

DREAM RAPS

VOLUMES 11-12



BY RAYMOND SOULARD, JR.

Dream Raps, Volumes Eleven-Twelve

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by Raymond Soulard, Jr.

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*“He was part of my dream, of course—
but then I was part of his dream, too!”*

—Lewis Carroll,
Through the Looking-Glass, 1871.

* * * * *



Smile.
Wake up!
Happiness

—6 x 36 Nocturnes, V, #35, 2001.

Volumes One to Ten of Dreams Raps can be found at:

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* * * * *

I'm in Elliptical City

This story happened some time ago or, possibly, some time hence. It's one of *those* kinds of stories. You see, I'm living in Elliptical City. The locals call it E.C. by day. And I'm at a kind of a coffeehouse. I think an open-mic performance night. It's dark in here. It's strange & close. And, at one point, my eyeglasses become entangled in some kind of a soft tape. A woman sees my dilemma, & takes them from me to fix. I nod to her.

She departs to go up on stage. I think she's going to perform a poem. But her poem is not words. She stands erect, all nine foot of her, waves her arms about like a bird, opens her mouth slightly, & out come **colors, many many colors.**

They come out in different varieties. They fill the air. They dance around us in this dark coffeehouse. Soon, she is all **colors** wavering up there on the stage, all nine foot tall of her. It is a moment of beauty, & mystery &, when she's spent, her **colors** dim, & they fade from around this dark coffeehouse, & from her too.

And then she's gone, & I take off my glasses, & I look at them. And now they have a slight **colorful** tint to them, by way of memory.

I look at the clock, since I don't have a watch, & the clock says I'm late. I rush out of that coffeehouse in E.C., & down many streets with my map in hand, until I come to the Elliptical City Transit (*Ec Tetera* by nickname!), which is filled with buses to places, & I must get

somewhere.

I am an editor, you see. My clothes are patched, but my notebooks are thick in my bag, & I have places to go to. Got my little jar of **2**, of course. Just a little left, saved it for this trip. I have to get to the Great Liberry to do my most important research.

I find the right bus, the roofless one. I'm the last one to get on. I sit in the last seat, next to two other people who are snorin' & slobberin', but they're not unfriendly to me.

I look through my notebooks thoroughly. I want to prepare to arrive at the Great Liberry. One does not show up half-intentioned, as it will affect what you find. You see, when this roofless bus gets me there, when I arrive to the Great Liberry, I am going to do some of the deepest researches I've ever done, into the *Dreaming*. For I've learned, in one way & another, that there are **Sleepers** who travel the *Dreaming*, trying to cause change with good ripples forward. They find it harder to change things the farther back they go, because history weights heavy upon any ripple.

Then there are these **Scholars** who advise them. **Scholars** who calculate the ripples. They look deep into history, & see where it might be changed toward the better, the kinder, the more generous. And they send the **Sleepers** to those places, with advice on what to do. *Move a book slightly. Smile at a stranger. Fall off a bridge, with witnesses.*

And then there are simply the **Tourists**. Now you can wonder such how a great operation like this is funded. It must cost bajillions of dollars to pay for such a project, to try to heal history, as they are. Well, these **Tourists**, they're the patrons. They pay to travel through the *Dreaming*, to view time & space from new perspectives. They pay to be at key & crucial moments in time, when documents were signed, & evil men were slain, & trees were planted, but they can *only* watch. They've become like traces, perhaps some in history call them **Specters**, but they're merely **Tourists** from the far-flung future, when the great project has been created to heal history, via the *Dreaming*, before the world ends, at least for people-folks.

And I am going to the Great Liberry to read more & more about this. If my intentions are good, if I'm focused, if I *hmmm* well, I will get into the part of the Great Liberry that will bring me to the books to read, to tell me all I need to know, or all I could wish to know, or even just one or two more little things in the large story.

I extract very carefully from a hand-made book I keep in the inmost pocket's pocket's pocket of my green plaid jacket a folded up piece of paper. I keep my important papers in this book, like my notes on the **Sleepers**. Oh, & some on Gate-Keeper & Mentor too.

Unfold the paper carefully for the slobberin', snorin' fellows to see:

*Ask for Schola' Sanchez.
He is the Liberrian.*

*I don't know if he used to be a **Scholar**, like the ones I am studying, I explain slowly to them. But he is a **Liberrian** now anyway.* They vaguely nod at me.

