas of stars, & songs
of boys & girls wished & washed our minds.
Night passed. Coming home, coming home.

We ranged the Island for days,
the stories don't tell this, it wasn't
a single day's conquest, we were brave,
we were less so, the Gate humbled us
before it would be found. Farther & farther
from the world, lost in mystic pale woods
until I listened, begged a little, & listened,
& led us the remaining way.

The Gate is not of this world & our skills
& tricks & strong hands did us no good.
The paths walled by vines & stones hurried
& pushed us, no pause, no food, never quite
night to rest. We came, straggled, crowded
before the Cave of the Beast. Words gone
as each of us entered the Cave, & was consumed.

Consumed us, singly, & then in all, & I felt
 the stones, I felt the promised streams,
 I let go, & more, & all, & now the wind
 among nameless things. I nodded, smiled,
 did not return, my brothers, now I am
 become the canvas upon which you will
 do something beautiful. I grant you this music,
 I burden you this song. I don't know if you can,
 but you will try & save the world.

xxvii. The Gypsy Girl

Among the adventures the one we never spoke,
 the girl in the graveyard & she was possibly dead,
 but we each had of her & were less & more.

We had sailed toward the Island for years
 without discovering sight of it. The books read,
 the shamans drunk with, the myth held no live bones.

A tavern to loose it, put down the weapons &
 too many maps. We ranged to different new
 companions & pursuits. New smells in the nose.

“You're the Dreamwalker,” she said to me,
 young, pretty, but a scar, but a limp,
 scarves of many sigils, cards on her table, a crystal.

I nod. Briefly imagine licking her scar, her everywhere,
 then take my drink. My friend's new brew.
 “The Island's a dreamer. It dreams the world.”

We walk outside, I don't tell my brothers.
 She sniffs of blue fire, too too blue, &
 leads me to a graveyard. We lay among effaced stones.

I don't reach for her as I ought, or might,
 but she gazes the stars & sings me a song.
 I sleep. Dream of warm blood on a fallen tree.



I find her while looking for the Dreamwalker.
 She smiles, & I tense. Bids me sit with her
 among a cluster of stones. Some say only “from.” Some only “to.”

“You lay with men & women both?” I nod.
 She curls into me, her hands soft,
 curious, benign. “The chasm won’t be breached.”

The painter joins us, remarks the moonlight,
 the shadows. She slips from her scarves & skirts
 & bids him portray her, portray us together.

We twine for my friend & he draws with
 a shaky hand, shakes his head, cannot
 render, & goes. She seems to follow, without her clothes.

My brothers are scattered & here is a naked woman
 in a graveyard. She is scared, limps, scarred
 but beautiful. I cover her with my cloak.

Now on an ancient bench near the graveyard’s gate,
 she calms, pushes my cloak plainly aside.
 Urges my hands upon her. “*There is no time.*”

I turn from my games of pegs & chance
 & find only our youngest brother remains.
 “They’ve gone with the gypsy,” he says, thin-voiced.

But she’s where she’s been all night, at her table,
 her cards, her crystal. Bids me sit. I nod.
 “My cards know more than your plants,” she says.

“That may be true. But my plants don’t lie.”
 Her smile rings & rings of power, enough
 to dance in partner, enough to burn worlds.

Our youngest brother goes to look for the rest
 & I watch her follow. He’d drunk what I’d given
 him first. No time for lies. So many beautiful truths.

I find each of us disarrayed as though
 strong, fine, dirty sex but strangely no sate.
 We gather ourselves finally before morning’s first light.

Nobody knew of the gypsy at the tavern
 that morning, the scarves & skirts we found
 in the graveyard were colorless scraps.

Our ship a refuge from that night & what
 it told us. We could search for the Island perpetually,
 or sacrifice all, finally, each other, & it would reveal.

xxviii. Builds the Kingdom (Part 1)

We lay twined abed, as we have from
 our first night, & you press me again,
 smiling blue stars in the velvet space between us,
 what brought me back, & with my bond
 of strong brothers, how was it so?

You'd known your own fate from a child.
 First a girl bleeds she is chosen by one
 or another. They fight, they trade,
 one beds me after they drink & hug,
 maybe they share me that night
 as a mark of friendship. Each vying
 to make me moan more helplessly,
 cry & beg.

So your sister had told you, & aunts,
 & your own mother with not enough words,
 & tears. "It's hard on them, this life.
 They need to be brutal to us. It *compensates*."
 She knew such words & their ideas too,
 but died like none of it mattered.
 Just the hairy bit between her legs &
 his need for compensation.

"Then you came." I smile. I'd almost forgotten
 the scattered tribes of this region. We came
 on a clue of the Island. But people knew me.
 They remembered me. "And everyone thought
 I'd come with a mission of union. My brothers
 liked it better than I did. They convinced me."

“No. I did.” I smack her ass. I could find
 this flesh candy in the silence of the seas.
 “Tell me.” “I dreamed you.” “Dreamed?”
 “It seemed of no consequence, a man’s
 yearn who’s smelled other men’s loins
 too close too long.” “It wasn’t.” “No.”

Our first night’s camp was near where
 I’d been a boy. Some remembered, welcomed
 me, us, but some didn’t. I saw you at camp
 & I’d never seen such terror in a girl’s eyes.
 Such hopelessness. “I told my brothers
 to keep the men busy, all night, drink
 & fight them, again & again.”

“You wouldn’t tell me.” “I had no words.
 This is what men do. This is what girls are.”
 “But still you feared. Your heart fought it.”
 “What woman would not choose which man
 beds her? By a tribal rule? Or by her own fired loins & heart?”

“I didn’t intend to take you.” “You’d sniffed me
 close the first time we passed. I’d already chosen you.
 I just didn’t think it would happen. So his
 small cock would have your handsome face.”
 I laugh. You taught me the heaviness & lightness
 of a woman’s wants, of her needs.

“You made me King.” “Your brothers had already
 decided that. Just lacking was the kingdom.”
 “When they beheld you my Queen, I now had
 worth to kneel for!”

She shifts impatiently. Strokes my cock
 thoughtfully, if that’s possible. Moves
 about in my arms, then leaps back
 from my known moves. “Tell me.”
 “Tell you what? You feel my hardness.
 Shall I beg again?” She laughs. Then stops.

“Why were you here? You didn’t come
 to free & unite us. Not originally.”
 “Why say you?” “Because girls like me
 are the spoils of the last standing.
 You hesitated. Gave me choice.”

“I’m not a brute.”

“No. And it takes one to ride into settled lands
& claim them. Fell the men there or worse
let them live servants thereon. *Tell me.*” I marvel her again &
wonder my silence.

“You sought something. Or someone?”

Silence.

“Should I fear you begged another her treats,
& she lives still in your heart?”

“No. We rode as brothers looking for a home.
We’d bonded by chance, accident, &
vowed to settle. We were ready. Too many
limps among us. Low fires in the heart.
We were tired.”

You didn’t quite believe me. You knew
among us six no longer spoken words,
wishes, remained. You chose, after all,
to love what I could give. Love, loving,
kindness. An especial cruel hand to any man
who’d have a girl like a tankard. To be drained,
bussed by another. I ruled by your lights,
& why you were taken from me is all
keeping me alive.

xxix. Builds the Kingdom (Part 2)

The ancient women have not forgotten
me as I visit their dwelling alone.
They gather around me in their furs
& feathers & finery. The manacle each
wears on her left wrist, as reminder.
“Tell me. We don’t visit for sentiment.”

“There are stranger strengths in this
world than most reckon. Hidden paths
among dreams, & truck even between
life & death.” *“Tell me.”*

The oldest, three hideous bones of a woman,
 eyes me. "Why did you return?"
 "I won't lie. It was chance." "What were
 you seeking?" I look at the manacle
 on her ancient crust of a wrist &
 try to think of her, girl in new stained
 white panties, led off for consumption.
 Compensation.

I sigh. "We sought the Tangled Gate,
 a bond of men gathered to save the world.
 But it was vain. Why gather us & not
 reveal the thing? They were despairing.
 Becoming saviors to my old homeland
 saved them, saved all of us."
 "Now you despair."
 "Yes. And you have help?"

These old crones then spend the last of
 their blood bone & magick to answer me.
 A bed the size of my brothers' boat,
 fires & stars where ceiling'd stolid stood,
 & them too many to count & ferocious
 again in their flesh, mouths to be
 kissed & sucked, breasts to be squeezed
 & bitten, shoulders & stomachs & buttocks
 to be licked, chewed, tendered, hips
 & maidenhair to be released in happy
 moans, laughing howls, & in that night
 they showed me, each a witchly piece
 to the whole, the route to the Island,
 & thus the Gate. *Thus the Gate.*

I woke by sun, chewed, well chewed
 & battered in dust. Of course they were
 gone, as though never been. But I knew
 the way now. It was no noble task
 for us, some great work of obligation.
We'd been wrong. We'd come to save the world
 now because we had so much to lose
 by its passing. Love fights for its right,
 love sacrifices when it must, but love most
 seeks to learn best how to live & shows others how.

xxx. Falling Free

There is no time. That's what we six learned.
 What we know still. *There is no time.*
 We travel rootless paths. Cling to their scenery.
 We mold to sense impressions, helplessly,
 & layer upon layer our seeming knowledge.

Our bodies mature like fruit, to new shapes,
 to deeper within. The path to others sometimes
 farther, more volatile. Do the lights of the sky
 understand? Do other creatures of the earth?
 Can our want flare to knowing, stay?

We accumulated, entering the Cave,
 filled our bond more & more, seeming,
 then a falling back, a rupture. A loss.

So many years to find this Island,
 come to its shores. With the wishes
 of our kingdom, its worries we be well.

We'd intended no kingdom & yet it now stood,
 & those who had raised it were now leaving,
 a voyage for all humanity, twas said, & though
 the world seemed prosperous & at its ease,
 they sailed without further word.

The King now knew the way, he'd summoned
 us & said. His great hall, its great communal
 meal table, where we ate with all of our
 kinsmen, was emptied but for one map.

His eye, his finger on one place, seeming
 in the open sea. "There." We looked.
 "In the morning." "How do we land on water?"
 "It will be there." "How will we know?"

He stopped us with a fist upon the table.
 "It's there. It's what we seek. Guarded,
 but we will be let in." Then he turned & left,
 didn't take his map. Didn't need it.

It was our fellowship that allowed us
 passage. The King traded our love for it.
 For him, twas no longer save mankind or the world.
Save her. Bring her back. Her unknown illness.
 Lack of funeral. No gravesite. We sailed.

Other stories tell of our arrival, the dreams,
 the dark portents. None tell the rest.
There is no time.

The Island that was not there came into
 view the third morning out, & we landed
 its shoreless rocky edge. Woods, it was covered
 in a unnavigable pale Woods!

But the King had negotiated our passage.
 He gathered us the next morning,
 upon an unliked night of sleep there,
 closed his eyes, & began to sing.
 Sing & climb from the rocks & on into
 the Woods. We followed him, weapons
 but no foe. A silent Woods to enter,
 save for the King's crooning.

Helpless we followed. Our King blindly
 sang & moved forward, not a stumble,
 unlike the rest of us. He sang us along
 a seeming invisible path for hours
 & impossible to say it led, & yet did.

It should have been night when we came out,
 & beheld the Tangled Gate. Should have,
 wasn't. It was taller than a castle
 & seeming ageless. Was ageless. *There is no time.*
 We'd yet to learn.

We remarked its legend above us:
 "For those lost." Were we? We passed through.
 There a Fountain, carved fanatically
 beyond the mortal skills. Its waters
 an invitation. The King gestured us drink.
 There seemed no choice.



The passage through the Gate was only partly physical. It's this the myths cannot convey. There were no days or nights in the Gate. *There is no time.*

We did not come to the Cave of the Beast by a path, or several. It was arrival without intention. Were there even the paths told of, made of vines & stones? Had we left the Fountain, or the entrance, or had we even left the shoreless rocky lip of the Island?

The King roused us. As a group we'd been slumped. "This is why we were brought together. To come here & enter this Cave. We're here to save the world by our worth as men. Our willingness to enter this Cave."

I entered & found myself of a sudden by the shore of a pond at twilight. The pond was covered in water lilies, & the insect hum rose to my ears. I sat & did not know. There was no way back. This is what was intended for me.

I entered next, seeing my brother in the far distance, by a place he'd mentioned having seen once, called it a living painting. I could not retrieve him, & despaired, when I felt many arms embrace me, touch my face, join my beating, my breath, *my brothers*—

And I came, though what separated one from another of us I could less & less tell. I did not need aid to sleep & wake both for here in the Gate it was this forever, it was source, before sunshine, before soil, all was music, all was flow. I smiled.

I came to know & saw the living canvas
of my brothers & how I'd come to paint it
& I yearned my place! Please let me
consume in this canvas finally
& know more than painter & subject,
let all be one, let all be one.

My King I came last before you &
something in this welcoming goo
was wrong. I loved my brothers so much
but I was trained by Creatures
far wiser than we men to sniff
& know. As I entered the Cave
I sniffed to know & the pain seemed
to rip me wide. I sniffed again &
again, to calm. My brothers were not
in that Cave. Not dead but gone.

When I came out you shrieked wordless
at me. You ran past me into the Cave
& remained within for three days.
I was compelled to stay vigil, no more.

When you came out, that third morning,
you were not as I had known.
We returned to our ship, unhindered,
no path needed. You told me only one thing,
"There's no need to mourn them. We know
there is no time. So there can be no death."

All I felt was the falling back,
the rupture, the loss. I wondered the Gate,
then the Island, then the sense
of everything.

I broke with you, my King, when I sunk
 to my knees one night & cried for help.
 Cried for help a man could conceive,
 & use. A Savior, to comfort, to explain.
 A Savior, whether he had ever existed,
 could now exist. Could comfort & explain
 hereon. Could bring me along with the rest.
 Where you, my King, my brother, had denied,
 when you willing sacrificed us all in the Gate.

The emptiness possesses me, even now,
 as I saw you divide from your kingdom,
 as I saw you reach back to the Island,
 as I saw you come to believe
 there was something there after all
 to save men, a bargain to be made
 with whatever Eternals had built that Gate.

I arrayed against you, my King,
 that others would not follow you,
 across the waters, on the path
 that had taken our brothers from us.
 A path you had designed because
there is no time & she had not died
 & *you could save her even now.* You could
 still save her & our brothers. The Gate
 could save us all. *The Gate could save the world.*



* * * * *



Joe Coleman



Autumn

We meet again:

my firebrand,
your tinder man.

In this Museum of Fallen Leaves

where we rustle amid remnant color
remembering attachment
and connection

and how green formerly decorated our privacies.

We should break windows

as if they were rules—
let anarchic gusts

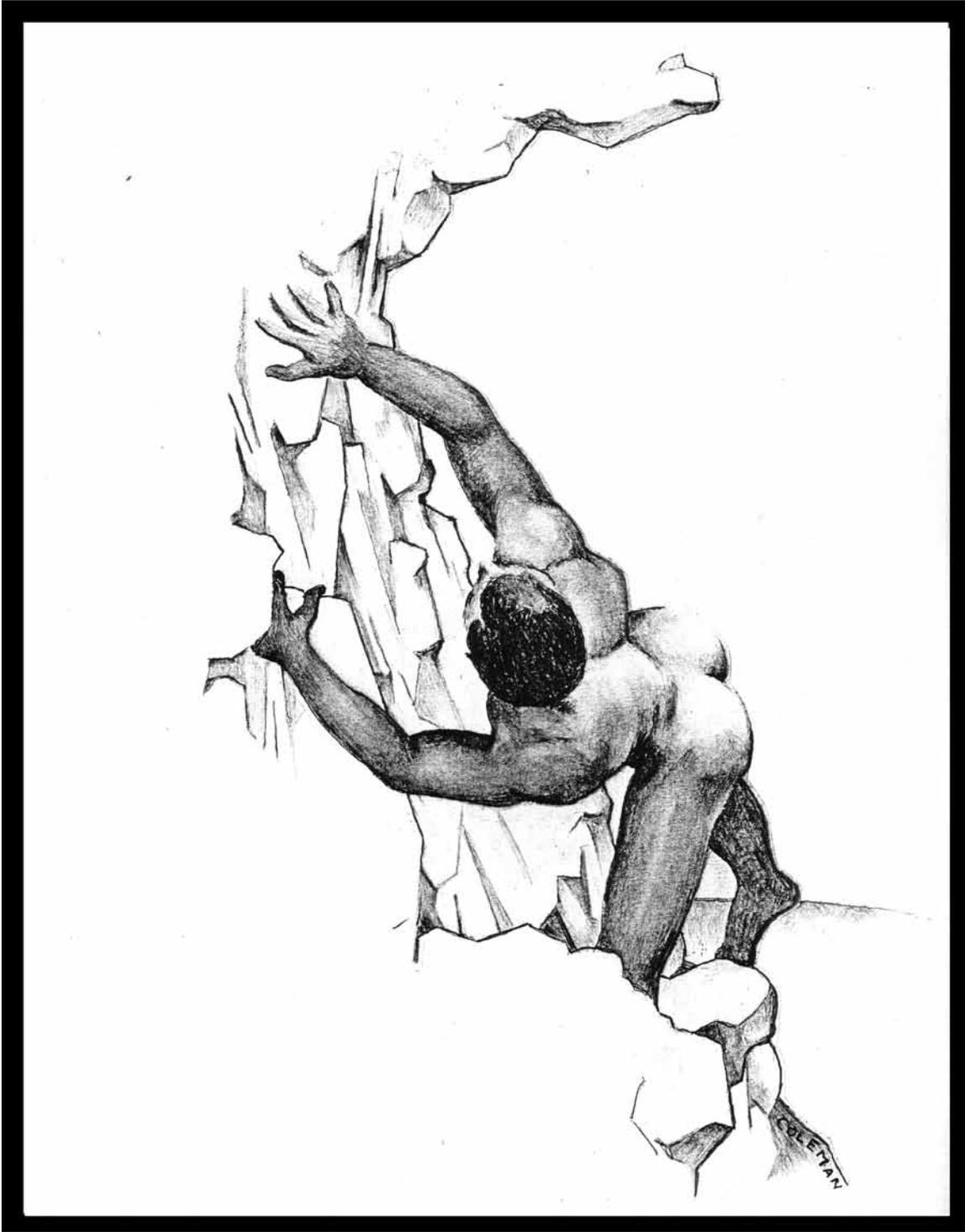
blow madness into dry displays.

Later,

in the rusty Factory of Bare Limbs
—breaking rules like glass—
you try to ignite me.

I fall and you leave again.

* * *



Mountaineer

From base camp, come sunrise, climbing starts
 in splay-toed foothills firmly on the floor.
 Begin the climb with open eyes.
 Confront the shadowed shape and size.
 Begin the climb by early morning light to reach the top and truth.