I smile bright as a dancing Creature. *Those are my instructions for when I get there. Ah! I am so excited!*

They smile at me, & go back to their slobberin' & snorin' rest.

* * * * *

There is, Down, at the Heart of the World, a Great Tree

There is, down, at the Heart of the World, a Great Tree. This Tree has six roots. *Where do these roots reach down to? What do they root in?* These are my questions. And another: *Is there solid earth of some kind down there into which these roots root?*

The trunk rises up, & its many branches have grown & traveled to many places. Have become lesser great trees that are beheld in wonder themselves, by those far above the Great Tree. *Where do they reach toward? Is there a far end, a far tip of the farthest branch?*

The Heart of the World is shared by Many Worlds. Thus, the Great Tree is the Great Tree of Many Worlds. Would you know *wherefrom*, you would seek down to this Great Tree at the Heart of the World, of the Many Worlds, & you would know better, but you would not know *all*.

And there came a Festival, celebrated on Many Worlds, in many ways. Worlds that, while they share the Great Tree at the Heart of them, had lost connection amongst each other in other ways. And this Festival was one where they grew closer together again. Because it was a Festival in many forms, on Many Worlds, but it was *one* Festival. One Great Tree, one Heart of the World, one Heart of the Worlds. *From many, one. From one, many.*

Look what's rising, as Festival goes from Many Worlds cross into each other's homes.

Look what's rising, in that Great Filld, where worlds cross by many wonderful threads. By using these threads, left here & thereabouts, by way of invitation, you can travel from yours to another's, & someone from there can come to yours.

Look what is rising, right in the center of that Great Filld, in reaction to all of this. Rising *higher & higher & higher. Tis a lesser Great Tree!*

To know that *I am I*, & also that *I am we*, & that these truths stand braided in all beings, is to understand, such as one can, that *everywhere* is home, & *everyone* is brother & sister & other.

Come to the Festival! Hurry! Come to the Festival! You'll get your thread to travel other worlds. If you come to the White Woods, you'll get a nice bowl of Rutabaga Soup, flavored with mushrooms.

You'll be shown how. You'll feel the roots down below you, reaching deep, & deeper, to unknown, or maybe unknowable, depths. And then you will feel, if you reach up, the branches of the Great Tree reaching ever on, ever out, ever in.

Come to the Festival, my friends! Come to the Festival!

There Are Many Ways, Many Paths, Many Worlds

There are many ways, many paths, Many Worlds. It's all true. And, happily, the worlds & paths & ways have opened up to each other again. As in times long past. The Festival has opened the worlds to one another again.

And it took you a while to figure it out, didn't it? I mean, what originally happened is that you were on the roofless bus, & you're headed home from work, & you were very tired. It's a big bookstore. It's just *so* big. Some shifts, they're quiet, & some you just run around left & right. All sorts of customers.

And it's good. They look for all sorts of books. Popular ones like *Aftermath* & *The Tangled Gate*. *Peter Pan*, of course. Controversial ones like *Nazi Jailbait Bitch*. Even, once in a while, scholarly ones like *History of the Six Islands*. By the end of the shift, you're just plain tired, & you get on the roofless bus, half-asleep. The Driver greets you. Wearing his busman's uniform & hat. You sit in the very back seat, tucked amongst your book-bag, your hat, & gloves, & whatnot, & you just fall asleep. You just fall right asleep.

Now your stop is just about at the end of the line. It's the second to last stop. But the last stop is *far* beyond your stop. And you know this because when you first started taking this roofless bus, coming from that bookstore job, you almost missed it. And the Driver said, *buddy, you don't get your stop, it's a long way on to the last one. Less'n you want to sleep it off on the Beach.*

Well, that's what happened. You missed your stop. You were sort of slouched down in the seat. And the Driver had other things in his mind. He was looking forward to the Festival himself. *Had you heard of the Festival?* Oh, maybe, you hear about things. But you wouldn't know thing one about how to get there.

Well, you woke up, because the roofless bus had stopped, & the Driver was shaking you. *Wake up, buddy, wake up! Are you going to the Festival too? We gotta hurry to transfer for the Festival!*

Well, you look around, & this isn't the city anymore. The roofless bus is deep in the White Woods, & they are strangely glowing, many, one, & none **colors**, however that may be. You've not been here before, preferring the familiar ways of E.C. And the Driver's changed out of his busman's uniform. He's looking more casual in blue jeans & lumberjack shirt. Wearing a **2** necklace. And he's got a kind of floppy hat on. Looks ready to party!

Come on, man. Come on. It's OK, he says. *I'll show you the ropes.* So we depart the roofless bus. He blocks up the tires. Takes the key. *Safety first!* he says with a wry smile.

He brings you through the Woods. No paths to be seen, until you come to a certain tree. Not really any different than all the others. All beautiful, they are, this one too, no sign. After a while, though, you hear a distant *Laaa!*

And up comes the strangest conveyance you've ever seen. It's kind of like a bloo-&-pink Trolley. But it's not like any kind of trolley you've ever seen. The door opens, & there's this strangely wonderful bloo-&-pink Piglet Creature behind the wheel. *Hop on board, passengers! Make sure to buckle in*, cries this strange Driver merrily.

Safety first! you both say. You're learning the ropes now.

And this Trolley just takes off on its tracks, rolling & unrolling underneath its wheels. So you can't see any ahead or any behind, but they're definitely down below. Trolley goes careening through the White Woods for a long, long time. And then stops.

Happy Festival, passengers! the bloo-&-pink Creature Driver calls. *Are you coming?* I ask friendly.

More passengers to get before I have my turn, the bloo-&-pink Creature Driver says, with a warm, tricky smile. She & your Driver friend throw friendly winks back & forth.

Now your floppy-hatted Driver friend takes you by the hand, leads you into a large clearing. *Oh my gosh, so many*, you say, but he leads you safely through the crowds. And you don't remember later half of what goes on. But there seems to be some kind of a stage-platform at one end of this Great Clearing, & performers of all different kinds. There are beings made of Buzz. They are beings made of Bells. *Like a Talent Show?*

And then you're being fed a little Soup that you've never tasted the like of before. And you're being led into a place of **colors**. And now you're in a great big place beyond what you can imagine. *Fill the Filled!* is the cry, as you find a thread in your hand, & you do not quite comprehend that. *What a beautiful tree in the center though!*

And then you're led along again by someone to a great old house, like one you remember from your youth's dearest dreams. And it seemed as though you're passed from hand to hand. You're in a Reading Room. Holding a necklace. You go through a door. You're taught to *hmmm* beautifully beyond what you can imagine.

And you come at last to a prairie. *How did you end up on the prairie?* You were just in a bookstore, five or ten minutes ago. And there before you now, you learn, is the Great Prairie Press Palace. And you approach, & there are many kinds of doors, & you choose one at random because it seems like that's what all this is about: *choosing*.

You go through a door of endless **colors**, with a smile on your face. And what happens next, you can't even imagine to wonder to know. *Happy Festival!*

Dreamwalker wakes . . . but not really . . .

Dreamwalker wakes, but not really. *Again*. It's like he comes to, as though he was just drifting off, even though he knows none of that is true. But here he is, in the warm home of an older woman he does not hardly know, yet she feels dear to his heart in some way he cannot understand with words.

And she is again teaching him from the frailest, most tattered of ancient books. *But are they words she speaks? Do her lips actually move? What is her learning?* She smiles upon him, like some kind of recalcitrant student, & he smiles back, guiltily, wishing he understood better.

Someone else seems there, too, sitting in a corner, witnessing this lesson. Like a Brother of his, yet he doesn't remember him either. But he recalls from earlier in the evening they were together in an old old coffeehouse, & the Brother was angry. Something about love, being deeply in love. And the street outside was crowded, loud. He'd never seen this place like this before. The only thought he has to himself right now is: *how to get back to that Cave, or on to the exit?*

But he keeps this most deeply to himself. Since he's a visitor, it seems, he's shown to a small chamber, the warm bed, many blankets of course. He gets in, gets under the covers. Does not undress. He's not sure why. But it's best not to undress.

And somewhere deep in the many sweaters, shirts, jackets he seems to have on him, he pulls out, from a very hidden pocket, a hand-made book containing a tied-together collection of index cards & photographs. These are his memories, since he seems to have lost his own otherwise. Memories, dreams, whatever he can pull together, he'll put down on the index cards with his stubby pencil. It is how he will remember them. *It is how he will find them again.*

This Philosopher

This is the way it began to be told about this Philosopher. After that upsetting trip down to the Beach of Many Worlds, & some kind of traumatizing encounter with a "computer table," his friends got together & raised a subscription that he may be able to do his philosophizing work. Maybe even become the Great Author of philosophical tomes that he yearned to be. Some wondered at all this, but it seemed to go well. You may wonder though: *What was his work?*

Well, at first, he watched his little black-&-white DüMönt TV, with an

Antennar 100Q, in his Philosophizing Chamber, which you could also say was a small room in the Pensionne in the Village, hosted by Aunt, who's also one of his patrons. Just down the hallway from that weird golfing fellow.