Go up those straddling shanks
 past knobby parts—their double-dimpled bends.
 Dreaming of youth, approach the dangerous divide
 —the junction not so risky as before—
(but where many think the journey ends . . .)

Its promontory spur and pendant rocks together say:
 “*Stop here a moment.*” Weary-eyed,
 go on up towards the lofty scarps in sight.
 Continue toward the uppermost display.
 Seek higher purchase and surrender hold.

Traverse the center massif’s stretching flanks.
 Climbing, scale the weathered wrinkled hide
 that has within an undiscovered core
 beating like a tired heart recalling grace and green and gold.

Go higher still . . . Go higher . . . more . . .
 —above the fissured neck on shoulder slope where shale extends.
 Ascend the craggy crest.
 With cloudy gaze stare sad from snow-capped peak.

Stare into space. Stare upon accumulated years.
 Hypoxic, reeling, breathe. Breathe deep and rest
 at elevated attitude until the vision clears.

I am aware of age and, weakened,
 I conclude I have grown old.

* * * * *





Strange News from Another Planet

[Classic Fiction]

*Translated by Jack Zipes in
The Complete Fairy Tales of Herman Hesse, 1995.*

In one of the southern provinces of our beautiful planet there was a horrible catastrophe. An earthquake, accompanied by terrible thunderstorms and floods, caused great destruction to three large villages and their gardens, fields, forests, and farms. Many people and animals were killed, and saddest of all, the villagers lacked enough flowers to make wreaths for the dead and adorn their graves in the appropriate way.

Of course, the people took care of everything else that had to be done. Immediately after the horrible event, messengers rushed through the neighboring regions carrying pleas for aid and charity, and from all the towers of the entire province, chanters could be heard singing those stirring and deeply touching verses known for ages as the “Salutation to the Goddess of Compassion.” It was impossible for anyone listening to these chants to resist them.

Large groups of rescuers and helpers came right away from all the towns and cities, and those unfortunate people who had lost the roofs over their heads were overwhelmed by kind invitations and took refuge in the dwellings of relatives, friends, and strangers. Food and clothes, wagons and horses, tools, stones, and wood, and many other useful things were brought from all over. The old men, women, and children were comforted, consoled, and led away to shelters by kindly hands. The injured were carefully washed and bandaged. And while some people were still searching for victims of the quake under the ruins, others had already begun to clear

away the fallen roofs, to prop up the wobbly walls with beams, and to prepare everything necessary for the quick reconstruction of the villages. Still, a cloud of horror from the accident hung in the air, and the dead were a reminder to everyone that this was a time of mourning and austere silence. Yet a joyful readiness and a certain vibrant festive mood could also be detected in all the faces and voices of the people, for they were inspired by their common action and zeal and the certainty that they were all doing something unusual and necessary, something beautiful and deserving of thanks. Initially people had worked in silence and awe, but cheerful voices and the soft sounds of singing could soon be heard here and there. As one might well imagine, two ancient proverbs were among the favorites that were sung: “Blessed are those who bring help to those who have been recently overcome by need. Don’t they drink the good deed as a parched garden drinks the first rainfall, and shouldn’t they respond with flowers of gratitude?” and “The serenity of God flows from common action.”

However, it was just then that

they discovered they did not have enough flowers for the burials. To be sure, the first dead bodies to be found had been buried and adorned with flowers and branches gathered from the destroyed gardens. Then the people began fetching all the flowers in the vicinity. But as luck would have it, they were in a special dilemma because the three destroyed villages had been the ones with the largest and most beautiful gardens of flowers during this time of year. It was here that visitors came each year to see the narcissus and crocuses because they could not be found anywhere else in such immense quantities. Moreover, they were always cultivated with great care in remarkably different colors. Yet all this had now been devastated and ruined. So the people were in a quandary—they did not know how to follow the customary rites regarding the burial of the dead. Tradition required that before burial each human being and each animal be adorned lavishly with flowers of the season, and that the burial ritual be all the richer and more resplendent, the more sudden and more sorrowful that death had struck.

The Chief Elder of the province, who was one of the first to appear with help in his wagon, soon found himself so overwhelmed by questions, requests, and complaints that he had difficulty keeping his composure. But he took heart. His eyes remained bright and friendly; his voice was clear and polite; and under his white beard his lips never lost the silent, kind smile for a moment—something that suited him as a wise councilor.

“My friends,” he said, “a calamity has struck that was most likely sent by the gods to test us. Of course, whatever has been destroyed here, we shall be able to rebuild for our brothers and give it all back to them, and I thank the gods that I’ve been able to experience in my old age how you all stopped whatever you were doing and came here to help. But where are we going to find the

flowers to adorn all these dead people and celebrate their transformation in a beautiful and reverent manner? As long as we are alive and well, we must make sure that not a single one of these weary pilgrims be buried without their rightful floral tribute. Don’t you all agree?”

“Yes,” they cried. “We all agree.”

“I knew it,” said the Elder in his fatherly voice. “Now I want to tell you, my friends, what we must do. We must carry all the remains that cannot be buried today to the large summer temple high in the mountains, where snow is still on the ground. They will be safe there and will not decompose before we fetch flowers for them. Only one person can really help us obtain so many flowers at this time of the year, and that is the King. Therefore one of us must be sent to the King to request his assistance.”

And again all the people nodded and cried out, “Yes, yes, to the King!”

“So be it,” the Elder continued, and everyone was pleased to see his pleasant smile glistening from beneath his white beard. “But whom shall we send to the King? He must be young and robust because he shall travel far on our best horse. Furthermore, he must be handsome and kind and have sparkling eyes, so that the King’s heart will not be able to resist him. He needn’t say much, but his eyes must be able to speak. Clearly, it would be best if we sent a child, the handsomest child in the community. But how could he possibly undertake such a journey? You must help me, my friends, and if there is anyone here who wants to volunteer to be the messenger, or if you know somebody suitable for this task, please tell me.”

The Elder stopped and looked around with his bright eyes, but nobody stepped forward. Not a single voice could be heard. When he repeated the question a second and then a third time, a young man suddenly emerged from the crowd. He was sixteen years

old, practically still a boy, and he fixed his eyes on the ground and blushed as he greeted the Elder.

As soon as the Elder looked at him, he realized the young man was the perfect messenger. So he smiled and said, "It's wonderful that you want to be our messenger. But why is it that, among all those people, you should be the one to volunteer?"

The young man raised his eyes to the old man and said, "If there is no one else here who wants to go, then I should be the one to go."

Someone from the crowd shouted, "Send him, Elder. We know him. He comes from our village, and the earthquake destroyed his flower garden, which was the most beautiful in the region."

The Elder gave the young man a friendly look and asked, "Are you sad about what happened to your flowers?"

The young man responded very softly, "Yes, I'm sorry, but that is not why I volunteered. I had a dear friend and also a splendid young horse, my favorite, and both were killed by the earthquake. Now they are lying in our hall, and we must have flowers so that they can be buried."

The Elder blessed the young man by placing his hands on his head, and the best horse was soon brought out for him. Immediately the young man sprang onto the horse's back, slapped it on the neck, and nodded farewell to the people. Then he dashed out of the village and headed straight across the wet and ravaged fields.

The young man rode the entire day, and in order to reach the distant capital and see the King as soon as he could, he took the path over the mountains. In the evening, as it began to turn dark, he led his horse by the reins up a steep path through the forest and rocks.

A large dark bird, a kind that the young man had never seen before, flew ahead

of him, and he followed it until the bird landed on the roof of a small open temple. The young man left his horse and walked through wooden pillars into the simple sanctuary. There he found a sacrificial altar, but it was only a solid block made of a black stone not usually found in that region. On it was an obscure symbol of a deity that the messenger did not recognize—a heart that was being devoured by a wild bird.

He paid tribute to the deity by offering a bluebell flower that he had plucked at the foot of the mountain and stuck in the lapel of his coat. Thereafter he lay down in a corner of the temple, for he was very tired and wanted for sleep.

However, he could not fall asleep as easily as he was accustomed to at home each evening. Perhaps it was the bluebell on the stone itself, or something else, but whatever it was, something odd disturbed him by exuding a penetrating and scintillating aroma.

Furthermore, the eerie symbol of the god glimmered like a ghost in the dark hall, and the strange bird sat on the roof and vigorously flapped its gigantic wings from time to time so that it seemed as if a storm were brewing.

Eventually the young man got up in the middle of the night, went outside the temple, and looked up at the bird, which raised and lowered its wings.

"Why aren't you sleeping?" asked the bird.

"I don't know," the young man replied. "Perhaps it's because I've suffered."

"What exactly have you suffered?"

"My friend and my favorite horse were both killed."

"Is dying so bad?" the bird asked disdainfully.

"Oh, no, great bird, it's not so bad. It's only a farewell. But that's not the reason why I'm sad. The bad thing is that we cannot bury my friend and my splendid horse because we

no longer have any flowers.”

“There are worse things than that,” said the bird, ruffling its feathers indignantly.

“No, bird, there is certainly nothing worse than this. Whoever is buried without a floral tribute cannot be reborn the way his heart desires. And whoever buries his dead people without celebrating the floral tribute will continue to see their shadows in his dreams. You see, I already cannot sleep anymore because my dead people are still without flowers.”

The bird rasped and screeched with its bent beak, “Young boy, you know nothing about suffering if this is all you’ve experienced. Haven’t you ever heard about the great evils? About hatred, murder, and jealousy?”

As he listened to these words, the young man thought he was dreaming. Then he collected himself and said discreetly, “Yes, bird, I can remember. These things are written in the old stories and tales. But they have nothing to do with reality, or perhaps it was that way once upon a time in the world before there were flowers and gods that are good. Who in the world still thinks about such things as that now?”

The bird laughed softly with its raspy voice. Then it stretched itself taller and said to the boy, “And now you want to go to the King, and I’m to show you the way?”

“Oh, you already know!” the young man joyfully exclaimed. “Yes, I’d appreciate it if you’d lead me there.”

Then the great bird floated silently to the ground, spread out its wings without making a sound, and ordered the young man to leave his horse behind and fly with him to the King. In response, the messenger sat down on the bird’s back and prepared himself for the ride.

“Shut your eyes,” the bird commanded, and the young man did as he was told, and they flew through the darkness of the sky silently and softly like the flight of

an owl. The messenger could hear only the cold wind roaring in his ears, and they flew and flew the entire night.

When it was nearly morning, they came to a stop, and the bird cried out, “Open your eyes!” The young man opened his eyes and saw that he was standing on the edge of a forest. Beneath him was a plain that glistened so brightly in the early hours that its light blinded him.

“You’ll find me here in the forest again,” the bird announced, whereupon he shot into the sky like an arrow and soon disappeared into the blue.

A strange feeling came over the young messenger as he began wandering from the forest into the broad plain. Everything around him was so different and changed that he did not know whether he was awake or dreaming. Meadows and trees were just as they were at home. The sun shone, and the wind played in the fresh grass. But there were no people or animals, no houses or gardens to be seen. Rather, it appeared that an earthquake had taken its toll here just as in the young man’s home country, for ruins, broken branches, uprooted trees, wrecked fences, and lost farm equipment were spread all over the ground. Suddenly he saw a dead man lying in the middle of a field. He had not been buried and was horribly decomposed. The young man felt a deep revulsion at the sight of the dead body, and nausea swelled up within him, for he had never seen anything like it. The dead man’s face was not even covered and seemed to have already been ravaged by the birds in its decayed condition. So the young man plucked some green leaves and flowers, and with his face turned away, he covered the visage of the dead man with them.

An inexpressible, disgusting, and stifling smell hung in the tepid air and seemed glued to the entire plain. Again the young man saw a corpse lying in the grass, with ravens circling overhead. There was

also a horse without its head, and bones from humans and animals, and they all lay abandoned in the sun. There seemed to have been no thought of a floral tribute and burial. The young man feared that an incredible catastrophe had caused the death of every single person in this country, and that there were so many dead that he would never be able to pick enough flowers to cover their faces. Full of dread, with half-closed eyes, he wandered farther. The stench of carrion and blood swept toward him from all sides, and an even stronger wave of unspeakable misery and suffering rose from a thousand different piles of corpses and rubble. The messenger thought that he was caught in an awful dream. Perhaps it was a warning from the divine powers, he thought, because his own dead were still without their floral tribute and burial. Then he recalled what the mysterious bird had said to him the night before on the temple roof, and he thought he heard its sharp voice once more claiming, "There are much worse things."

Now he realized that the bird had carried him to another planet and that everything he saw was real and true. He remembered the feeling he had experienced when he had occasionally listened to ghastly tales of primeval times. It was this same exact feeling that he had now—a horrid chill, and behind the chill a quiet, pleasant feeling of comfort, for all this was infinitely far away from him and had long since passed. Everything here was like a horror story. This whole strange world of atrocity, corpses, and vultures seemed to have no meaning or order. In fact, it seemed subject to incomprehensible laws, insane laws, according to which bad, foolish, and nasty things occurred instead of beautiful and good things.

In the meantime he noticed a live human being walking across the field, a farmer or a hired hand, and he ran quickly toward him, calling out. When the young

man approached, he was horrified, and his heart was overcome by compassion, for this farmer was terribly ugly and no longer resembled anything like a child of the sun. He seemed more like a man accustomed to thinking only about himself and to seeing only false, ugly, and horrible things happen everywhere, like a man who lived constantly in ghastly nightmares. There was not a trace of serenity or kindness in his eyes and in his entire face and being, no gratitude or trust. This unfortunate creature seemed to be without the least trace of virtue.

But the young man pulled himself together and approached the man with great friendliness, as though the man had been marked by misfortune. He greeted him in brotherly fashion and spoke to him with a smile. The ugly man stood as though paralyzed, looking bewildered with his large, bleary eyes. His voice was rough and without music, like the growl of a primitive creature. But it was impossible for him to resist the young man's cheerful and trustworthy look. After he had stared at the stranger for a while, the farmer expressed a kind of smile or grin on his rugged and crude face—ugly enough, but gentle and astonished, like the first little smile of a reborn soul that has just risen from the lowest region of the earth.

"What do you want from me?" the man asked the young stranger.

The young man responded according to the custom of his native country: "I thank you, friend, and I beg you to tell me whether I can be of service to you."

When the farmer did not reply but only stared and smiled with embarrassment, the messenger said to him, "Tell me, friend, what is going on here? What are all these horrible and terrible things?" And he pointed all around him.

The farmer had difficulty understanding him, and when the messenger repeated his question, the farmer said,



“Haven’t you ever seen this before? This is war. This is a battlefield.” He pointed to a dark pile of ruins and cried, “That was my house.” And when the stranger looked into his murky eyes with deep sympathy, the farmer lowered them and looked down at the ground.

“Don’t you have a king?” the young man asked, and when the farmer said yes, he asked further, “Where is he?”

The man pointed to a small, barely visible encampment in the distance. The messenger said farewell by placing his hand on the man’s forehead, then departed. In response, the farmer felt his forehead with both hands, shook his heavy head with concern, and stared after the stranger for a long time.

The messenger walked and walked over rubble and past horrifying sights until he arrived at the encampment. Armed men were standing here and there or scurrying about. Nobody seemed to notice him, and he walked between the people and the tents until he found the largest and most beautiful tent, which belonged to the King. Once there, he entered.

The King was sitting on a simple low cot inside the tent. Next to him lay his coat, and behind him in deep shadow crouched his servant, who had fallen asleep. The King himself sat bent over in deep thought. His face was handsome and sad; a crop of gray hair hung over his tan forehead. His sword lay before him on the ground.

The young man greeted the King silently with sincere respect, just as he would have greeted his own King, and he remained standing with his arms folded across his chest until the King glanced at him.

“Who are you?” he asked severely, drawing his dark eyebrows together, but his glance focused on the pure and serene features of the stranger, and the young man regarded him with such trust and friendliness that the King’s voice grew milder.

“I’ve seen you once before,” he said, trying to recall. “You resemble somebody I knew in my childhood.”

“I’m a stranger,” said the messenger.

“Then it was a dream,” remarked the King softly. “You remind me of my mother. Say something to me. Tell me why you are here.”

The young man began: “A bird brought me here. There was an earthquake in my country. We want to bury our dead, but there are no flowers.”

“No flowers?” said the King.

“No, no more flowers at all. And it’s terrible, isn’t it, when people want to bury their dead and the floral tribute cannot be celebrated? After all, it’s important for people to experience their transformation in glory and joy.”

Suddenly it occurred to the messenger that there were many dead people on the horrible field who had not yet been buried, and he held his breath while the King regarded him, nodded, and sighed deeply.

“I wanted to seek out our King and request he send us many flowers,” the messenger continued. “But as I was in the temple on the mountain, a great bird came and said he wanted to bring me to the King, and he carried me through the skies to you. Oh, dear King, it was the temple of an unknown deity on whose roof the bird sat, and this god had a most peculiar symbol on his altar—a heart that was being devoured by a wild bird. During the night, however, I had a conversation with that great bird, and it is only now that I understand its words, for it said that there is much more suffering and many more terrible things in the world than I knew. And now I am here and have crossed the large field and have seen endless suffering and misfortune during this short time—oh, much more than there is in our most horrible tales. So now I’ve come to you, oh King, and I would like to ask you if I can be of any service

to you.”

The King, who listened attentively, tried to smile, but his handsome face was so serious and bitter and sad that he could not.

“I thank you,” he said. “You’ve already been of service to me. You’ve reminded me of my mother. I thank you for this.”

The young man was disturbed because the King could not smile. “You’re so sad,” he said. “Is it because of this war?”

“Yes,” said the King.

The young man had the feeling that the King was a noble man who was deeply depressed, and he could not refrain from breaking a rule of courtesy and asking him a straightforward question: “But tell me, please, why are you waging such wars on your planet? Who’s to blame for all this? Are you yourself responsible?”

The King stared at the messenger for a long time. He seemed indignant and angry at the audacity of this question. However, he was not able to maintain his gloomy look as he peered into the bright and innocent eyes of the stranger.

“You’re a child,” said the King, “and there are things that you can’t understand. The war is nobody’s fault. It occurs by itself, like thunder and lightning. All of us who must fight wars are not the perpetrators. We are only their victims.”

“Then you must all die very easily?” the young man asked. “In my country death is not at all feared, and most people go willingly to their death. Many approach their transformation with joy. But nobody would ever dare to kill another human being. It must be different on your planet.”

“People are indeed killed here,” said the King, shaking his head. “But we consider it the worst of crimes. Only in war are people permitted to kill because nobody kills for his own advantage. Nobody kills out of hate or envy. Rather, they do what the society demands of them. Still, you’d be mistaken if

you believed that my people die easily. You just have to look into the faces of our dead, and you can see that they have difficulty dying. They die hard and unwillingly.”

The young man listened to all this and was astounded by the sadness and gravity in the lives of the people on this planet. He would have liked to ask many more questions, but he had a clear sense that he would never grasp the complex nature of all these obscure and terrible things. Indeed, he felt no great desire now to understand them. Either these sorrowful people were creatures of an inferior order, or they had not been blessed by the light of the gods and were still ruled by demons. Or perhaps a singular mishap was determining the course of life on this planet. It seemed to him much too painful and cruel to keep questioning the King, compelling him to provide answers and make confessions that could only be bitter and humiliating for him. He was sorry for these people—people who lived in gloom and dread of death and nevertheless killed each other in droves. These people, whose faces took on ignoble, crude countenances like that of the farmer, or who had expressions of deep and terrible sorrow like that of the King. They seemed to him to be rather peculiar—and almost ridiculous, to be ridiculous and foolish in a disturbing and shameful way.

There was one more question, however, that the young man could not repress. Even if these poor creatures were backward, children behind the times, sons of a latter-day planet without peace; even if their lives ran their course as a convulsive cramp and ended in desperate slaughter; even if they let their dead lie on the fields and perhaps even ate them—for horror tales were told about such things occurring in primeval times—they must still have a presentiment of the future, a dream of the gods, some spark of soul in them. Otherwise this entire unpleasant world would be only a meaningless mistake.

“Forgive me, King,” the young man said with a flattering voice. “Forgive me if I ask you one more question before I leave your strange country.”

“Go ahead,” replied the King, who was perplexed by this stranger, for the young man seemed to have a sensitive, mature, and insightful mind in many ways, but in others he seemed to be a small child whom one had to protect and was not to be taken seriously.

“My foreign King,” spoke the messenger, “you’ve made me sad. You see, I’ve come from another country, and the great bird on the temple roof was right. There is infinitely more misery here than I could have imagined. Your life seems to be a dreadful nightmare, and I don’t know whether you are ruled by gods or demons. You see, King, we have a legend—I used to believe that it was all fairy-tale rubbish and empty smoke. It is a legend about how such things as war and death and despair were common in our country at one time. These terrible words, which we have long since stopped using in our language, can be read in collections of our old tales, and they sound awful to us and even a little ridiculous. Today I’ve learned that these tales are all true, and I see you and your people dying and suffering what I’ve known only from the terrible legends of primeval times. But now tell me, don’t you have in your soul a sort of intimation that you’re not doing the right thing? Don’t you have a yearning for bright, serene gods, for sensible and cheerful leaders and mentors? Don’t you ever dream in your sleep about another, more beautiful life where nobody is envious of others, where reason and order prevail, where people treat other people only with cheerfulness and consideration? Don’t you know anything about what we at home call music and divine worship and blessedness?”

As he listened to these words, the King’s head sank, and when he raised it again, his face had been transformed, and it glowed

radiantly with a smile, even though there were tears in his eyes.

“Beautiful boy,” said the King, “I don’t know for certain whether you’re a child, a sage, or perhaps a god. But I can tell you that we sense all this and cradle it in our souls, all that you have mentioned. We have intimations of happiness, freedom, and gods. Indeed, we have a legend about a wise man who lived long ago and who perceived the unity of the worlds as harmonious music of the heavenly spheres. Does this answer suffice? You may be, you see, a blessed creature from another world, or you may even be God Himself. Whatever the case may be, you have no happiness in your heart, no power, no will that does not live as a presentiment, a reflection, a distant shadow in our hearts, too.”

Suddenly the King stood up, and the young man was surprised, for the King’s face was soaked in a bright, clear smile for a moment like the first rays of the sun.

“Go now,” he cried to the messenger. “Go, and let us fight and murder! You’ve made my heart soft. You’ve reminded me of my mother. Enough, enough of this, you dear handsome boy. Go now, and flee before the next battle begins! I’ll think of you when the blood flows and the cities burn, and I’ll think of the world as a whole, and how our folly and fury and ruthlessness cannot separate us from it. Farewell, and give my regards to your planet, and give my regards to your deity, whose symbol is a heart being devoured by a wild bird. I know this heart, and I know the bird very well. And don’t forget, my handsome friend from a distant land: When you think of your friend, the poor King in war, do not think of him as he sat on the cot plunged in deep sorrow. Think of him with tears in his eyes and blood on his hands and how he smiled!”

The King raised the flap of the tent with his own hand so as not to wake up the servant, and he let the stranger out. The

young man crossed the plain again steeped in thought, and as he went, he saw a large city blazing in flames on the horizon in the evening light. He climbed over dead people and the decayed carcasses of horses until it grew dark and he reached the edge of the forest.

Suddenly the great bird swooped down from the clouds and took the young man on its wings, and they flew through the night silently and softly like the flight of the owl.

When the young man awoke from a restless sleep, he lay in the small temple in the mountains, and his horse stood before the temple in the wet grass, greeting the day with a neigh. However, the messenger recalled nothing of the great bird and his flight to a foreign planet, nothing of the King and the battlefield. All this remained only as a shadow in his soul, a tiny, obscure pain as if from a sharp thorn. It hurt, just as sympathy hurts when nothing can be done, just as a little unfulfilled wish can torment us in dreams until we finally encounter the person we have secretly loved, with whom we want to share our joy and whose smile we wish to see.

The messenger mounted his horse and rode the entire day until he came to the capital, where he was admitted to the King. And he proved to be the right messenger, for the King received him with a greeting of grace by touching his forehead and remarking, "Your request was fulfilled before I even heard it."

Soon thereafter the messenger received a charter from the King that placed all the flowers of the whole country at his command. Companions and messengers went with him to the villages to pick them up. Joined by wagons and horses, they took a few days to go around the mountain on the flat country road that led back to his province and community. The young man led the wagons

and carts, horses and donkeys, all loaded with the most beautiful flowers from gardens and greenhouses that were plentiful in the north. There were enough flowers to place wreaths on the bodies of the dead and to adorn their graves lavishly, as well as enough to plant a memorial flower, a bush, and a young tree for each dead person, as custom demanded. And the pain caused by the death of his friend and his favorite horse subsided in the young man and turned into silent, serene memories after he adorned and buried them and planted two flowers, two bushes, and two fruit trees over their graves.

Now that he had done what he had desired and fulfilled his obligations, the memory of that journey through the night began to stir in his soul, and he asked his friends and relatives to permit him to spend a day all alone. So he sat under the Tree of Contemplation one whole day and night. There he unfolded, clean and unwrinkled in his memory, the images of all that he had seen on the foreign planet.

One day later on, he went to the Elder, requested a private talk with him, and told him all that had happened.

The Elder sat and pondered everything as he listened. Then he asked, "Did you see all this with your eyes, my friend, or was it a dream?"

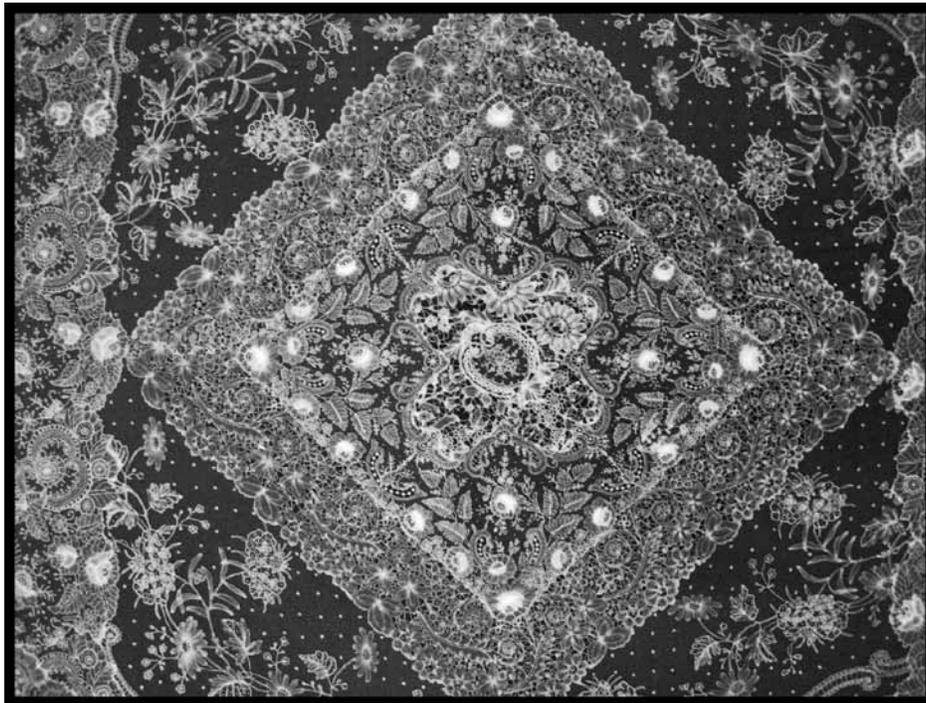
"I don't know," said the young man. "I believe it may have been a dream. However, with your permission, may I say that it seems to me there is hardly a difference whether I actually experienced everything in reality. A shadow of sadness has remained within me, and a cool wind from that other planet continues to blow upon me, right into the midst of the happiness of my life. That is why I am asking you, my honorable Elder, what to do about this."

"Return to the mountains tomorrow," the Elder said, "and go up to the place where you found the temple. The symbol of that

god seems odd to me, for I've never heard of it before. It may well be that he is a god from another planet. Or perhaps the temple and its god are so old that they belong to an epoch of our earliest ancestors, to those days when there are supposed to have been weapons, fear, and dread of death among us. Go to that temple, my dear boy, and bring flowers, honey, and song."

The young man thanked the Elder and followed his advice. He took a bowl of honey, such as was customarily presented to honored guests at the first festival of the bees in early summer, and carried his lute with him. In the mountains he found the place where he had once picked the bluebell, and he found the steep rocky path in the forest that led up the mountain, where he had recently gone on foot leading his horse. However, he could not find the place of the temple or the temple itself, the black sacrificial stone, the wooden pillars, the roof, or the great bird on the roof. He could not find them on that day, nor on the next, and nobody he asked knew anything about the kind of temple that he described. So he returned to his home, and when he walked by the Shrine of Lovely Memories, he went inside and offered the honey, played the lute and sang, and told the god of lovely memories all about his dream, the temple and the bird, the poor farmer, and the dead bodies on the battlefield. And most of all, he told about the King in his war tent. Afterward, he returned to his dwelling with a light heart, hung the symbol of the unity of the world in his bedroom, and recuperated from the events of the past few days in deep sleep. The next morning he helped his neighbors remove the last traces of the earthquake from the gardens and fields, singing as they worked.

* * * * *





Judih Haggai



for no reason
dawn yanks her from bed
to swirl in silence

* * *

Central Park
free skip through dimensions
ageless player

* * *

high velocity
roar and circumstance
while i gently sleep

* * *

mess around
abracadabra
but what is real?

* * *

near the end
eyes puff into sadness
lingering sigh

* * *

the wife
unwraps husband's arms
and slips away

* * *

calendar days
collide into timezones
meanwhile i watch clouds

* * *

friends climb totem
call out to the world
each with message

* * *

early hours
dogs barely bark
at silent birds

* * * * *

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Part Eight

*“When did it matter the most?
When I smiled at another & believed.”*

(xiv.)

There is a maw to the heart of the world & from it I emerge. I come & come, & men will chase at me, grab at my fur, cut me for my blood, my fluids, think themselves masters, shapers & takers, claim a place above others for their kind, racially arrogant enough even to divide among their own numbers, invent whole myth-story-lies to plot their course & a triumph for a few of them. This world a backdrop, a passive & endlessly bountiful resource for their dramas & years.

I know enough of men to empathize with their hopeless efforts to build perennial crusts around their loins, their emotions, none escape this world, or some world, bones will burn or bury somewhere—

There is a maw to the heart of this world, you will find it everywhere there is a far edge, a man, his idea, a shattering storm. The world is no more still than any of its creatures, its musics the transformations none will resist—

*They willed me to understand, for all of this world’s complex creation, they willed me to **walk as a man**. Bear a man’s senses, have his dreams, his lusts, his fears, his two hands two eyes two legs—They willed me caged in the great edifices of his constructed homes & languages—they wanted me to understand how men loved & loathed the plentys of the world, how they felt each as a kind of . . . fruit fallen a little way from the tree, each among other fallen fruits, the tree in sight, the earth & grass beneath, the feeling of live but finite power each in his skin—they willed me from the world’s maw to emerge & go among them—contrived me to suffer with their sufferings—*

Mercy left me able to survive, & mercy alone. Between my iterations I would retreat to this woods, these now well-known oaks, I crouch close to them, I tremble years among men & many more returned here, wounds none other can know—

Close my eyes & I am again the near-blind man, my remaining sight still fluttering with lilac & lily, moving with their scented light, scratching up a spark by glint & petal, behold my silhouettes shaped like a God-thing—their word for a piece of the world that contains the world, gestates the world, guards & punishes & directs the world—

Open my eyes & I am the scrawny prick-hard singer, finding my music beneath the night’s sweeping skirts, insisting the oldest idols totter forward & people my lyrics, grind bloodless hips new with the next hour’s

*unspent semen, its high crackling juice, command the world to cloak in men's emotional garb, **world feel like men**, suffer like men, see with two eyes, five fingers each hand, a heart ticking down in time—how else explain his hard prick, his sickening blood?*

Close again & now the tall professor, behold my sepia-washed pictures, their hard press at your jaw & shoulders to justify your own sanity, resist the years-long game, in this man's form I feel able to breathe some nights, the world huddles some near me to comfort—

Again & now the dark man kneeling with my horn & shredding time, an anger in my blood blown out in song after song, yearning the love for every fruit, we are fallen from one tree, & our bed is grass under sun & stars, oh yes please, mercy, mercy, mercy

I am quiet this morning near my oaks, feeding, being fed, believing my sacrifice will be enough this time—men will finally bow & know, then stand & walk a new way—

(xv.)

There've been times, moments, places, I've relaxed, & begun to believe. Winter lights on a long boulevard, a hidden shade of cool salmon over low hills. Even battlefields on moonless nights, dying & among the dying. We are safe, my brothers, this is all home, we shall not be abandoned tonight or ever . . .

We danced the courtyard the night before you left, again, you showed me your whys, what rotting, what still pink, I had learned you were like me, molded & emerged from the maw, because I walked as a man & was lonely. You were to comfort & suffer with me. I was never sure if you were contrived from hope or desperation for the world—

Your eyes crackled with fear of want, not mine but your own. You touch my beard as though a pet, I tangle your hair with my fingers, wish again to know. Wish like men do, lustful with questions, violent with answers.

I remember that night, it was three or four hundred. You were one, or several, as was I. We'd fought for kings we'd never meet, never touch, & never know. We'd dance & I'd showed you that boulevard, those trees, your smile, long & it lingers.

As we live, so we die, so many memories, more forgotten. I writhe among my oaks this quiet morning & so remember.

It was a time for believing, my maps, my uniform in first light. The many half-remembered lovers in photographs.

We walked down so many empty streets together, looking on, looking back, I have not seen you in so long, I do not see you directly anymore, I know you better & clearer now, what I am, what you are, what all this is & is & is & is not. But there is no final thing to know.

(xvi.)

We walked the One Woods together in my many dreams, you singing songs in your own strange tongue, its clicks-clicks & noise-noises, the way pink & blue & yellow would burst from the trunks & bushes around us.

It is always dusk, when the light blurs & lingers, when a few stars peep out in the sky—

It is always dusk, when the music of the air begins to loosen, to smolder, to crackle, when want starts to unbuckle the many bound worlds of men—

It is always dusk, & the light shifts its palette, every shade & hue will strike differently than by sun, both harder & softer, go figure—

It is always dusk & what is man upon me recedes as what is Beast within me comes & comes—

It is always dusk, you are fanged too, the night is moving in deep blood & you slip in as though a swimmer a cool rapid stream—

It is always dusk & the certainties of the sun hold more frantic until deemed useless to the hours, again, until what is knowing now by shine & strum & blaze—

*It is always dusk I will never have you nearer than now—
I will never have you at all—*

Then I wake. And you are far, as we agreed, & I am silent again. You leave me signs of songs in scattered clearings, spears of your colors struck into fallen logs. I read them as they melt, sigils none other would know. Pressings, pressings.

There is something you would have me do that I hesitate. You believe I was once a man, or perhaps could be again, perhaps some better kind of man than there be. You believe we played too close to the Eternals in our drive to control, or save, or not surrender, to shape, to break through their powers & time itself. I don't know. I am ashamed how much I do not know.

But your songs begin to convince me, & I wish you near again. The sacrifices we'll need to crack the maw will come soon. They will not survive. They will fuel the transformation. We will together blow through the world. Are we supposed to? Will it be any better?

My only doubt is the girl not a girl who approaches again. I wonder if nobody has to die. I wonder why I must choose. I find your songs in more & more clearings. I retreat to my oaks more & more because thus.

I stand now where we first met, in the Tangled Gate, so long ago, where we came upon each other & knew we were of the same thing. But this is neither waking nor dream. I stand here to call down the stars from the sky & find among them a truth to hold & pursue.

I swap out handfuls, looking for the words of light I need, crush & fold & block their heat even unto themselves in my relentless need.

*When they speak, to guide my steps hereon, it is not men's tongue nor your spectral one. Their message is clear: **bind the girl, consume the dancers. Break the maw & absorb its every last dripping of power. She awaits.***

I am helpless to you. Yet I must come & go & breathe apart & away from you. I must having neared you now go far. I don't know. I don't know.



Maybe there is something in your colors as they melt away that nudges me, a sparkle, a tremble, a dripping hue I want to chase more than it all.

*Maybe the stars are not all, or their message is incomplete. I don't know. **I don't know.** But I will to.*

(xvii.)

Maya sometimes is able to sleep again in the caves, among her friends. It starts to happen when they bring to her a yellow pillow, the softest of soft, who knows a good joke or two, & the pillow's partners who tend one toward blue & one toward purple. They seem to be called Dream Pillows & they are soon in her grasp even as her many friends cluster close to her.

Exhaustion absorbs many hours of sleep for her, though there is even so a singing, someone kind & tending, near, singing.

Dreams are slow to come, but like tidal waters they do approach. Morning sunlight, tidal waters. Morning sunlight, tidal waters, the sense of a path. Morning sunlight, tidal waters, the sense of a path, *follow along*, Maya, seems to sing the voice. *See what there is to see.*

The singing voice retains for her the morning sunlight, the tidal waters, even as she begins to move along the path, to see what there is to see. Eventually there are lilies, & a bench, twisted up from the earth of vines & stones, perhaps still of the earth.

Maya sits, waits, wonders if her friends are near, or who else.

[You first came in lilies & soft morning sunlight. You came in the puzzles & formulas men called dreams. I sniffed you, twice, but did not know if I could think you friend.