So he began thinking about football teams he saw on the little TV, like that great old tight end he used to enjoyed watching. Now got to wondering about them, in a philosophical manner. Like: *what if, instead of being built to run & tackle, they were built to fly?*

And then he adjusted his Antennar 100Q, borrowed from a fellow Pensionne dweller, that weird golfer actually. Nice enough fellow, he supposed. And now he watched those dancers on the little TV, & he thought: *what about them doing even more rising up, than always just landing from their dancings?*

And these things interested him for a while, & he wrote them down in his vast & strange hand-made notebooks. But then, see, he began to *really* mull into his philosophizings. He tried to draw back, & see it big, & then draw deep in, & see it small.

And he thought: *well, now, if I took the various bric-a-brac about me, I could possibly conjure up a substance called 2. And sometimes it will be the number 2, & sometimes it will be T-O, & sometimes it will be T-O-O. Ah, there's something. And sometimes it will be a pill, & sometimes it'll be a paste, & sometimes it will be a steam. Sometimes it resides in a jar, sometimes in a bowl, sometimes on a necklace, or a bracelet, or a ring. And, as 2, it would address many questions, such as I + not I. As T-O, it would address enhanced action, as in to dance even higher, to fly instead of run. And, as T-O-O, it would be even something else. Dancing higher still! Flying further, more & less, both!*

And his friends, who had created the subscription to support him, eventually came round to see how he was doing. They brought him nicely covered bowls of Rutabaga Soup, to make sure that he et once in a while. Even Philosophers must do so.

And he sat with them, & he told them all about 2, T-O, T-O-O. And he showed them, the guy amongst them, there were many girls, there

were a few Creatures, but there was a guy amongst them, he'd been the first, & he showed him first, & then the rest.

And so the Philosopher demonstrated with him how it worked. Handed him a jar, handed him a bowl, put a necklace around his neck. They begin to engage in 2, T-O, T-O-O. *All drew closer. All floated far away.*

Aunt stood in the doorway, smiling. She knew that all were delighted by the beginnings of this Philosopher's long work.

Gate-Keeper & His Mentor

You know how I've been researching the Gate-Keeper for so long? *Where did he come from? What is he?* Not the kind of things that you can go to your usual kind of fine library & find out.

But, you see, I have a friend. His name is Schola' Sanchez. He is a Bear Creature who is the **Liberrian** for the Great Liberry at the Heart of the World. Schola' Sanchez is a fine fellow & he understands how long I've been researching the Gate-Keeper, to understand, & to tell. That's all I want to do. *I want to tell. Do you understand me?* I think you do. Thank you.

So Schola' Sanchez, one fine time, he came to see me, while I was sitting at the Driftwood Table, in the Bungalow Cee, working on my notes, trying to figure this & that, not doing very well. *Labyrinthine, Many Musics, Dream Raps*, I don't know.

Well, Schola' Sanchez came right up to me, where I sat at the Driftwood Table in the Bungalow Cee, working on my notes, & he offered me a kind smile, & a friendly paw. And he led me, by one way, & another, to the shore of the Wide Wide Sea, where waited the great green-&-golden Calgary the Sea Dragon, of so many famous songs & stories!

So Schola' Sanchez & I winded our way right up, from tail to back to shnoggin of that fine Calgary the Sea Dragon. He had us buckle in with Safety Scales. *Safety first!* is our motto, one & all. And we *thwup-*

thwup-thwupped away, long & long & long over the Wide Wide Sea, until we came to where it was time for Calgary the Sea Dragon to swoop & soar suavely *up-up-up!* & then *down-down-down! ker-splash!*

And deep, deep, deep, deep, deep we now go. Safe as could be, with this Calgary the Sea Dragon, until we—*ker-splash!*—come right out the bottom of the Deep Deep Sea to the sky above shore of the Deeper Deeper Sea, & there was Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle, on the Beach of Many Worlds!

We had a nice visit with him. Probably a nap. Maybe said hello to his Imp friend, who lives in a tooth cavity in Abe's jaw. She cackled us friendly. Schola' Sanchez told Abe what we were bound for doing. Abe nodded & agreed it was the thing right now to be bound for doing. *Get along my friends! Hurry, hurry!* he cried merrily.