[You saw me & you jerked a bit. And you smiled. And yet you were careful. And yet careful had not been in your nature till you saw me.

[I sat near you & tried to look more like a man, push myself out thusly. And I tried to speak like a man, but you shook your head, no, in this Woods there is truth.

[We played a game that morning, tap the air & loose its notes, collect the notes & shape a thing. Gently blow & lure its colors. Nod, exchange.

[Last round you conjured a small white bunny, pink nose, mesmerizing eyes, tranquil but intent expression. I held it, felt its pulse.]

Maya shifts uneasily, starts, only the singing lures her back, all is well, return, all is well, return

[You shook your head when I made to clap, give the Creature back to the air, as was common. Your smile bid me keep.

[Did we meet again? Several times? Then fewer? Then all I had of you was the White Bunny, who would sniff twice & be gone for days.

[Soon I only had soft mornings trying to remember the place where we met & played our game. Where I did

not need to conjure as man to please your company.]

Maya wakes & looks directly at me. Every Creature is clustered still near about her, her Dream Pillows close. The great cavern seems to light & dim by need.

“Yes?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What is it, Maya?”

Her eyes purple out on me, she is thinking as wholly as she can.

“You know what next?”

“Sort of?”

“Who was he?”

“The Beast. In somewhat a Man’s form.”

She nods.

“Do we leave here?”

“I think so. Eventually.”

She nods again. Wishing she was asking better questions.

Finally, a better question. “Do I come from here?”

“Maybe. Or the sea. Or Emandia.”

Nods. Tries again. “Why does this feel like home?”

“The Creature Cavern?”

“All of it.”

“The Gate?”

Nods but a sincere yes.

“I don’t know what to do with that, Maya.”

“It matters.”

“Yes.”

She smiles, heart full, & settles again among her Pillows & Creatures.

She sleeps, she rests, her dreams just a soft wordless covering upon her.

Nod, recede, courtyard has given me gift of words again.

(xviii.)

The White Bunny returns, sniffs twice, settles in my lap, as though I am a man, as though I am a rare & trusted man. We still together, we watch, the morning among oaks is full of small movements & light sounds. Her long ears rest on my arms, as though I really have arms.

I begin to remember. I am a fist of men by a map, I am a volcano burying all, I am many fish on many decks, breathing hard, breathing last. I am paintings in castles & in closets. The White Bunny nudges me return.

We sleep. I dream like a man & yet. The White Bunny looks up at me & I follow. Faster than any man’s legs, holding a . . . white thread? Through oaks whose leaves remain despite winter light, through places dark & unfinished in the Gate.

(A sloppiness? That’s the human word. They would lose form in these places, though I do not. I am made of the same stuff. Men not quite. Or maybe truer is: men less & less. I wonder if the not-quite-girl would.)

Now walking, no longer a man’s form. A girl’s slender carriage, wispy torso (like hers?), & the Bunny is

waiting near a hole in the earth. Though I am too large yet we crawl through. A long long scabble in the dark. My thread gives out but I continue to follow.

We come to an ancient structure, burst through, a half-fallen wall, stand within. Words in my mind say: "The Carnival Room is near." I am afraid, I am not afraid. Which is truer? I see my face in many reflections around me: hard, soft, hers, his, no body's, all's.

The White Bunny hops quickly, ears flashing, & I follow on my girl's light legs through rooms of detritus & decay, at last to a room where we stop. She looks up at me, raises her pink nose, & again, & I enter.

I hear cacophony, song. I see doors mounted on walls, beckoning. A tunnel into the darkness, where its long wheeled carriage extends. Two yellow-skinned brothers observe me, plucking stringed instruments, songs of laughter.

A tiny creature at my feet, black & white, gnattering at me in . . . clicks-clicks & noise-noises? I am delighted. I wish to go. I look back but the White Bunny is gone. There is a black thread.

I follow the black thread, feeling the girl in me recede, feeling larger & more helpless, burst choking & breathless from the earth.

The return is swift, there is no adventure left. I wake & don't look down. No thread, black or white. No Bunny. Something wishes to convince me otherwise. Something would have me save what I would destroy.

What am I? What am I made of? What am I here to do?

(xix.)

The Gate-Keeper thrashes hard in her arms, she cannot tell if he is awake or asleep. She's been losing something lately here. A sense of wants, of loyalties. It began with the King, in his arms. She was assigned to reach him, to seduce him, to persuade him to destroy his Island exile in a total assault on the Mainland.

It was by the Gate-Keeper's will for awhile. The cameras were there, like sweat on the wall of a humid room.

He was violent with me. He bit me. He held me down when I was not resisting. He could not calm down enough to enjoy my body with him.

He kept me in a private chamber. It was lit by candles & curtained heavily. Our bed very big. I would stay there without him. The Gate-Keeper did not object though he was inly disturbed. A tremor anyway.

Maybe it turned the morning I followed the Princess after she danced. The King had no interest in watching me dance after. So I didn't. I watched her dance for him, her dreams rendered in patterns, stones & sand flying. What would happen? I don't know.

But I followed her when she dressed, when she wandered away.

She didn't. It was not vague. I learned this. She would find her way to the Tangled Gate. Never enter but near it. I would hide & watch her. She might lie before the Gate on the ground looking up. She might dance but not as she did for the King. Not as a young female supplicating, offering—no. Before the Gate, the Princess manifest in a different being entirely. Powerful, very powerful.

So I waited until she trailed away, eventually, & I approached.

A massive structure. Looked ancient beyond ancient. And above in the center, very center, were the words “*for those lost*”

I watched. I waited. I saw not far within the Gate was a Fountain, also very old, partly fallen down.

Was I restricted? Had the King or the Gate-Keeper said a word? No. Neither had said anything to me. Why would the Princess not go in? Had she been forbidden?

I didn't know. But something, *oh something*, I walked in. Nothing titanic occurred. I approached the Fountain.

The sound of the water tinkling in it like a sweet song. I sat on its outer lip & listened for a long time.

Should I drink? *Should I drink?*

I feel I should. *I want to.*

Yes I guess I will. *I will.*

I drink. I drink deeply. The more I drink, the more I wish the Princess was with me, in my arms, drinking too. I wish the King was with me. Naked with him but calm. His eyes lick up & down my legs, bite at my shoulders & breasts. I urge him drink from my cupped hands & he does, he calms. *He calms.*

I blink. He's not with me. It *felt* like he was. Here at this Fountain. But he's not here.

I vow to get him this drink. That very night, as he roars angry from his day into our chamber, to pillage me for hours, I pause him, enough, just enough, after some initial pillaging, to drink from a silver cup of water. He drinks. He drinks all.

He calms. He *calms*. He sits with me. He touches the fresh & fading bruises on my chest. He sighs. He looks at me & sighs.

“Tell me, my lord.”

“Tell you?” he says hoarsely.

“Tell me all.”

He nods. “I don't know that I can.”

“Try.”

“That drink. It was from the Fountain.”

I nod.

“This Island,” he starts & stops.

I gentle into his grasp.

“We came here years ago. My brothers & I did. It was practically all forest. A strange, beautiful, pale woods.” Silence. “Only the Gate was otherwise.”

He groans. Leans close against me, almost shivering. I gather our blanket around us. He doesn't say more. Leaves me in the night but I am covered. I am kissed.

The Gate-Keeper stares at me now. He is not awake. I learned this after the first incident.

“What are you?”

“I am the dead girl you found in the surf.”

“What are you?”

“I share your bed when it pleases you.”

“What are you?”

“I am seducing the King to invade the Mainland.”

“What are you?”

“I am no longer seducing the King because we have drunk the waters of the Fountain.”

“What are you?”

“He will tell me the truths of this Island.”

“What are you?”

I say nothing & he falls back, & he does not later remember.

Then, acceleration. As though pieces snap together one & all & there is a thrust.

Neither Maya nor Christina distinctly, the Princess enters the Tangled Gate. This is what it comes to, if you’ve followed this long. The Gate tugs finally & all comes.

The Fountain, time to drink, it sparkles, it *sparkles*.

It tastes like remembering. But how? But so.

Christina remembers the farmhouse, the farmer, the man & his boys. I’ve thought of this before, I’ve remembered it. What’s left?

It was the farmhouse itself. There were too many rooms. They were too big. They led down, where? I didn’t know to see them.

Maya remembers too many times with the Creatures, it makes no sense. Do they all come from the sea, like her?

Having drunk with both hands, we calm. The Fountain is among trees as old. We think: good men built this Fountain long ago but they *did not build the Gate*.

Left or right? No way on but choose. Which way in childly dreams? Which way as my finger traced the Architect’s maps?

I asked him once. Let a small pout loose in my lips, I’d noticed that would move him a little by my preference.

His eyes slid my face & led me with him down the swoop of my garment & we lingered & enjoyed until one of his fingers tapped his head, another his heart, a third his nose, but twice.

We think of the Pensionne, our adopted home, miss it fresh, leave it again, sniff twice with this feeling, & choose left. The great walls of vine & stone, twice my height, the sky above the blue of my teacher’s eyes? The White Tiger in the garden whose apprentice I was, by whom I learned to tender the world & its shoots.

I think of the box of colored threads given me, more than once. By that man, Nathaniel, in his store, as he directed me & Christina & Kinley to the Red Bag.

But here too. Years ago. He held me, the Architect, on the day I left the Island, when he made me go. He gestured to a loose rock behind our couch, said, “that rock knows more of time than men can

reckon.” He sang—sang!—to me, “*the many kinds of time*, the binds of time, & how it looses to the air.” I found it there when I returned to the Island (had I left? Haven’t I always been here?)

Here it is, one box from several paths. Its legend: “*for those lost.*” Really? Maybe.

I select the green thread. It is labeled “*Recover something dear.*” I return it to the Fountain, tie the end of the thread to a stony hook. Begin again. Whatever this is now. Still his film, his Island set?

I move slowly at first, as though learning to walk. Occasionally there is a breach in the walls, not decay, not time. The ruin of angers & blows. The ground remains always gentle beneath my bare feet. I am awake. We are awake. *We hurry. We dance. We remember.*

I round a turn & recover something dear. My friends! From behind the wall in my bedchamber, discovered only in childly dreams. Too many to count. I think they’ve all come. They crow & cry, click & howl. Nothing to forgive in how I left them. Never was.

(Suddenly: my obsession with the Architect became overwhelming, my new woman’s blood crying out blindly to be near him always. Their warnings unheard. That last birthday party. I came as Maya, left as Christina. But, still, nothing now to forgive.)

“Christina.”

“Maya.”

“Don’t go.”

“I won’t. I’m here.”

“This is for all of us.”

“Yes.”

“And Kinley too.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know what all that was but this is what we’re supposed to do. Stay with me.”

“I’m here. We’re together, Maya. I’m not sure how.”

“We’re sharing the Princess now.”

“Like a bed?”

“Yes.”

“Where is she?”

“She’s what we’re doing until we leave.”

“Oh.”

(xx.)

They lead me to a clearing where all may sit, perch, float calm upon the air. There is no gap of time between us & yet the story to be told. I have returned to the Island, bid so by my dreams, they wait quietly & wish to know my path.

“I know these are more your friends than mine, the way the script divided us up, Maya, but let me lead right now. I think I know what to tell.”

“OK.”

“There was to be war with the Mainland. The King my father was ready to return & claim again his throne. I listened from my hidden place to his counsels with soldiers & ministers. It would be bad. But my brother’s death while peace-making had led through years to a sympathy, a willingness to take on the apocalyptic zealots who occupied the King’s capitol, prepared it ruinously for end-times.”

Maya nudges me to look to our side. Cameras! What determines when he can find us? There's something to this. I nod to her alone, the Creatures wait, listen intently, I resume.

There is not even the twitching of a nose as I speak. A stray wind raises fur here & there, a few green spikes, royal purple feathers. These Creatures are aware what dark cities men dwell in their homes & hearts, & they would wish to keep me near instead if they could.

"The King's plan was a secret, well hid behind the sacrifice of virgin dancers presumed to keep him satisfied. The zealots believed this kind of offering to be sufficient, that we exiled pagans used the sacrifices to appease the Eternals, maintain our ancient practices but contained on our Island prison. When the final days of fire came, they believed we would thus be easy for their wraithful savior to find & annihilate."

The trees are bare here, it looks like winter. A glint of water in the distance. All lovely. I find this telling hard, & sad. Somehow I know these words thoroughly upon speaking them.

"Does he use a script?"

"I don't know. I don't think Kinley believes he does."

"Does he know we're both here?"

"I don't think so. Just me, Maya."

"The Creatures know. But they are not upset. They like you too."

Christina-as-Princess almost laughs, but doesn't. Talks on.

"The Architect had arranged my escape. I would go with the freed dancers & leave the Island forever. He knew, & told me in those last days, that the Beast did not consume them, in truth bore them far away, though he knew not whereto. But this time it would not happen."

Several of my friends join me in my place in the grass. Next to me, my lap, near.

"He took charge of the delivery of the dancers from the boat to the Gate, & then the Beast. He gave me the black thread & hid me nearby. When they all came, I appeared & demanded to inspect them.

"The Hero among them was easy to spy out. The Architect had told me we would work with him to make our escape. As our soldiers watched, I knocked him down, hit him about his head, cursed him. Among all that, I slipped him the black thread, him smiling at me & stroking my arm. I whispered him the words that would allow them to follow the thread & return safely. There was no choice. The King would watch some of their progress from the Architect's Tower, his spy-glass."

Now more of them are nearer me, in my lap. Fur of violet, cream, crimson. Many bears. Three giraffes. The White Bunny, of course, & her fellow tenders.

"They love you, Maya."

"They love us as their Princess."

"I think they know more than that. You are one of them in some way."

"Finish, please, Christina. Just finish. Those cameras spook me."

Resume. "We left on darkest night on the boat arranged by the Architect. We sailed away without notice. The Hero commanded the ship & all seemed to credit him our escape." I trust my friends & go on. "When he came to my cabin in the night, I had more words from the Architect to repel him.

"Then he left some of us on another island. We woke from a night of celebration on its beach, but there were only half a dozen of us remaining. Our cups had been poisoned. I was relieved. The others were terrified & looked at me."

A voice in my head, in words not English but I understand them: "You led them back safely to the cities of men?"

I nod. "There was a boat eventually. I told them of our shipwreck. I was no longer the Princess from



the Prison Island of pagans. I was a wealthy traveler & scholar from far lands, & my party followed me in this deception for our safety.”

“You are tired.”

“A little more. Eventually we returned to the Mainland. The War was over, but no victor. I chose to keep my exile & disguise even when my companions left me, returned to their homes.”

I lay back, finish. “The Pensionne I came to, I think it was the last gift from the Architect. They knew me true & cared for me. I thought I’d found a new home but they were simply letting me rest, letting me wish to return here again, if I chose.”

Exhausted. They lead me to a safe place, bundle me to sleep among them. I feel most the child again, feel their love so simple, so vast.

Perhaps asleep now, we talk.

“They didn’t want to leave me.”

“Who?”

“The ones I was abandoned with on that island.”

“Oh. Who were they?”

[They didn’t tell the Princess fully who they were—but they were not a random number—their task was to keep her company & safe until she arrived at the Pensionne—there was nothing random in any of them—nothing at all—the Architect had arranged all of this. Whether she would return to the Island eventually was the only matter he could not control.]

(xxi.)

Fell asleep wanting to tell more, more than all, I wake & most of my friends are gone, back home safe. Only three of my dearest remain & will guide me, our dangers shared, like always. The White Bunny, the gnattering little imp, the turtle who wasn’t a turtle.

“What is it with you & the White Bunny, Maya?”

“Just don’t call me Alice.”

“Haha. No. But something.”

“I don’t know. We’re close.”

“I feel it.”

My thread is played out & I guess to pick a new one, when I hear music & occasionally a man’s sweet voice. My friends press me to follow this music, leave my thread be. “He will lead us. He is the Traveling Troubadour.”

We follow without seeing him. His ringing music alone leads us. I think about the Architect & wonder if this is the way.

“We have to find him.”

“I don’t think we *have* to.”

“What?”

“I mean, this story is about you, us, & him as much as anything.”

“They knew about him at the Pensionne.”

“Is this more script in your head?”

“Yes. They didn’t seem to like him so much. It’s like I came back with their warning in my head. Like I didn’t really know what he was.”

“But you came back. Here we are.”

“You love Kinley, Christina. You know him. Don’t let anything confuse you.”

“You love him too.”

“Not like you do. Not close.”

The bright music starts to fade but my friends do not hurry us on through the twists & turns. We let the music fade. I sit beneath a tall oak. Realize I feel no hunger or tiredness. My friends sit near me. We wait. The day passes. We nap lightly curled together.

The Architect, Kinley, walks up to me, takes my hand. He does not smile. Many cameras. Glad to see me. He leads me further along, faster & faster, my friends hurriedly keeping up. We come to a black cave in the earth, silent, seems impenetrable.

He looks me hard. Gestures in. A second time. “Go. Now.” I want to say something but Maya restrains us. I reluctantly gather my friends & we enter the cave, walk slowly in.

Then it gets lighter. For a moment more is revealed than ever before. It’s too much how raw creation & dissolution both are, how the Universe generates worlds & lives on those worlds to eventually feed upon them all. None escape. *None escape.* I cry out.

And wake. The details of it all fading. Kinley is gone. If Kinley it was. I stand now beneath the oak.

Playing it through, cameras rolling, I consider my collection of threads. Maya nudges me & I select the crimson one. “*For greater understanding.*”

We move along again, the White Bunny seeming to hurry us now. The Imp is gnattering crazily as she skitters along, the turtle quiet, not a turtle.

We are coming to something, my bones feels its jittering power. Very close.

(xxii.)

I come to you again. I remember you. We contrived Creatures from the air, like those I travel with. *I remember you now.*

You are an old story, far older than men, old as the earth.

You were created long before men.

To walk the earth. One, none, many.

You were not given rules by which to abide. A mortality. An I among many.

You shifted, & did not die. And then you did.

And then you lived on.

Now you are unable to tell me but something troubling. Danger not to you, but to me, us, men? I cannot understand, you are trying to be gentle.

You place in my mind the image of the Architect’s Tower & give me a little nudge. Suddenly, I *treble*

in time. Tower, tree, starcraft, collapsing back, undoing.

Oh. Again, here, my friends sniff me twice & wait. That cave. The crimson thread in my hand. *I was in there. I think I know.*

(xxiii.)

There are many magicks in the world, & I watch you walk among several. Your friends gird you powerfully with their love, their deep roots in the earth. The cave you entered to know better is more of a danger, but I cannot get near. The script lets me only so close.

I follow as wind, as glare on water, as winter leaves. Waiting for a moment to give you word.

I spy your blue bag & make a move. Affix myself as hummingbird & wait. I listen to your chatter with your friends. They want you to return to their caves where they can protect you.

I can't let them persuade you. *We have to escape the Gate.* I begin to hum near your ear, risk this, you look around, but nothing. Your friends sniff twice & I am exposed.

But as the Architect, not Kinley. The script seems to control what we do. Cameras are filming but the Creatures pay no attention. I wonder how they can help. Are they subtly crafty, gaming enough to exploit this moment?

We sit. The tiny one, our friend who helped us escape, comes up to me, gnattering crazily. She enters my mind, pushes things around. Everything filmed but the moment when she disappears somewhere in my mind, bites my palm, cackles crazily & again, will be my signal to come, then I cry out for the Princess to retrieve her. Even as deep as this, she only retrieves because she loves the Princess & chooses to. I truly do not know what these Creatures are.

The White Bunny stares me intently, & I strangely calm, lean back, nearly dream. She does not press or pry but wearies me & again I whimper for the Princess who not for the first time resembles a bunny too.

The turtle not a turtle does nothing to my mind, sits my lap, guarding the Princess even now against me.

Choicelessly, I say, "I have no such friends as these. I did not come to harm you. *Please believe me.*"

You stand, bid your friends wait, we walk apart from them.

"You asked me to find you here."
I grimace. "You're greatly needed."
You nod obscurely.

There is a silence between us. The Princess no longer needs a teacher. You pick up your blue bag without a word. Your friends let me follow at a distance, & I know the helpless fear of ordinary men.

(xxiv.)

The script compels me to talk. “You are not what you seem, a Princess, a usual young woman. You are from a far place, now gone. A beautiful place that was rotted, used up, by men not unlike those here you know. You were sent here, when small, to change the path, make the world’s path elsewhere.

“They could not know when or where you would land, but they gave you what powers they could. To dream powerfully, to treble in time. Their gifts. The blue bag you carry is my gift to you, given when you left the Island, lined with power, protection. Fewer limits on your mind & body.

“I am learned, I see through shells, but I am just a man. I come from a time men have ruined, & it half-rots, & I will not return. I’ve come beyond the Dreaming to find you, because you are thread out of time, & this Tangled Gate bears your way.”

She & her friends remain still. Her friends think I sniff wrong, but, still, I’ve come to help.

She speaks. “What do we do?”

“Pick a thread.”

“How will I know?”

For a moment I’m tempted to reassure here, to tell her she *will* know, that her will & instinct, the love of her friends, my counsel, the deep good power in the heart of the world, will easily prove enough. But I don’t.

“There are many threads in your box. Choose one, & we’ll go.” It’s not much of an answer. She’s still waiting, as she often did when I taught her. Stubborn for whatever words unsaid. I try.

“The world is mysterious enough for us, & it cares for us in its own ways. But the world belongs to something else. You’d stare yourself blind into the sun, & not know, not be sure, not able to return & use what little you’d kept for your survival.” I stop. Enough. She nods. Motions for me to near her. Brings out the beautiful box from her blue bag.

Her friends sniff & do not seem to like this box more than they like me. I don’t suppose they would but they remain silent. She studies the threads remaining, stares up into the sky for a moment, then selects the purple thread. “A wish to heal.”

We stand. She hands me the end of the thread. Shakes her head at her friends. “When you feel a tug, follow.” And then she goes.

(xxv.)

A turn & I have left my friends & the Architect, save for the purple thread. The path ahead falters & I find myself climbing over debris of vines & stones. Soon beyond the remains of the walls but strangely shaped stones keep the paths. They are placed at equal distances.

Then I discover who is placing them & think me dreaming. It is the White Tiger from the Pensionne! My old friend. I worry this strange place will render us strangers to each other but he turns, sees me, & bows his head low for my embrace, as ever before. For a moment gone from wonder, happy, simple knowing.

“He will help us, Maya.”

“He was your Creature?”

“Stop laughing. He was my teacher there. I think something else too. Something the Gate-Keeper won't get to know. It's not in the script.”

“What?”

“When I was younger, I had a trainer. I was smart, that's dangerous & hard for a girl.”

“Yes.”

“I think he was my trainer then, too.”

“What does that mean? We're just playing the Princess now.”

“I don't know, Maya. But something, for sure. We need Kinley to figure out this weirder shit.”

She continues. “They gave me work in the great garden of the Pensionne when I arrived there. I had brought no treasure to offer but one of my traveling companions said the Pensionne was generous to poor travelers.

“My room was small but with a tall window for sun & stars. They let me sleep many days until I was ready.

“There was work in the kitchen too, after the dinners, the one meal of the day not nuts & fruits. It was good work to lose my thoughts in, the water's hot breath calmed me, kept my focus simple to the task. When others joined, there were songs.

“Some were war songs, which I didn't like. Even the ones about the King my father, a returning hero, half a god in his armor.”

“Did you see him? You? We?”

Christina laughs. “Pronouns. No, I kept hidden all the years I was there. It was for the best. I kept track but did not join in.”

“The Pensionne was far from the War & bloodspill, but there was a greed for news of the battles, a hunger for violence against the zealots who had stolen & ruined so much. A devilling wish to burn them all.”

The Gate-Keeper uses my thoughts as a voice-over to a series of images, scenes of war & death. All the while I am embracing my friend & he is looking at Maya curiously within me.

“He knows you're the Creature girl.”

“But he trained you!”

“We're never going to sort this through, are we?”

“No. Just pass through it.”

There was more often peace in the garden. It became my domain from before light to afternoon. Most days I saw only the faces of the many blooms, heard only shaking leaves in the wind. I tempted sometimes to dance at dawn as I had on the Island. But my dreams rarely followed me into waking, & my feet rarely pressed me to dance. I did my work. I was quiet.

Then I noticed the White Tiger one day while I was scrubbing dishes. I asked the others & they laughed, said he appeared to a few but none too close, & caused no damage. I wanted to know more but they didn't know or wouldn't tell.

That night I dreamed of the Architect in his Tower, & I asked him. Tapped his head, his heart, sniffed twice, but I stomped.

“No. *Tell me.*”

“I don’t have to. He will himself.”

“He’s not an ordinary beast.”

“He’s a tender. You’ll be his apprentice.”

“A tender?”

He smiled at me, warm & sweet, I practically swooned like a gossip, & was gone.

“Fucking Kinley.”

“A tender? The White Bunny is a tender.”

“And the tiny one too.”

“What does it mean? What did he teach you?”

I don’t remember how we finally met, or most of what we spoke of our many days. I remember his beautiful white fur with its deep black stripes. I remember his blue eyes.

Eventually I began to dream again, & dance alone at dawn those last mornings there.

You feel real as I embrace you now, feel the soft growl through your perfect coat. I show you my thread & try to explain, but you push close, your face to mine, you make me look better. Your blue eyes are now flecked with the same purple as my thread! No longer master & pupil, we will go together again.

(*xxvi.*)

We push stones into place, restoring paths to a great length of the Tangled Gate. Sometimes we separate & work at different paths. Sometimes it feels like Christina & I are separate, working & helping separately. I, we, worry he’d be gone again, like he never was, but he finds us, me, us, head down for our embrace, blue eyes flicking purple, & we go on. Each of us, Maya, Christina, on a side of our White Tiger friend. I wonder how. She wonders how. No hows.

Eventually we come again to the One Woods, it is never far here, & walk among its great trees. My purple thread is running low, & we have to decide, tug & wait, or go on?

When I reach the end, we stop. I think of the Architect, Kinley, & my dear friends back there, love them, adore him, sniff twice, & look at our tender friend. *Really look.* His fur a wildly bright white, his stripes a moonless night’s dark. White & black.

“Like my threads?”

He rears back & roars with wonderful joy.

I tie the purple thread to a low tree branch as Christina watches. We together half bury the box of threads among the stones at the tree’s base. Tug. Hope our clue is clear to them.

Our tiger bows low & together we mount & ride him. Now we can go at his pace, which is swift as my White Bunny’s. *We ride.*

The landscape blurs & other things among the trees emerge. Strange buildings, vehicles. Metallic ships

up in the sky, shifting form over & over.

I feel purpose without words. A sense of hurry. Stronger than ever, a wish to heal.

Then out of the One Woods, up over a hill & below a place I should know but don't. But Christina does. She cries out.

Several buildings close together among wide fields, but these buildings are half-fallen probably deserted.

Our friend slows his pace, becomes hesitant. Sniffs twice.

Ab. I pat him twice, he kneels, we dismount. Christina nearer to me than ever before.

"Here again. I am here again."

Our friend does not go further, I won't let him. His electric blue eyes loving, concerned, unknowing. Loving. But they are his blue again. I take Christina's hand tightly as he reluctantly bounds away.

(*xxvii.*)

We sit down in this overgrown grassy field some distance from the farm buildings.

I wonder where the cameras are or what they would show. But it doesn't matter.

"Clover-dale."

"That's what it's called?"

She nods. Looks at me. "I lived there for a little while. I don't know exactly how long. Maybe months."

I nod. "How old were you?"

"I was an orphan. Or something. I'd come from somewhere to there & I don't remember hardly anything."

"And then you moved?"

"I ran away. Someone . . . helped me. More than one really."

She looks grey & withered. This place confuses her, upsets her. I look at the buildings closer, & realize with a start that I seem to know them too. She talks on.

"A part of me is still there, Maya."

"A part?"

"That's why Kinley & I came here. He's keeping a part of me there."

"Who? Kinley?"

"No. The scientist. I think he's protecting me somehow. Kinley thinks he won't let go." She smirks, a moment of the familiar Christina. "Stupid jealous idiot."

Her words *mean* more to me than they should. They seem crazy but for an old memory, pushing up, oh. *Ohh.*

We look at each other, maybe deeper than we have before. "Did we know each other then, Christina?"

"I don't know but maybe."

"Who else helped you?"

"It was a girl. She didn't look exactly like you. Mostly she whispered in my ear."

"How did she help?"

"The first night. He was going to have sex with me. I mean, I was brought to replace his dead wife. But she whispered in my ears to sing. And it put him to sleep. Every night I would do it. Then I wrote



to the scientist because I read his essay in a magazine. He would send me songs because I didn't know many. Then she told me to leave, that she was going to destroy the place. I had to go. So I did." By now both are wide-eyed at what they are both remembering.

"Christina, it wasn't me exactly. It was my friend, Samantha."

"She said she was Maya. She was beautiful," Maya nods. "She is."

"But why help me?"

"I think that has to do with where you are from."

"And how I don't remember?"

"Christina, I think you're from the sea, like I am."

"The sea?" Maya nods again.

"So I was brought from the sea to his farmhouse?" Nod.

"But part of me is still there. Now. What do we do?"

"We go. As the Princess."

"Like a disguise."

"It will bring the Gate-Keeper back too."

"He doesn't see us?"

"No. He's filming something else. Probably Kinley & the Creatures."

"Oh."

Hand on hand. "It will be OK, Christina. Maybe we'll find Samantha & Dean in there too."

We approach together, as one, no threads, no teachers. I feel my friends, in me, the Architect, Samantha, Dean, Dylan, I summon them all for this, love them, walk alone, sniff twice, approach the main entrance.

The steps crumble below my feet, release back to earth as I use them. This feels right, this release.

The first room is dank & cluttered, filled with kitchenware, weapons, books, as though packing & flight interrupted by death, or despair. No need to sniff here.

The next room shines suddenly, many reflections. Oh, mirrors. Why don't I remember this? I look in them, OK.

An unseen light shows me as a child, a crone, a Queen, a beggar, a barebacked dancer, a creature like my many friends (that's you, Maya), even a great growly thing. Me a Beast?

This one I study, take its calm for my clue. Something to remember new. *My friend too.*

I pass on. The air becomes outdoors chilled & I find myself in a featureless desert slashed by sun's winter heat. I walk & walk until I arrive at a kind of exit, there's a door in sight, I don't know how.

There is a little hut. Within it sits an exotic little man. He wears a baseball cap. It has a picture of . . . that little imp. Her face. Great big eyes & smile.

He's old as deserts. Comes out, makes to bow like a servant. I shake my head, touch down to his small shoulder. He smiles with several teeth but now I feel in him the same great calm power as I felt looking at my beastly image. Then he laughs, braying with delight, & begins to gnatter like the tiny imp, my friend. Ah. *OK.*

Not thinking, not scared, not sniffing this time, I gnatter in return, high & low click-clicks & noise-

noises. A kind of play, but I knew that. A kind of song too?

The more we gnatter, the more we treble in time, see this desert long ago as a great watery basin, far hence filled with starcraft. It's delightful, he's showing me something great & beautiful but—

“What am I to do?” I ask suddenly in English. Hoping he understands. “Who am I to heal? How do I get all of me free of here & find my friends?”

The little man smiles his lovely few teeth smile. Motions me to the door behind him.

“Just play through, my friends,” he whispers. “Find the Carnival Room.” He steps aside & yet he now protects us too. Feel it true.

(xxviii.)

“I didn't keep his letters when I left. I didn't keep anything. I left suddenly one morning when you, she told me to.

“She didn't think I could hold him off anymore. She thought something was going to happen.”

“Why not sooner?”

“I wondered that. I didn't ask. But now I think, maybe, it was training.”

“Training?”

“Maybe. Or maybe I was supposed to find something out.”

“What?”

“He wasn't right. I mean human. I mean he looked like a man but he wasn't one. And Clover-dale wasn't right either. Too many rooms. But they didn't fit, Maya. I thought all this over later, when it was over & I was gone. I even wrote things down, trying to figure out why it didn't make sense.”

“Like journals?”

“Sort of. But it sounds like a weird fucked-up story. Finally I decided to try & forget it all.”

“Until now.”

“Yah. It's not over. But I don't know what to do now that we're here. And we don't have Kinley with us.”

“I think that's a good thing, Christina. I'm not sure why I say that to you. Don't be mad.”

“I'm not. I agree. He wasn't here then. I was. You were, sort of.”

“Is he here? The farmer?”

“I don't know. I thought Samantha was going to destroy him & the oldest son.”

“What about the scientist?”

“I don't know that either.”

“We're powerful, Christina. I mean together, like this.”

“Yeah.”

“Are you ready to go in?”

“I guess.”

“Have we seen anything you remember?”

“The outside, that's how it looked. The rest, not really.”

The last night in his bed, it's why she sent me away. That whole day. Maybe I pushed her to do it. I had no truth to work with but I needed something to happen. So I pushed it. I knew she was watching.

The oldest one overcame his memory's pain & came home early from the afternoon farming. I saw him coming through the window. Slowly, reluctantly, but coming.

I'd been waiting, with a plan. Hurried to the farmer's bedroom, to the bathroom within it. Shed my clothes on the bed, turned on the shower, stepped in. Then simply waited. I heard him enter the house.

His steps were uncertain, looking in one room, then another. Not wanting to hear the shower. His groin's remembered pain knew it was a trap. But he came on anyway. Saw the clothes on the bed. Removed his own. Tried to speak—to warn me? To hope for my invitation? But no words. Nothing. He entered the bathroom, closed the door. Maybe I would finish him off this time. I wasn't sure I wouldn't as he pushed aside the curtain & stepped in with me.

Then clarity opened my mind to what I would do. His terrified eyes, his shrunken member. This boy was a game piece.

Taller than me, I faced him calmly, pulled his head down to me, into the hot water, gently rubbed the water through his scalp, massaging it closely & thoroughly. No words, I calmed his breathing. I slowed him down now in time, took a better hold, shifted him back & forth so he could see me younger & in other places & older & far away; once I started this, it was like sliding a coin around a table. Then I brought him back slowly, landing him in the farmer's bed the night before, perching him between my eyes to watch. He felt my nude body, cold even beneath covers, watched the farmer douse the lights, nude also, & slide into bed. Felt the soft but gritty hands slide about me, heard closely the quiet moans as he touched my breasts, my thighs, my face—

“cherry, so cherry” whispered

& I began to sing, so quietly at first that the farmer was not aware, but with more & more power, & he was grasped, seized, moved about, though I kept slipping, kept having to adjust & grab again, & my singing would waver & strengthen,

& I took this boy into the singing itself, back several hours to my bath in this very room, the candles, the incense, I led him right in my bath with me, lingered him over my face, lips, across my neck, down my shoulders & among my breasts, brushed him against my hard nipples, he gasped, & rubbed his lips upon me, pushed a little more till he tasted, he groaned & tasted, then led him down my stomach & between my thighs, softly, deeply, into me, *ohh*, concentrated his being into his cock & entered him into me, *ohh*, deepdeep into me, *ohh*, close, but no, retreat, slowly, wetly retreat, & then I showed him the letter I was reading, from the scientist, was it a poem? this boy didn't know but I led him along the lines of the poem, one after the next—

In it he told me my story before I fully knew it was mine, in detail he told it, I made this boy read it & begin to sing it with me, us together, as the farmer curled close to me, his hands on me, his mouth wetly close, but the spell of words coming upon him, that hard old cock of his, meant to rent & seed me, softening, his hands loosing that wish to encompass me whole, his body falling back even as we sang on & on—

*In childly dreams I visited my friends
who lived in caves & tunnels behind the wall
of my bedchamber. My first time I did not
know I was still sleeping when I heard
a singing voice. I did not wonder, as one
does not wonder in dreams, at the hole.*

*I quietly crept through the hole, listening.
 Sometimes the singing voice was gay,
 sometimes tragic, but it never ceased.
 I met the White Bunny first, not a word,
 but instantly my friend. She showed me
 how to hop the tunnels, remember by sniff.*

*All admired the gnattering little imp, her strange
 play with objects, now this, now that,
 now here, now gone! But her tricks ran
 deeper, her play like a wise funny book
 written on the water, finished in the air.
 So many friends, & weeks of sleeping hours
 to know them, each time I climbed through
 the hole. The White Bunny waited. We went.*

*I could not forget the singer though none
 knew where he was. Sometimes his voice
 joined our songs, our laughter, even the gnattering
 imp would seem to play & teach among
 his tunes. One grew used to the singing,
 like an ocean's tide. One wished to gift in return.*

*I gathered my friends together & told
 them we must make the singer a gift.
 A small box, to keep his most valued possession.
 With a few words I borrowed from the Architect
 (he had so many!), this box would be most protected.
 Every friend gave a stone, or a jewel,
 a feather, a scale, a nut, a clipping of fur.*

*With the White Bunny, the gnattering imp,
 & the turtle who isn't a turtle, we traveled
 for many of my dreams, listening closely,
 nearing, then not so near, the singer.
 I feared will would not be enough, despaired
 a little. The singing grew despairing too.*

*I sniffed twice, & begin to laugh. The singing
 joined me, as did my friends. Laughing
 became a happy song, a song of finding,
 a song of gifts. We hurried, we slowed.
 There were no rules to finding him.
 He did not know where he was.
 We sang. We gnattered. We neared.*