So we did. Boarded Calgary the Sea Dragon again, dived down deep again, into the Deeper Deeper Sea, & come to the well-known dry tunnel into the Cave. Thence mysterious place where the White Woods & Great Liberry become one & the same. Not too far from that Great Tree, that's for sure.

And Schola' Sanchez, a lovely Bear Creature, a bear of powdery gray beauty, & a big smile, & a fine **Scholar's** cap on top, to show he is a **Scholar** (or used to be, since he is a **Liberrian** now), he brought me to the researches I needed to do, & this is what I learned.

I learned Gate-Keeper had a Mentor. He was a strange-looking fellow, very tall, long coat, was a dark man with pale eyes. He had a knit cap upon his head. Hey, I wear those from time to time too! Striped was his. White spiked teeth, *maybe make you fear?* I'm not sure if you should. Warm brown hands, tall white boots.

This was Gate-Keeper's Mentor, this was who taught him. And helped him, too, when he came back in later days, to his old home-world, because he was on a mission to help this home-world, help its folks move to the beautiful world where they wanted to go. *Colorful, mysterious, calm, & sweet.*

They went together. Far from the settlements that they both knew familiarly, unhappy settlements, near their crashed spaceship, never very developed. Nobody wanted to live there. But they did, as seemed like no option. But Mentor, knowing Gate-Keeper's wish to move them, nodded & knew it was time to bring him to the yellow building.

The yellow building was a far *far* trip. Far off in a part of the world none of the rest of their people knew about. It was tall. It was crooked. It was yellow. You could say it was yellow of sickness, but I tend to think it was more the yellow of sad thought.

And there was someone inside, someone who guarded the yellow building, but was also a prisoner there. Both. Strange. And what happened was, Mentor showed the Gate-Keeper how to deal with this guard-prisoner. It was *not* to elude her. It was *not* to fight her. It was to do the one thing that nobody had ever done before or rarely. And it was to open both hands out, for her to sniff. It was to *hmmm* in a very special way. And she went from guard or prisoner to who showed them how to reach the roof of the yellow building. Had any been there but her & Mentor? I don't know.

And now they're on the roof of the yellow building. The three of them, & Mentor pointed in the now darkened sky of their long travels. He pointed to a certain shining image in the sky. Bigger than the stars, well enough to see very thoroughly, & said, *that, my friend, is our true home.*

* * * * *

Lilianna & Hobo Jones

Now this is the strange twisting story of Lilianna & Hobo Jones. Hobo Jones was the most advanced Robot-Man ever built. Intended to save the world. Now this might have come about a little too late in things, but it was an awfully good try.

You might think: *well, Lilianna was probably the lead scientist building him, the inventor, or maybe she was someone that Hobo Jones fell in love with. Being the most advanced Robot-Man ever built in the world, might he not have feelings in his heart?* Maybe. I don't know about any of that.

I don't know if any of it's true really.

Hobo Jones & Lilianna met somewhat randomly. He was given the run of the Facility while they were building him. He knew he was a Robot-Man. And he knew he was built with the intention that he save the world. She was working at the friendly little market in the Facility. I mean, even your fancy scientists, your brilliant-genius types, need a pack of chewing gum now & again, maybe a cup of coffee.

And she worked behind the counter. Doesn't mean that was the whole & sum of her story. But that's where she worked. And Hobo Jones, sometimes called Hose Jones, having the run of the place, he come in one time & they got to talking, as folks do. And it turned out that they shared a favorite book. *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie.

It was the strangest thing in the world, that they both had dreams about flying off to that Island with Peter Pan & the Lost Boys. *What a thing to share!* Their friendship began there but, let me tell you, there was *a lot* more to it than that.

* * * * *

In the Circuit

Have you ever ended up on a bus that you found you could not get off, per se? Well, you *could* get off, but you found that you just had to get on again, to continue along, in the Circuit of the bus that you were on. And so you could get off, for reasons, & then you would get back on, & ride along. And it felt exhilarating, mysterious, hopeful. *Ride along. Get off.*

It wasn't one of those new fancy kind of buses where you let the Robot-Man know you want to get on & off. No, you had to pull the cord. And it went: *errrrrrr!* Sometimes it didn't, & you'd have to wait for the next stop. But it worked most of the time. And there was no air conditioning, of course, but you could pull the windows open a bit, when they didn't stick. And the seats are kind of sticky, because it was hot. Even though outside it was cold. And it didn't have a roof most of the time either, so there's that.