*I felt us very close now, we all did,
 the singing filled us whole but, still,
 not quite. I sniffed twice, & took a deep leap.*

*"There is a door," I sang, "♫ now we pass through. There is a door. And now we pass through!"
And so we arrived in the Carnival Room,
the root of the singing, its Tower, its starcraft.*

*One had to look around like singing,
one had to listen closely like singing,
one had to walk like singing, sniff like singing,
♫ always keep singing, or one found
one's self back in an ordinary tunnel
♫ the singing close ♫ elsewhere like always.*

*So much to see, a feast of wonders:
vast, deep mirrors, with shifting tales
writ on them—doors hung high
upon walls, ♫ other places they would
lead—a painting of a great wheeled
carriage on rails—♫ when I sang ♫
laughed ♫ gnattered my best, there were
two exotic brothers, one playing a stringless
guitar, the other dancing with a castle
upon his head, their songs joined my
laughter, ♫ the general gnattering, ♫
the singer's happy cries, many, one, none.*

*The singer, I learned, could only be
found in this way. Not a solid form,
but by habitation. He **was** his many songs,
♫ those he shared, ♫ this was his function,
♫ this was his happiness. In my many childly dreams,
I did not question this. It was answer enough.*

*Now, feeling like I am far from those
childly dreams, ♫ yet, I listen for his
music, any note or quiver of it. The rooms
I pass through grow large ♫ larger,
sometimes empty, sometimes furniture
the size of mountains. Always a half light.
No sound but my bare feet hurrying.*

*I try to remember the songs, even just one,
but they elude me. We sang many,
♫ many times over. Just one. Nothing.*

*Then . . . music! but not singing. Instruments.
A squeeze box, two fiddlers. I come to
a room of my own size again, dark but
noisy. I follow the music. A long tunnel.
Follow the music. Now a . . . platform*

*above rails, like the picture from
the Carnival Room! It is close, but
I look for the musicians.*

*They are indeed three. An old man
with a mess of hair, in a long grey coat,
playing the sunniest day on the many
yellowed keys of his old squeeze box.
The fiddlers tall, thin, so very thin, barefoot
like me, dressed in faded harlequin
rags, dancing & fiddling with eyes closed.
They do not notice me. I listen.*

*Then, I begin to dance. Not just to dance
like remembering. The years fall away
completely & I am dancing with all of me.
Dance like laughing, dance like gnattering,
dance like singing under the big moon,
under none. I dance like the tides,
like the tallest oaks, like everything
I can conjure. I forget the where
& the what of it all, forget to sniff
twice & know, I dance back my years
to far away unknown places, & dance
on to the many I will become & know
in other times. As the roar of the great
wheeled carriage escalates, I return,
as best I can. The musicians have
finished too, & gaze me quietly.
I am arrived finally at this moment
of my self, this perpetuity. I am ready.*

I traveled the boy deep into my bones, where all these words coursed music in me & we occupied the sinews of my body as I read the letter in the candle-lit bath, & I'd usually masturbate myself again & again but this time I didn't, I had to hold onto this open deep need—he moaned in my mind for this release but no—

Then we traveled to the farmer's bed in dark of night, him now sleeping his childhood's peaceful sleep, & we climbed onto him, positioned on his soft cock with our mouth, blowing & whispering the magic words until it began to rise & thicken again, & we licked & blew, licked & blew, & he understood that this man was not his father, he'd been purchased too, & his brothers & an anger in him that I needed to press on as I moved around in the bed until the farmer's cock pressed against my inner thigh & I kept shifting until I felt it pressing, pushing against my pussy lips, & my unsated hunger was near blind upon me to make the final move to slip him deep in me, I might have but a moan, not the farmer but the boy, whimpering me to remember & desist & I did & that I think was when Samantha decided it had to end, that moment when the boy became my friend—————

(*xxix.*)

The swaying as I come to, as Maya nudges me from within, is indeed a train, a faster train than I've ever been on.

"Are you OK?"

"Yah. I think so."

"Did all that really happen?"

"I think so. It's funny you don't remember."

"I just don't know. It seems like Samantha, not me. Was I there somehow too? Maybe like this, like we are now?"

I open my eyes. It's a subway train. The car we're in is half-full. Several boys & men glaring at me, a couple obvious. I look down. Oh.

Tight low cut blouse, with a sort of leather vest. A skirt so short my butt can sneeze uninhibited. Not Maya's style for sure.

"No. It's not. But yours?"

"Yah. When I was younger. I think after I left the farmhouse I sort of let myself go dull. My mind & body. Body especially. Then I got to high school & saw how it was. So I got a trainer."

Shit. It was because of you I got to look like this. Then I just wanted every guy who hadn't looked at me to look, look twice, like these.

I think. Kinley's son. As the Architect, he has a son.

"Help me focus on the script, Maya. I need to remember the Architect's son."

"Kinley?"

"Yah. I mean, not really, but yah. Just help me."

"OK."

I wasn't left alone very often. But then a day, & I left the Architect's Tower offices. As I descended the staircase, the faces frowned at me.

"Faces?"

"In the stone. I wasn't sure what they were, but they were trained to keep watch on me. That day I didn't care."

I found you in your chamber.

(You had taught me so many things. Yoga. Tai-chi. You listened as I tried to piece my life together in words.)

A thousand candles lit. At first I couldn't see you.

(Your studio. You said I could come in any time. Told me where you hid the key.)

A whisper in my ear. "You're beautiful." A hand on my cheek, a breath.

(What happened that day? There was no teacher-student tension between us. I knew even then what that felt like.)

I say nothing but more away. "Are you scared?" Still nothing. "I wish you belonged to me instead but neither of us is of this world anyway."

(Was it obligation? Did you have to train me that way too?)



Another breath & there is darkness, & I am tumbled into embrace. Touched high & low, strangely, I am not scared.

(Just the wrong hands. I didn't know whose were right but I did know yours weren't. Still, something in me urged me to please you, to relax to this & please you.)

Stranger still, when you for a moment pushed my thighs open to push yourself in me, there was nothing, nothing between yours.

(I was willing enough, but you hesitated. Relaxed your hold. I thought you smiled & I guess I did too. Maybe I laughed. Not at you.)

I am shocked. I laugh.

(Did I laugh at you? Because you had me spread & willing enough on your floor & you were soft & hesitant? Was I that cruel? Was I *that fucking cruel!*?)

You fall away, cry out, are gone.

I return to the Architect's office.

Say nothing. Learn how that works.

I stand up. Pull up my panties & jeans. I leave. We're done. I see no way forward & I don't really want you enough to work for it. I've already learned how a slow smile & the right clothing can win me most of who I want. So I do. Quite a few. Not carelessly but for practice. I knew someone was coming.

My eyes are now open to this traincar. There you are. I smile. This is me now. Not traumatized jailbait Xtina. Speak. Easily.

"You're beautiful too. You always were."

Your look is inscrutable.

I think. "You did it on purpose?"

He nods.

(Help me, Maya!)

"Are we from the same place?"

"I think so."

"Is that where we're going now?"

"You are."

"But you're here on this train."

(Oh. Shit. *Shit!* He died too, Maya. Both of them did. I think. I went to see him, when I graduated. I was angry at Kinley, since it seemed like he was letting me go. I went to see him, just to feel something like I did. I would have with him, oh would I. But they said he was gone. No clear story. But possibly an accident. I cried & I cried. I never told Kinley. I wouldn't know what words.)

"Only a message. They will think you something else & try to claim you. You are there to heal, solely."

I nod. "I'm sorry."

"I wish we had, Christina. I wish it had been like that, to let us know."

Alone again on the carriage as it pushes at high speed through hours & miles & maybe more. There is nothing to see through the windows. I wait, afraid to dream, miss everything, whatever I am, whatever I was.

"Just hold close, Christina. I'm here with you."

The train arrives in daylight & I guess I wake up. I hear shouts. “She is here. She saves us! She is here!”

They’re pale, there’s a lot of them. They live in these high caverns we are in. They tell me in too many pressing faces that they dream to heal the world.

They are failing. I am their waited legend. The first to cross the Dreaming back from elsewhere.

“Should I come out, Christina?”

“No. Just pay attention.”

“OK.”

They crowd around me, shorter than I am. Show me their sleep chambers, the brew each drinks to cross the Dreaming. Kinley would love all this. Bastard.

I can’t comfort them as much as I want but I find myself sniffing to know more. I think Maya is doing that but I’ve gotten to trust her weird Creaturely instincts & moves.

“Thanks.”

They think I have solved their riddle.

How to heal not hearts but history.

They are waiting for me to say something, give them orders. They get impatient.

“There isn’t time. *There isn’t time.*”

Pushing me toward an open sleep chamber, a cup of that drink. *Shit.*

Maya’s about to show when there is a roar through the caverns, the millennia, *everywhere, always.*

(xxx.)

When the purple thread tugs at my hand, we hurry. We Creatures are together now completely. They have taught me how to push beyond myself as simply a man.

They take turns with me, because I am slower & can’t handle more than one of them at a time. The White Bunny tends my hands, shows me their pain, spreads them out straight to my whimpers, shows me their beauty. Lets me cradle her & feel what flows bright & easy between us. It seems always night in the Gate now, the moon always full.

The gnattering little imp compels me crouch low to her level & gnatter too, high & low, she clicks & cackles & adjusts my mind closely, gently, not simply to open me within & expose my all, but to scour out the rot from my long years among men & their wars.

The turtle not a turtle goes last on this endless night & I expect another lesson or clearing, feel humble, glad, really glad, but he falls asleep in my lap & I let myself too.

We share a dream together, & he brings me to where she would visit them, deeper reaches into the caverns. I am walking upright now, I am clear. I see the Red Bag & know this is what they were all leading me to, readying me for—

I wake & they are all in my lap, like oldest dearest friends. We sniff once like hello, gnatter a joke or

two between us, & then the tug.

We go together but there is something in this that is me leading us now. We will find you, we will protect you. Both of you, I promise. When we arrive to your thread tied to the tree, your box of threads buried below, I know, I am clear, I sit down with these friends of yours & mine & do what I hadn't thought to before.

I braid the remaining threads together, close & tight. I work silently yet there is music near, singing. My friends are near me, they wait, they are patient to my task.

The threads now form a longer line & their power glows. This line will not run out. The box I stow in my cloak & I tie the braid's end to the thread on the branch.

We begin together to find you both, protect you both, save you both. "I was wrong before that you are the thread," I say to every camera lurking nearby us. "We share this among us, with these colored tools, the trees, the Gate. We will do this task together. We will learn how together."

I stop, my friends stop. I point into the foresty dark glare & gesture, firmly, *come here*. After a moment, the Gate-Keeper nods, & comes forward.

(xxxi.)

"We know the words used to describe us: zealots, fanatics. We know the hatred of those who would oppose us. We know, too, at least a few of us, how the world ends: dead air, dead soil, & so many failed tries to undo the disaster.

"Once it seemed the Tangled Gate was the way, set the path to undo the vision it showed us. Yes, I was one of the fellowship that landed on the Island's shore, when it was all forest. We found the Gate, saw what was to come at the end of the world.

"We were each given a choice that day: save mankind or save the world. I chose the first. The others chose otherwise.

"We each entered the cave of the Beast, fought its battle, received its message. It was how the Gate communicated to each of us. I can't say how it was each of us emerged from the cave but we were not the men we'd been, nor was our fellowship any longer intact.

*"Now, of those six, only you & I remain in this here & now, & we will never sit together at table again. Your numbers diminish by the years & what matters more is that I will efface you from history itself. You will unbecome & I will powder your bones on the sea. I remember who you were & this is the only way I can honor that person. You **shall not** bear his name, walk in his body.*

"All for the girl. All because you could not accept your loss & chose to truck with the demons you call Eternals. Now she is gone & your demons are fled you. My brother, you fight on as if no choice."

The Gate-Keeper stops reading for a moment.

"Have you filmed that?" asks Kinley.

"No. Not yet. Soon."

“Do you know who we are?” asks Christina.

“You two are the Princess. He is the Architect. They live in the caverns within the Tangled Gate.”

“How do you know us?”

“I cast you.”

They look at each other, upon hearing this.

“What does that mean?” asks Kinley, grey & agitated.

“I was told you were coming to be in this part of my film, & so I waited for you. You came.”

“How is that ‘casting?’” asks Christina.

Maya & the Creatures say nothing, simply sniff.

He holds up the ragged manuscript.

Two word title. “This convinced me.”

All are quiet a moment. The Gate-Keeper talks some more. “He knew this was the best way for you to pass through.”

“Who?”

He looks at Maya who stares back him bluntly. “You know him as a Beast.” Looks at Christina. “You know him as a scientist who helped you once.” Looks at Kinley. “He is no threat to you, provided you follow through on this. You have to know all this & what’s to come to understand.”

There seems no choice. The Gate-Keeper reads on.

“But when there is nothing left, when the Island, & the Gate, & the girl, are all no more, perhaps you will come to me. Perhaps I will forgive. Perhaps I won’t. Perhaps, as you said to me, there are stranger strengths in the world that will write our final fates.”

“That last night. I knew before the rest you would take what the demons called Eternals offered. I pounded the table between us until every lamp in the empty hall shook.”

“Is there none of the Saviour’s mercy left in your heart?”

“What Saviour?” you said bloodlessly.

“You showed me your fist, pounded your chest, then opened your hand. Tapped your shaggy head. ‘These will save me. There is nothing else.’”

*“You see a hole in the bosom of the world, Brother. He fills that hole up, day after day, & his beat is growing strong enough to **save us all**.”*

The Gate-Keeper closes his manuscript & nods. Makes to leave, then pauses. “They are elsewhere again. Keep going.” Kinley starts, looks around. Gone. Looks at the Creatures, now his dear friends. Nods. They walk on.

(xxxii.)

I reach into my traveling coat, on a whim, root around among the little colored books & there is . . . another one, a different size. I pull it out quickly. Sit down in the path. Just so. My Creature friends settle close to me, waiting.

I page through the writing. “This one’s different. It’s in English. I can read it right now.” Page after page. They wait quietly, not even sniffing.

I find the last entry & begin to read aloud.

“The force of human history was on the side of the fist, not the open hand. Both were powerful, but only one spoke to the most helpless fears of mortal men, that whatever health or happiness or prosperity was achieved, it could not be maintained. Beat would slow, breath would stop, mind would cease. Not a billion preachers of a billion magickal, instructional, or just comforting words could prove otherwise.”

I pause, look at my friends. “I had gone above ground, with a mask, for a little while. It was always a risk but I had a good weapon & I knew places the population would not go. Places with long histories of danger & ill luck & fear. Usually fictional, all of it.

“I went to one, on a hill, overlooking an overgrown freeway. Nobody knew I was leaving. Nobody knew most of what I knew, & this knowledge was leaving with me.”

They stay near me, a sniff or two. But have learned I’m like this, there is no danger, this is me being me. They protect me as much as I do them, if not more. They leave me my space to talk, to read to them, whatever. I take a jerking breath, & read on.

“Proof, assurance, a reply to despair, lay beyond men’s daylight lives of grab & fuck. Even as they belonged to their world in a way few could really know, their world belonged to something else. It lay in the open hands of those who begat it from the ashes of other worlds, other men. While no longer corporeal, these others had their effect, nudged into history some of its brilliant moments. But they saw over the centuries it was not working, again.”

My friends huddle me close, know this is hard. I am happy near them, for all this. They are my friends, this matters to them as to me. We love each other. I read on.

“The Tangled Gate preceded human history as a portal to this world, a crossroads where intentions of the Eternals could be made manifest. It is the source of human dreams, that nightly clue of worlds elsewhere, of many kinds, with offers of many threads. Dreams inspired men to build, to create, to raise up civilizations but, as before & before & before, it was not enough. Those who believed men apart from their world, superior to it, meant to feed blindly & to breed more feeders perpetually, & explain their exception to all other life as the will of an invisible hand they alone resembled, failed to understand that hand, that it held all, that it was many hands, that these hands more & more despaired, that beyond time itself these hands would contrive a child, not a saviour but one who would take of this world something as it ended, something of it beyond it, to the next world, that as she passed through the Red Bag, she would no longer be merely human but the world itself, its lessons, its losses, its beauties, its smallest sounds, its heart living still as what was left behind was abandoned by the Eternals for lost, as men did not save themselves, as their world did not recover its grand & subtle power, as time itself ran out & the last breath, & the last beat, & the last dream.”

I take one hitching breath, don’t look up, & read on. “I’m going back to find you, & follow you, if you will let me. Perhaps you need an ordinary man in the next world too, who hopes & fears as men will hope & fear, who will help them know time & death & dreams as you have failed to. I leave tonight.”

I look at you, finally, & you are none of you upset, & I wonder what I do not know. I love you, I love the Princess, as I have never loved before. I would protect you more than what I am, just a man.

The White Bunny sniffs twice & begins to hop, slowly, waiting. The tiny imp begins to gnatter a song, & follows hurriedly, as does the turtle who isn’t a turtle. I stand, I follow, I catch up, the braided thread playing out from my hand as we go.

(xxxiii.)

Again, suddenly, elsewhere. When I open my eyes, we're an I again, still, suddenly, I find myself leaning against the shoulder of my strange friend from childly dreams. *Oh.*

He is playing our game, nudging music from the air, giving it shape. His touch is light, gentle, but to its purpose. His strange smile, shows me his work. My friend, the White Bunny. I am pleased. She sniffs twice, takes my lap.

"Where are the others?"

"She is here & there both."

"Where are we?"

"Near the road away."

"Away?"

(We are I right now, Maya & Christina, among each other, one, none, many, this is the Beast, Maya's friend, & the scientist, who saved Christina, we see with one pair of eyes both her purple & her blue, breathe with one lungs, beat with one heart, our single mind, I cannot describe this better but this is how we have to follow this through now)

His look is sad. He nears resembling a man—my scientist?—then more a tree, a swarm of insects, a high tide on an empty winter shore. But still sad. I look at him close, but not enough, I crawl among his buzzes, his branches, his waters, his arms. I raise my joys & share with him, when the world has warmed me, amused me, taught me, loved me—loved me innocently, loved me dirty, loved me shy, loved me well—

"Please. I am your friend. I am strong."

"I know."

"Who were those people? The sleepers? You brought me back."

"The last of men. Your architect's people."

Um. I nod. Try to think. The Beast saved me from them, the scientist saved me from the farmer, he means me well. Yet—

"Will you come with me?"

"No. I remain."

"And my friends?" The White Bunny is asleep in my lap. He makes to stroke her fur, hesitates, doesn't.

"They are a part of men. They come from the dreaming mind, the shaping hand. You will meet them wherever you pay attention."

Feeling helpless, I begin to anger some.

"What is my choice in this? *Tell me.*"

There is a silence in & around us, a long, long breath, in, out, in. The Beast now seems to comprise everything that walks, flies, & swims the earth. "Where there is life, there is choice. But sometimes not the ones we would wish."

I hug him deeper, his branches, his buzzings, his ocean deeps. His empty canyons, under full moons. His green buds, his curling leaves. I hug him like my beating & my breath, my dancing, my music, my singing. My many loves. I want to remember it all.

"Thank you. Safe journey. Goodbye."

(xxxiii.)

“Wait.” Maya pulls them apart, literally. The Beast/scientist starts back from fading elsewhere.

“Maya. What?”

Maya sees the Beast of the Princess’s childly dreams. Christina sees the scientist, or thinks so.

“You kept a part of Christina to protect her.”

Silence.

“Are you going to release her?”

“Maya—”

“She had to come here to find you. Here you are. Are you letting her go?”

“Not yet.”

“Why?”

“You have to finish this.”

“Then?”

He looks at Christina now. “I don’t know all the answers. My article that you read came to me in a vision. In the vision I saw you where you had been brought to, that place, that farm-not-a-farm. You were scared, your memory stripped of you, the man who purchased you showing you his hand, how you resided in his closed fist. I saw how you eluded him night after night by singing him to sleep. I was brought into that bedroom in this vision, close to you, till I could smell your young scent mingled with your fear, & I could know he was not a man of any mortal, earthly kind.

“I was then brought up, up, in this vision, into the skies, among the stars, & I was given to understand that we came from them long ago, that we originated in the music galaxies make a-borning, colliding, passing from giant beings to dust, & back again. The universe is full of music, everywhere! And I was told to write it all down for you, to begin to save you, this was my task, my great task to take me places I did not know I had already known.

“I wrote the words the next morning & sent them off to the magazine as I was told, but I did not know or believe what had happened or feel anything would come until I received your letter & I understood it was all real. You were real, & in danger, & I would help you. It was because you asked, not because you were compelled.

“I would dream every night, begin in the farmer’s bedroom close to you, listen as you sang to him the words I had sent you, watch him fall to his peaceful, painless sleep, & then I would leave you & rise into the sky, the stars & I would experience the great musics of the universe, comets crashing, suns exploding, planets green & ice planets & water planets, & I would wake with a song for you to sing, words filling me till I wrote them out & mailed them to you—

“And then it was over & you were gone & I dreamed no more yet we were not severed. I moved along with something of you still in me, & now here you are & I can see you & wonder still what between us. I don’t know what happens now. I just know you have to finish this.”

Christina nods. Nods at the scientist, at Maya. One, again, suddenly, she turns from him & continues along.



(xxxiv.)

The road away is long & straight, brown plains on either side. I feel as though something withholds from me, an unsure stranger here. Sniff twice, thrice, four times, a shimmer, nothing. I think of my White Bunny asleep in my lap, imagine her legs extended, her ears flying back, tug for this in my mind, & find myself changed, thought & instinct one, tug a little deeper, & I treble in time—

A shimmer, a break. Back, hence? Neither, both. None, one, many. Here is no time & every time. The fields are brown, are green, are seas, are filled with starcraft. The road remains. I am not alone, but need to tug more clearly. I stop hopping, steady myself, close my eyes, feel around.

Somewhere, deep within, Christina snickers. Twice.

There . . . a thread, but thick, it is braided. Open my eyes & see.

The glare of a distant movie camera blinds me for a moment. A moment. Then I see the Eternals, know this is their processional, they are departing this world.

Christina & Maya separate a bit, each needs the other right now to reck this scene. There is sadness here but . . . something else, something we could not have thought, a kind of waiting joy. Something new to come to, open hands, open doors, strange chances.

Seeming unnoticed, I hop among their numbers. They have their hierophants too, feathered up like hawks & eagles. Their initiates in rainbow garb, simple, humble nonetheless. Others who know better carry instruments, pipes, guitars, horns, sometimes cluster & raise up stomping songs. Staying near the braided threads, I continue hopping forward through the processional, toward the glinting, glaring thing ahead. Not the Gate-Keeper's movie camera this time, though they are around in number still. It is the sea.

Distracted, delighted, I am more fully become girls again, & wonder if this is the Island's shore, or even its same sea.

"They are all one, I think."

"One, none, many."

The initiates, the musicians, the hierophants too are splashing, bathing one another. I keep a pace apart when I am approached by a smiling man, familiar.

"Uh oh."

"Keep cool."

(Just as Maya led them while they were White Bunny, so Christina leads them now. Her slouch fits the moment's need.)

It is the Hero who abandoned me & the others to that Island. He holds out open hands & bids me listen. "It was by the Architect that I did all I did. His will led me through all my actions regarding you." The surf, noise, & laughter cascades around us.

"Are you with all of these?"

“No. Not really. I was sent to guide you.” Silence. He looks closer at me, arrogance & brute expectation gone from his face. I wait.

We sit on the sand, watching the revelry. I let him sit closer to me than I would like. Let him secretly sniff my scent. Feel my breathing close. He does not look at me but it does not matter. Speaks again.

“I was made by agreement between Eternals & some men. My purpose was to contact the Beast, ask his help. The words you gave to me at the Gate as I entered were for him. A surrender, a truce, that when you entered the Gate, you would be aided to pass on. The word you spoke to me that night on the ship when I came to you, it was the Architect’s next instruction. It’s why you & they are all here now. It’s why what happened then & now next.”

“He told you where to leave me.”

“Yes.”

“And with which dancers?”

“Yes.”

“It was all planned.”

“Yes.”

We sit quiet watching celebrants return from the water, dry & dress. As more ready themselves, there is a sense of waiting for next.

“What is my choice in this?”

He starts. “It is all by your choice. You will decide what will be.”

“When?”

He smiles, stands, offers his hand.

It is soft, strong. Maya & I look at each other within. Smirk, blush a little.

Yet he’s afraid of me, would kneel if I bid so. I think about it, Maya shakes her head.

We walk together among the crowds, further along the road, evening coming on.

“What did the Beast say to you?”

Silence.

“I asked him what a hero is, this part I was crafted to play.”

Silence.

“He said a hero understands fear in others’ hearts as well as he does in his own.”

I nod.

There are many shouts ahead, fields by the road filled with tents, bonfires, dancers, musicians. Stars heavy & light in the sky.

I keep close to this Hero who understands. He coaxes me laughing to dance, some of his old swagger returning.

I let myself undo all battered down within. Maya, shy & shy, shifts onto one with me to secretly enjoy. Lose to the fires, the stars heavy & light.

I don’t know what the morrow will bring. I wonder about the Architect, really about Kinley; about

Maya's, our, friends.

Then his strong hand grasps my waist & for a merciful while I don't wonder. I sweep into fire, music, & dancing, into the powerful man's nearness, into my girlishness, into my mortality, into my lights.

(xxxvi.)

There is still a long way to go, it seems, & the new day is for fasting. I walk beside the Hero, lightly trebling in time but keeping my steps about me. I am agreeable to this in that I am not sure its purpose. The Hero keeps my lips wet with drink against the dry winter sun.

Hmm. "Maya."

Silence.

"Maya!" What do I do? Bark for her attention?

She's listening but silent. Distracted or maybe concentrating both. Whiskers are probably twitching.

"Funny."

"What's up? You're too quiet. Too somewhere strange & I can't tell it."

Silence.

"*Tell me.* I'm really a persistent bitch when I need to be."

"The Hero. He sometimes looks a little familiar."

"Sometimes? Familiar?"

Silence.

"Who?"

"No."

"Who?"

"I'm wrong."

"I doubt that."

"Dylan" she blurts.

Oh. Shit. Well this complicates things more, if it's possible.

"Doesn't mean it's him."

"Like Kinley isn't the Architect."

"Tooshie. But we can't assume it's the same thing."

"Why not?"

"Because we can't, Maya. We have to be able to pick up on things but not assume. Just see what connects."

She's quiet. But thinking.

"Now I know too. So we'll see. Maybe it's just a coincidence but nothing weirder. We'll see, OK?"

I feel her nod. I know she'll tend to be more girly now so I will have to catch her slack if needed.

We continue.

Trebling does not help me know better. And what I know does not explain. As always when dismayed, I think of my friends during our best days in the caves & tunnels of my childly dreams. They are important, simple & wise. They have stayed with me always.

"There used to be masques then," I say aloud to Christina. She listens. I like when she listens. It's like something strong on my side.

"We'd decorate the caves & tunnels, bring out instruments. Lots of singing. Costumes. They'd have me wear a crown of vines & stones &, um, preside over it all. You would have liked it a lot." She nods,

listens.

“There was one in particular, a very strange one. I didn’t know which friend was wearing which costume. They usually dressed as sprites or oaks or sunshine or red berries.”

“Creaturely costumes.”

“Yes. But this time they dressed like men & women, & I could not figure out how they did it with their usual forms.”

“Magic?”

“They didn’t usually do things like that. It’s hard to explain but they had certain ways & this night felt different.”

I take a breath. Dylan, or the Hero, whoever, is looking at me closely.

“You’re red-faced. Drink this water.”

Maya’s too blushed to do, so I nod & smile for us & accept his water. We sit by the roadside for a few minutes beneath a tree. I can see what she means. But maybe not. I wouldn’t have noticed by myself. We stand & walk on. He wants to hold my hand, friendly, & Maya tries to run us. From some freaky memory I click-click noise-noise her calm, & let me drive. She calms, lets.

“Tell me more.”

She’s silent but trusts me, & likes the hand despite herself. Talks.

“They gathered around me, these beautiful forms of men & women, smiled me loving & sad both, it was impossible but they did. Then they sang to me in a . . . um . . . like a braided voice:

*When the glaring lights have left
When the music has slowed to smoke
When there is sniff of good blood & then no more
When touch brittles maybe to break
When taste is old & cold, hurts*

*The Red Bag, doorway back to dreams
The Red Bag, the path, come
The Red Bag, come, trust, come here”*

For a moment I see twice, then multiply. I am along this road away, I am with my friends in that strange masque, I am waking in my bed in the Pensionne on a wet spring morning, I am swimming with all that I am to make the Island’s shore.

The Hero catches me & leads me off the road again to a shady place. We sit in peaceful grass, the day is warm but kind. He makes me drink water, looks around once, feeds me something like a small handful of fruits & nuts from his bag.

I try to cohere. I’m here, not those other places. This isn’t much of an answer but just to go with it for the moment.

“I am not ill. A day of fasting should not fell me like this.”

“It’s not that, Princess. We’re getting closer.”

I take a leap. “The Red Bag.”

He nods. This is as much as he knows.

I look at his face closely. Sweet, intelligent. Dylan, Dylan's kind, I don't know for sure, but a sudden good thought.

I take from my pocket the few things I still carry. Knife, brush, my totems. One resembles my gnattering imp friend. I press it into his hand. "A gift."

His face fears, retreats. I smile, the lush girlish smile he had longed to possess once his own.

(Dylan? I am your own. I don't care what the script says. We belong to each other. I am stupid to say this. But it's my truth.)

(Christina wrestles Maya behind her, keeps her there. Maya growls once, then calms.)

"You're the Hero they guised you as. For real now." He smiles, helps me up.

We walk among the hierophants, initiates, musicians.

"I would defend your life from any & all." I nod. This time I take his hand, in bonding friendship. Maya calms behind me. Him being near, Dylan or near-Dylan, it is deepest medicine to her heart.

(xxxvi.)

*Neither death nor dream
are truly a remote land*

The Gate-Keeper coordinates all cameras for his film's climax. This version's climax, this time. He hopes the script will produce in the performers the film that is needed. If not he'll try again, here or elsewhere. But he's tired—

She came to his chamber last night, it was late, he let her find him after persisting for awhile.

She tried to talk, to get him to listen & tell too. What would happen after the morrow's final scenes filmed. What he would do with her.

"We follow the script. That's what is done every time."

With me you are no demon, you are a beautiful dead girl who became unrooted & has wandered since. You came to me as I was expecting someone, knew not know.

The film has tired you. Fucking the King to poison him, to drive him to give up the Island for his war on the mainland. He would fuck you for all his anguish & anger, lay sweating across your hips in the unshaded moonlight, his tears, sweat, the blood between you, & you would urge him to be strong. To follow through on his vision in the Gate.

But this part would be over soon. There is more & I'm not sure what it is. You come from somewhere as the demon & I don't know where. I don't know your full intentions even as they still seem in part to destroy the King. There is more & I don't know.

"Let me stay with you. Let's go beyond all this," your eyes seem to say other words as you say these. I

pull your long night shirt over your head. There are light marks on your beautiful breasts & stomach. Did he do this? I take you in my bed, I fuck you for a long time & nothing convinces me I am in full control anymore. Something else. If I said yes, it would be to the girl from then, the one who wished to play the Princess, not now.

So tired, he moves his cameras into place & lets the action roll . . .

Remember some things. It's what I've returned to the Island to do. I've lived long times in the Pensionne, tended its gardens, visited with my White Tiger the tender. Apprenticed to his teachings.

When dreams came, as long they hadn't, they were of the Island, the Architect asking me to return, to find him in the Tangled Gate. We argued.

"Why now?"

"You're needed."

"You wouldn't let me when I lived there."

"You'd been to the Gate many times in your dreams. I knew this then."

"What did you know?"

"I knew then, I know now, that the deepest truth of a human heart is its persistent yearns. When you came to me, you were forbidden the Gate in all but your dreams, & I only allowed you maps to study. Those years had to pass, time binding you to the Gate by absence & wish."

(Fucking Kinley)

"Now you bid my return."

"Ask the White Tiger."

I never find him but he is before me, head sunk low for an embrace. Always the garden, though I'd never seen him enter it, or exit.

He taught me in every way possible what tenders most need to know: *kindness most binds*. I often resisted the far ends of his teachings, when kindness seemed second to self-preservation, or revenge. He insisted me. Pressed me again & again.

Of my dreams he would only say there are many ways to heal, not just the tender's way.

"I have to leave, don't I?"

Quiet growling in his throat.

"Come with me."

Silence. Yet we would meet again in some way. His last embrace made that clear.

My travels since have brought me to this road, to an obscured understanding of what I am.

The Hero & I with the rest approach a kind of temple now. It is hardly dawn. A temple, a cave? I can't tell. I push my way forward in the crowd. A tall, feathered hierophant faces me.

There is silence. Does he expect words from me?

"I expect nothing. I wait your will."

"Will I find my answers in there?"

He shakes his head, as though I'm asking the color of my eyes.

He steps aside & I walk toward the door leading in. Aside the door, a basin of water, insisting a splash, a drink. I think of the Fountain back there, nod, splash, drink. Enter, not knowing if I will return.

(We bind tightly until we are one again. This is our best hope, what we are, unified I)

For a moment, blind blackness, nor the feel of ground underneath. I breathe slower, do not cry out. Something tests me.

I reach within, keep my balance, sniff twice. Images emerge in the darkness & hang about me.

I see the book of patterns my father & I would study, deeper ways to contrive my dance & sing of waking dreams. What was this book? I reach out to touch it, turn its pages. There is something here it seems I know. These are gnatterings, rudely writ! I touch a page, fragile as a wisp, & words like “*there is no final thing to know*” lay upon my brow, clue & thread.

Follow the thread, half turn & there my brother, whom I loved so closely, finding me disconsolate that I would not see my friends again, listening to me tell of their world, their ways, just this he said: “You will limp now as I sometimes do. But not always. You will find each other again.”

Another half turn & my friend who claimed my father’s heart, made off. I see them in the bedchamber they alone used. Her straddling atop him, sweaty dark hair down, hips moving impossibly slow, head reared back in snarl, in growl, teeth long as she sucks him into her, deep into her, till nothing seems to remain, leaving the room, nude, him recomposing in the blood & sweat falling from her as she walks the empty corridor, him an old splayed man & her gone completely.

(& then something more, something the cameras do not catch, a glint within a glint, where she is headed, walking slowly, she is headed now to my chamber where I am sleeping & she is going to kill me or hold me down & make love to me in a way the King never had from her one single time, she is going to give herself to me completely, like this is what she is supposed to do—)

*(She approaches & I feel her long want of me, longer than anything else, really, & this is strange, this throws things off as long as it lasts but then I twist & divert her, push, again, stronger than her by far, toward the outdoors, toward the rocky beach, there, the sea, go now, **go now**—)*

I press myself harder into this darkness, command to know, now I am small, hardly made, singing to rags & flower vases because they sing to me, we are alike in stuff—

I try to recall earlier but it’s like I wasn’t born, never an infant. Created like an animate statue, no couple loved me to be, the King not my father, nor his dead first wife the Queen my mother—

I tire.

What do I do here?

“I’m from the sea. It’s not where I was made, but where I was raised, born up, where I was taken when small. How I came to the Island.” I look at the Gate-Keeper directly in all this darkness & chaos. He is holding a camera that looks made from vines & stones, cranking a wooden handle more like a branch. “You knew all this.”

Without pausing in his work, he says quietly, “I’ve been making this film for thousands of years forward & backward. I’ve chronicled the world for you countless times until one way or another we



reach this climax & discover what you do.”

I nod. He retreats into the darkness again but I know he is still filming, ever filming.

There is quiet a long while, then I begin to hear wisps of song, of a kind with the despair I feel for all this. I reach out my hand toward them & they settle on my outmost stretched finger like a hummingbird.

Singing, *“Many kinds of time, several binds of time, & how it looses to the air!”* I think of my Architect, & the singing molds his face in the dark before me.

“You’ve come.”

“You’ve led.”

I feel soft pressings against my arms & my shoulders. My friends! I can feel soft fur, a tiny imp’s shape, a turtle not a turtle close.

“Do I finally learn what all of you are?”

“You created us. You do every time there is a new world.”

They crowd close to me. The Architect’s breath upon me.

“Why don’t I remember?”

“You always say because failure is an imperfect teacher, & hope opens hands best. We are your hints of elsewhere, of others. All you will allow yourself.”

“Is this world a failure then? Am I supposed to lead the procession out there to a new one?”

“There is a choice.”

“What choice?”

“Stay. Fill the hole in the heart of the world. Bind the Gate here, to serve as foundation for all.”

“Why haven’t I chosen this way before?”

[Maya, Christina, this is Kinley. You’re hearing me under all this dialogue. When the time comes I’ll make sure you come with me. Just follow the script through for now.]

“I convinced you,” says the Architect, with a deep heart’s whimper. “I believed we could make a world without flaw.”

There is silence. I drift from my friends, wander memories that seem departing. The sweet, high music of the Traveling Troubadour. The dark fanciful music of the One Woods when all woke deep in the night & cried out. My father the King on sleepless nights, his spyglass upon the black water. The demon tugging him back away from his family, his Queen, rending him willing to sacrifice my brother, & whoever else, the snakebite in his heart never letting him rest until our Island home abandoned, & all to war. Never seeing her slip back into the sea, where we both began, as his boats raised their sails.