Oh, & you avoided that one seat that wasn't really there. It was more like a hole. I mean, it *was* a hole. And if you look down into the hole, it was hard to know *what* was down there but it didn't seem to go down *just* to the bottom of the bus, tell you that much.

So, anyway, one time I got off the roofless bus, I lucky found this Great Clearing with all sorts of fun activities going on. There was this Talent Show going on. And there was this one tall woman singer. Her hair sort of lit up like the Moon. That's what I thought.

Well, OK, I didn't *really* think it. The guy next to me with the horn on his head, from the roofless bus too, he says, *that lady singer, her hair lights up like the Moon! Her sister sings these, like, rainbow poems. You should see her too at the Festival too!*

And she was playing a banjo. And the banjo was bigger than her. So she had herself kind of wrapped around the body of this banjo & she was sort of plucking with her arms reaching on all sides. I think she had a few extra fingers. And *then* her hair lit up like the Moon. That was fun.

Later on, back on the roofless bus, there's a party going on. I think everybody's here, everybody who's riding the Circuit. It doesn't happen often. Usually one or more of us are off at one of the stops, at Talent Shows or whatever. But we're all here, & it feels like a big party. And we're just enjoying ourselves to no end. Maybe some **T-O** mixed up & being shared around. Like they say: *We all drew closer. We all floated far away.*

I was sitting next to the guy with the horn. It was sort of in the back of his head, but he could kind of adjust it a little bit. It was kind of like if you comb your hair, one way or another, you can kind of move it around your head. He could kind of move his horn around his head. And he said to everybody, *say, last stop I was at, I was at this guy's hovel, & we were watching this real old TV with a weird antennae like a coat hanger. It must have been, like, 200 years old, if not more, & we were watching this old crooner on the TV as we were sharing this bag of, um, some kind of strange food he called ChocoSmacks. Them's the facts! says he. At least they were better than these really weird, like, protein bars, I think he called them? Just made me burp.* Everyone laughs.

And the crooner on this ancient TV, he was singing, kiss me once, & kiss me twice, & kiss me once again. It's been a long, long time. Then like his crazy neighbor lady started pounding on the wall or something, & he says, Excuse me, I have to go to the bathroom now. Good night! Like, huh, what?

Well, everybody in the party digs that story, it's pretty good. You see, we'd all become kind of collectors of the adventures we have. And I swear the Circuit gets even deeper. I ask the guy with the horn, he seems to be the veteran in the bunch, I ask him what I've been wondering. *Is this the same Circuit, man? Are we going around in the same circle?*

Well, he moves the chawin' tobacco' from one of his cheeks to the other of his cheeks, while he's thinking about this. *Chaw chaw chaw.* Spits out, & then he says, *naw, the Circuit gets Deeper, every go-round. It gets Deeper, Cap'n.*

Dreamwalker & the Frail Ancient Book

Dreamwalker looks as closely as he can at the frail ancient book in the older woman's hands, & he notices there are two places on the cover where it seems to be cut out. She'd just been reading to him about the long ago Great Violence.

It was everywhere, she read. There was a kind of perpetuating force that made it. So, nowhere at ease, nowhere far from it. It was a rupture, a constant movement of violence. But then, it concluded, not by choice, not by will but, as all things seem to do, it began to end.

And though she never has before, she now hands Dreamwalker the frail ancient book, & she smiles at him, a smile she has never before, & one he cannot deduce as being without mirth or without something else. *Look, look. See.* She hands him the frail ancient book, & he makes to open it up. She shakes her head. *Look, look. See.*

He realizes that the cutouts on the cover are a place for eyes, & so he closes it again, & he places his face very gently against the frail

ancient book, so that his eyes can look into the cutouts. And he sees that there's something there now. A gentle rising, swelling, & falling through the Many Worlds, that is a remnant, a memory, a scar of that Great Violence. And it is ill at ease. And things could go one way, or another, regarding it.

He gently raises his face from the frail ancient book, & looks at the old woman, her no longer smiling. And she says, *you must find your Brothers.*

In the Ago, or the After

Maybe this story takes place in the *ago*, or the *after*. In some ways, they will resemble each other. Maybe, in some ways, they won't.

In short, it is Saturday. We are together in a movie theater, so I'd say *after*. She quizzes me with lovely turquoise eyes about why this theater & not the other one. And I say, *because of its track record.* Maybe this is an *after*, not so much *ago*. But I'm not so sure about that.

The movie is animated, after a fashion, dark & thick & vivid. It is a strange, flowing narrative, rolls to the edge of the screen, & seems to roll a little bit further, & that is *after*. It's about a sort of tadpole, nearly eaten by a dog in a pond. Has kind of a wiry little frame, antenna poking off in all directions. It's a very strange tadpole. Scrawny, but tough.

That dog, I don't know if he wants to eat the tadpole, or just play with it with lots of teeth. It's hard to say. Tadpole gets a little chewed, but gets away.

And the theater fills up full & gets very loud, that's *ago* & *after*, I'd wager. Down at my feet, I notice a small bloo-&-pink Creature. My Beloved again lays her lovely eyes upon me, quizzing a second time. I pick up the little bloo-&-pink Creature, & settle her in the crook of my arm, comfortably. Smiles me a tricky *thankee*.

The narrative gets thicker. *Is it more than one narrative? Is it more than one screen? Are we still in this movie theater?*

It gets louder, & louder, & louder, & louder, & I think: *you know, maybe I confused the track record of this & that other theater. Maybe.*

* * * * *

The Photograph

Now you've heard stories of Hobo Jones, sometimes called Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man ever built, intended to save the world, & of his friendship with Lilianna, who ran the friendly little market at the Facility where Hobo Jones was created.

And, for the longest time, their conversation was light. Talk of Peter Pan & Captain Hook & Tiger Lily. Sometimes they simply liked to listen to music together. When Hobo Jones would come into the friendly little market, Lilianna would have the white-faced pink cat radio playing all sorts of old tunes. She liked *The Jazz*, she said, & Hobo Jones could see why. It made him feel jittery inside, but in a really really *good* way. She usually had the Dreamland Jazz station tuned in but, when it got too fuzzy, she put on SpiritPlants Radio America for awhile.

Then one time, things took a turn. And they took a turn for the following reasons. You see, Lilianna had carried with her a secret into working at the Facility. Now she wasn't trying to bring it down or sabotage it. She was no *assassin*, mind you. But she had a question. It had to do with a photograph she carried with her.

She would wear those kind of long, old-fashioned Amish dresses. Not so much for the style of them, but because they contained many pockets. She was a fan of many pockets. It's where she kept her pencils, & her little notebooks, & her novels, & all sorts of things that she might need during the day. She was told when she was hired that she was not allowed to bring any kind of bags into the Facility. But she could bring things in her pockets. Being smart, & wily, she sewed several of these dresses with even *more* pockets to bring with her into the Facility.

And one day, she drew from one of these many pockets a photograph, a black-&-white photograph, which she showed to Hobo Jones. She said it was a black-&-white photograph of a black-&-white person. *I'm not kidding you, Mr. Jones*, she said.

And Hobo Jones took the photograph from Lilianna's hand, which was **colored** somewhere between orange & yellow right now, & he studied it closely.

Then he said, *may I do some further studying on this, Miss Lilianna?*

She nodded.

* * * * *

It Was a Fragile Group, Wanting to Accomplish Something

We'd been traveling for a while. It was a fragile group, uncertain, wanting to accomplish something. But it's funny how what that was changed over time. It grew amorphous, higher, *more* fragile.

You started off by saying: *I love this world, I want to do good by it.*

And then you shift to: *how can I do good by it?*

And then you shift to: *what do I have that I could use to do good by it?*

And then you shift to: *what good does it need?*

And then you shift to: *what good would really help?*

And then you shift to: *what good would matter anyway, over time?*

We'd travel these White Woods for a while. I couldn't tell you how long, none of the others could either. They weren't like other places, they weren't uncertain, unsteady. There was something here that was *sure*, though none of us knew what.

And when we heard the sounds up ahead, we were hopeful & fearful. But, as we came closer, they were obviously the sounds of celebration. *A Festival?*

Cheering, laughter, many kinds of tongue were being spoken, when they did not sing, & we came, slowly, creeping, unseen, to the very

edge of a Great Clearing.

It was filled with *all* kinds of beings, some more familiarly shaped, some not. Some dancing on the solid ground, some up in the air. Some it seemed both. Some seemed neither. And, way at the far end of this clearing, we in our hidden shadows espied a great stage &, on it, great performances.

I'm trying to remember now throughout this time what exactly we saw, but it's like one was shaped like a White Tiger, one like a White Bunny hopping through the air. There were Bears. There were Winged beings. There were beings made of Buzz. There were beings made of Bells. There were beings that seemed clustered, many to a stalk, & others that seemed quite alone.