My blue bag. The many threads. I begin to fear. How do I know a flawless world can’t be found? I twist in, & in, *in*, feel myself starting to pull this world closed upon itself, its possibilities, even as glints & glarings of a new one nose me near.

I fear. Words are leaving. This is what they do. *No!* (leaving) *No!* (leaving)

I try to cry out *help me* but it just sounds like a grunt. *No!* (leaving)

Try again, the world is shaking, the Beast & its mate together, comforting at this once again known end. Failure. Pain.

*No! (leaving) No! (leaving) N-! (leav-) N-!
 (gnatter) (N!) (gnatter) (N!) (gnatter gnatter!)
 No! Help me, Architect! My friends! Beast!
 Hero! My father the King! Help me!
 White tiger! Singer! Troubadour!
 Help me! (No!) (gnatter! gnatter!)
 Help me, Queen! Help me, all!*

A great roar, a wild pain, I feel blown all to light, cry soundlessly, & then all silence. Silence.

Then a voice, my own, & yet I listen:

*“There is a door & now we pass through
 There is a door. And now we pass through!”*

The world spasms. The world shakes.
 The world holds. I reach into its maw &
 fill it with everything I’ve ever learned,
 ever known. I bind myself to this world,
 its flaws, its beauties. I push time back,
 smooth it like a thin blanket across a
 long bare back. It is there for those not
 ready to reveal themselves to the night,
 & its many kinds of truths.

I push back, growing stronger, healing
 all I can, there is so much, & the world
 will ever root up its song in part from
 its countless fractures, how they chorus.

My efforts tire me, & I feel my friends
 join me, gather at my back, help me
 push, this world, keep this world,
 arriving, arriving now, arriving
 somewhere to something, close, closer,
 more, & more, & a push, & now, good,
 it’s . . . water. Sea water!

I am in mid-dive into the sea,
 my things tied about my waist,
 bidding my friend goodbye with a wave,
 this time I see his face true,
 it is the Hero, my friend, smiling
 at me as once I had at him, thank you,
 I love you thank you, & goodbye.

The shore is rocky, no beach where I half-collapse breathless. The sea lets me leave but willing this time. I have bound myself. I have remembered some things & bound myself this time. I will climb the rocks to the Dancing Grounds, restore them for all I've learned, dance again on the girl's legs I choose to keep. I will let the Castle continue to return to green, the One Woods hungering back its possession of all the Island.

The Tower, with a touch, shall return to tree, & my Architect will have his day & night without end.

Finally, I will come to the Tangled Gate, that which I have loved best is here, always has been, not left or right by the Fountain, but *through*, *no way in but through*, I will step through the Fountain, its luring waters swallowing me as I do, & come at last to the caves & tunnels of my friends, leaving a part of me here, my childly dreams, they shall receive me as my beautiful dear friends, feather, fur, gill, shell, happy sniffs all around, but a part of me will draw a part of them away, away, deeper & deeper, ever toward & arriving finally at the Red Bag. Finally at the Red Bag.

And here we will close what has too long been opened, the wound that was the loss of our home, long ago, what brought us here, the remain of us, how we built but could not forget. I was made to help us heal but healing is hereon, not back there. We have done what we meant to do.

As many, as one, as none, each of us shuts eyes & imagines the conclusion of the story on the other side of the Red Bag. Closes eyes, imagines, steps through.

[Maya, Christina, hold onto what you are, your names, your loves, what has hurt you, what you have held dear, hold onto each other & your friendship, just think about that for a little bit longer. I will catch you.]

One by one, till all, till I am left
to finish. I watch myself dancing
the grounds my father the King
built for me, hear the songs
of my childly dreams in these caves
& tunnels, had forever, the world's best,
secret balm.

If these pages are found & read,
listen for the singing from the caves
& tunnels. Join us in childly dreams.
Dance their messages through
your daylight hours. Touch & teach
others how, they are real. Open hands,
touch & teach others how, so close,
smile, so close. *They are real.*

[Perhaps the Gate-Keeper would & again, but I would not & use what I have of the Architect in me one more time to fling Christina, Maya, & me into a depth of the Tangled Gate he does not know, one his film has never found, there is so much more to this than I knew before we came here, but I have his maps now & more importantly I have his long coat & the precious Secret Books, & most of all I have Maya & Christina who are two & one & several, I think, & so my obligation is to get them beyond this, leave it back, they will remain the Princess much & in many ways for a long time, we've twined our threads with this story, they are stronger, they are one.

*[I cohere & cohere & cohere us for a long time, they've barely held onto something of themselves, I keep on it & toward something, drag us toward something from this hard flow back, the Gate-Keeper would not lose us, would not **lose them**, but so, & so, they are mine, they belong to themselves, they will not be the Princess in your script perpetually, I think & think of what might do this & finally reach out in my mind for the Creatures, the White Bunny & the imp, they know me & they follow no script, no film, help me cohere them, please, the Princess will remain with you forever but these two girls are mine, they must go with me, please help me, please help me—the White Bunny sniffs twice, the imp cackles & g-natters—*

We are sitting at dusk together on a bench. A stony path nearby. Trees, so many tall & brilliant green trees. Wildflowers in every color. And rain. Sprinkles of rain.

It stirs them to wake. They look around. Look at me.

I nod. Stand up. Start to walk, but they don't. I smile, hold out both my hands & they to take one each.

This is the Tangled Gate beyond its mythic story. This is how it feels to walk one of its paths, anywhere, anytime. Hands in hands, bound to try & settle some things.

It will be a long walk anywhere, for now, learning how to better traverse its distances. Sometimes a long walk is needed for thought, for bonding. Sometimes the walk has to be short & to the pound-pound-point.

It is past their times for previously written scripts & limitations.

Maybe the way I'm struggling to put it is this: it's time to bring the Tangled Gate to the world, to figure out what & how this would be.

I've got Christina. I've got Maya.
I need some more of different kinds but soon. Soon enough.

For now, the pleasure of walking with my girls.



To be continued in Cenacle | 87 | December 2013





Tom Sheehan

Grandfather's Remnants

Grandfather ran the city dump,
burned clinkers in a little house
made of scrap. On cold nights drunks
slept in, thicket 'round the grouse.

They were welcome, long night heat
of iron stove they wrapped around,
hot rim cold feet were propped upon,
quick difference from frozen ground,

bare railroad tracks and entry ways,
darkness where abides the ghost,
or last resort, dread cardboard wrap.
The lonely birds came to roost,

flew in at dusk. He stoked embers
to dry each feathered fan;
often left his lunch about,
tasty suet hanging for the clan.

On Saturdays I brought his lunch,
laminates of bread and meat,
thick and heavy, coarse as sin,
brown banana we would not eat,

dark coffee bottled in a pint,
wound about with paper clasp.
I never saw one dark bottle
finished off within his grasp,

never saw his hand inside
odd-size paper bag. His flock
did choose, had suet choice,
hens dining before the cock.

When he died they grieved
the man who gave them sup,
the drunk, besotted brothers
who once drank of his cup,

mottle skinned, the soured of life,
pale host, beaten up and warred,
they came to touch the little man
who offered what was left by God.

* * *

Letter to a Sweet-smelling Woman Waiting Words

Ah sweet marrow ganglia matter of mind what inviolable pleasure brings me to my computer this time of night in the moonspill mooncream what draws me this way and that from my outer to my inner am I all questions in this mushrooming quiet and dark of night this sound of dead foxes hanging thinly with leaves the den not returned to mother hunted while hunting and dogged down this deep of night this dread of sleeping while my mind can still move its way over the wave of things can extrapolate conjure figment articulate touch smell know once again the musk I could die for right now this instant this eternity for my nares have the memory of fingers and the dry pulp beneath my nails is your residue of love I cannot manicure away ashes of our fire.

I see suck words on lips I see the drip of syllables phonetics of some word rock buried in you as deeply as mine sunless and miles deep past the six hundred miles an hour that our impulses travel from mind to extremities of selves to fingers of satisfaction to fingers of knowledge to lips say to eyes move to pits of breast set into teeth like caraway seeds (oh I love the working memory as my tongue worries a pit like a cavity beginning –I form words for you at the touch) what tangible ghost of nights past is near me touching like grass or a spider web not quite there who the spirit travels its hands and lips and words against my ears my self my all as if Chapman's Homer has its speech and touches to me I I am alone atop Darien this abominable night though I have shares and am shared oh shared by madness oh stung by stars and simple grass.

Oh, listen believe me daughter of words holder of the precious word rock I am moonmaster starriser suncatcher burster of cometing yea a farmer plugging word songs but a listener of your night watches walker of your dreams the evil-doer doing done that far thin voice of a star moving on you oh dream death at morning light ah it is lonely the fox is dead I hear the dogs cry above the clash of leaves the horn empties its wail on wind the den not returned to the young wait cold and hungry the burrow walls close in in cool pneumatics the ferret comes slowly at first teasing his mouth waters saliva runs oozing like sperm his back arches he tingles Oh love I'd love to come to your mouth to have your lips holding me is volcanic thought furnacing the blade of your tongue is ever merciless why are you so unkind to me why cut memory's cut do my veins intrigue you my capillaries crawl like others crawl except when you loose your tongue you are mad! mad! but I bid you I bid you come at me once all mouth all imagination all energy I would know no other night nor own one I am doomed pusher of thought darer of deeds worder of words I am doomed who such lip when such thigh take the angle of my eye lest I lose that nearing breast bring your mouth where you've caressed use your tongue as gallant blade my private parts to invade.

I moonmaster master of words roper of stars brander of herds of Pegasus flock beg your tongue talk let it be known beneath your bone I love your curves and wanting nerves sleep comes now sifting through me pushing its delights into the barest ends of me the torture of a sugar remembered thighs intersect triangle of nerves coming away slowly as a rusty sled downhill excruciatingly lovely from the pitch of parting.

Once I shot at a doe and oh! I missed! I missed!





Psychedelics Not Linked To Mental Health Issues

[Essay]

Published September 4, 2013 at [realitysandwich.com](http://www.realitysandwich.com)

http://www.realitysandwich.com/psychedelics_not_linked_mental_health_issues

The classical serotonergic psychedelics (LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline) are not known to cause brain or organ damage and are judged to be non-addictive. They have been used for thousands of years in the Americas for celebratory, religious, and healing purposes.

Over 30 million people currently living in the U.S. have used them. Considering that millions of doses of psychedelics have been used every year for over 40 years, reliable case reports of long-term mental health problems following use of these substances are rare.

Knowing this information, a team of researchers decided to delve further into the relationship between psychedelics and mental health. The Raw Story¹ published an article on data collected from a U.S. government-sponsored survey that shows that the use of psychedelic substances such as LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, and peyote does not increase a person's risk of developing mental health problems.

“Everything has some potential for negative effects, but psychedelic use is overall considered to pose a very low risk to the individual and to society,” clinical psychologist Pål-Ørjan Johansen of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology said. “Psychedelics can elicit temporary feelings of anxiety and confusion, but accidents leading to serious injury are extremely rare.”

Johansen, along with fellow researcher Terri Krebs, gathered data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health survey to look at the relationship between psychedelic drug use and mental health problems. The survey is conducted annually by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The researchers found that psychedelic use does not indicate an increased risk of developing mental health issues. Rather, people who use psychedelics actually showed a slightly reduced risk of mental illness.

“Early speculation that psychedelics might lead to mental health problems was based on a small number of case reports and did not take into account either the widespread use of psychedelics or the not infrequent rate of mental health problems in the general population,” said Krebs.

Individual case reports have shown that psychedelic substances can trigger preexisting psychiatric conditions, but unlike scientific studies they cannot be applied to larger populations.

“Case reports of mental health problems following psychedelics are often comparable to case reports of mental health problems linked to intensive meditation, visiting

holy sites, or viewing beautiful artwork and sublime natural scenes,” the researchers wrote.

Psychedelics are not known to cause damage to the brain or other organs of the body, cause withdrawal symptoms, prompt addiction or compulsive use, or cause birth defects or genetic damage.

There has been a renewed interest in the study of psychedelics in the medical field in recent years. Scientists at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center have studied psilocybin, the active compound in “magic” mushrooms. Their research showed that psilocybin can safely treat patients with advanced-stage terminal cancer, including a reduction in anxiety, depression, and physical pain.

Scientists at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine have found psilocybin to promote positive changes in attitudes, mood, life satisfaction, and behavior that last for more than a year.

Preliminary research on MDMA, a substance commonly referred to as “Ecstasy,” could help people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. MDMA is often classified as a psychedelic, although it is also classified as a euphoric empathogen and stimulant.

Although all of this scientific and anecdotal data has been collected and published, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration currently classifies LSD, psilocybin, and peyote as Schedule I substances. This is a category that is supposed to be reserved for very dangerous drugs with no known medical value.

The study, titled “Psychedelics and Mental Health: A Population Study,” is published on PLoS One.² For more information about current psychedelic studies, visit the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.³

Endnotes

1. <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/08/20/data-from-u-s-survey-casts-doubt-on-u-s-classification-of-psychedelics-as-dangerous/>
2. <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0063972>
3. <http://www.maps.org/>

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Charlie Beyer lives in Oreana, Idaho. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 83 | December 2012. He tells me he's become a dinosaur bones scout for the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. What stories will come! More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His sublime poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. Halloween a favorite holiday of his as he loves to costume in body & Art.

Judh Haggai lives at lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her wonderful poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>. What would be your costume, Jude?

Herman Hesse was born in 1962 in Calw, Germany, & died in 1962 in Montagnolo, Switzerland. He is rightly regarded as one of the greatest 20th century novelists. His fiction in this issue was also reprinted in a volume in the 2005 Burning Man Books series (<http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>).

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His fine poetry and prose regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. The current issue's piece is part of his *Nighttime Daydreams* work-in-progress. More of his work can be found at <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Martina Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her fierce poetry last appeared in *The Cenacle* | 85 | June 2013. More of her splendid work can be found at <http://www.rollwiththechanges.org>. She & beloved Brian have a new cat & a new home!

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His masterly prose & poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Recently recovered from some serious surgery, he's back at his writing, daily composing thousands of lines before dawn.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. It is especially for her amusement that the Notes from New England Bungalow Cee piece is included in this issue.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. The leaves are turning many colors. Air is cooling. Season to drift back in time from the smiling kinetic safety of today to the roiling places of Yesterdayland.

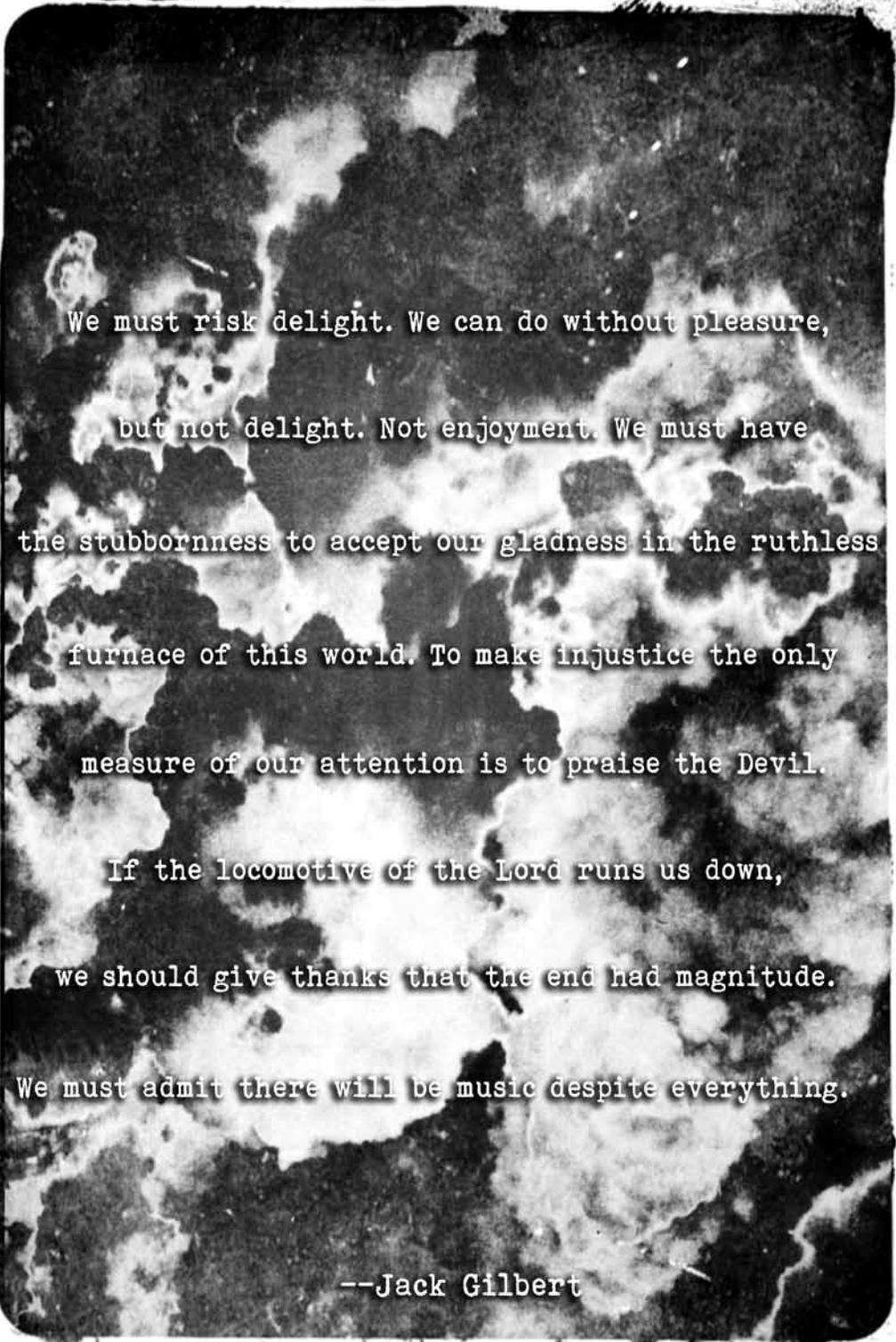
Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor lives north of Boston, Massachusetts. She hosts the monthly Out Loud Open Mic gatherings (<http://www.outloudopenmike.com>). Her dandy poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 83 | December 2012. Her poems this issue I'd long coveted to print. Thank you, ZMT!

Christopher Wick lives in Phoenix, Arizona, & is a new & welcomed contributor to *The Cenacle*. A good friend of Nathan Horowitz's, they learned poetry together when young & both have come to write it damned fine!

David Wilder lives in Raleigh, North Carolina & is a regular contributor to RealitySandwich.com.

* * * * *





We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless
furnace of this world. To make injustice the only
measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.

If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down,
we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.
We must admit there will be music despite everything.

--Jack Gilbert