But it was all so friendly. It was all so wonderfully various & friendly, & the music swirled about us, tickled us, warmed us like a blanket, a good warm brown blanket, maybe with kind Bears upon it.

And then a kind paw touched my terrified elbow, & a lovely little face raised me up, raised the others up too. Brought us into the clearing. Brought us through crowds that smiled & danced & sang to us. Brought us to a great Kettle, & gave us each a bowl of wonderful Rutabaga Soup. And brought us closer so we could watch, & stand among what seemed like a bajillion new friends.

Hope in the world, that night & always. Hope in the world there is such. Maybe we can learn how to be the Travel Angels we've wanted to be.

* * * * *

The Friendly Little Market

Hobo Jones slides the black-&-white photograph into a slot in his torso. He begins to *whir* & *whir* & *whir*, which probably means his advanced Robot-Man machineries are studying this photograph closely. His eyes begin to *spin* & *spin* & *spin*, & all of him gives off a strange *hmmm*.

Lilianna has seen this before. It's how he does his work. She knows to be patient, & wait to see what happens. Then his eyes stop spinning, he stops whirring, & *hmmmming*. The photograph pops back out, which he then hands back to Lilianna.

And he says, *he is traveling to the Island. He is carrying many plastic bags. Some of them contain small vinyl records that he values. Some of them contain magazines of poems & pictures, of which he is fond. One of them contains something that . . . I do not know. But I think the answer is somewhere in this Facility, if you would like to accompany me, Miss Lilianna.*

She nods, she smiles, she takes his offered arm, the crook of his elbow. Leaves the friendly little market with a sign that says, *Back Soon*. Off they go.

* * * * *

Flipping Channels in My Mind

This was long times ago, many *many* turns of the calendar back. I lay, relatively comfortably, in the darkness of my ZombieTown hovel. I was sort of curled around the wires poking out of the mattress upon which I slept. Move my blankets around too. I had it all worked out. Eyes closed, it was quiet, for once, in the building in which my hovel resided. No crazy neighbor lady tonight.

And I was flipping channels in my mind, as I was wont to do. Without coin in my pocket, nor friend to my name, I had channels to flip in my mind. No Antennar 200 needed. *Haha!*

First channel, there's some kind of complex office with tiny little *Cenacles*, fulla tiny little poems & pictures, bundled together with their associated Jellicle Literary Guild audio cassettes, tiny little ones, & other things. A strange & delightful array. *Goodness me, what does that mean?* I could not begin to tell you.

But I flip the channel, that's the deal. In the Village, there's a computer that assigns people-folks to tasks, uses shiny, silvery punch-sheets.

Everyone has to take a turn at the computer table, to get their assignments.

I try to sabotage the system in an attempt to muck up things, & manage to escape unnoticed. I think it will all get crazy, & I don't know if I succeed, because I flip the channel again.

The President & the rebel leader on the TV & in the newspapers square off grimly but, at a very private party, they can be seen talking, laughing, raising glasses, & one could ask the through-line from public enmity to private congeniality. Kind of a strange game, like *Sprites & Imps*, in which moves are being made on multiple levels towards the end of clicking an unknown result into place? Not a victory for one, defeat for the other so much as a collaboration? The subtle messy kind that does not play well for crowds staring dully at boxes, but does keep the world from blowing up? *Click!*

This one takes a while to come into view. Oh, it's bookstore I used to work at a long *long* time ago but it's all kind of reshaped, & dusty, & dank, & there seem to be dead critters lying about the floor. And this Tramp comes up to me with crumpled bills in his paw, & says, *I need quarters! I need nickels! That's all. Quarters! Nickels!* And then he hands me a grubby couple of bills, & I try to sort it out in the cash register machine &—*click!*

The old **Scholar** gentleman had given his long wild literary presentation on the *Great Grand Braided Narrative [Gr. Gr. Br. N., for friendly]*, & we sat at the kitchen table, & he had a single sheet of one typed poem to show for it all. And I was about to ask him how he had organized such a massive literary presentation, & kept it all together. And he looked kindly at me with his crinkly wise eyes. Dirty beard. Smiled his tooth & said, *click!*

* * * * *

A Strange Compound

This is the story of a young man who lived near a strange Compound, weird people coming & going by day & night. And he knew some

of what was going on there, because he worked there sometimes, somehow it come to be. And he knew that there were people who *ran* the Compound, & then there were others who were *run*, as it were.

The young man fell in love with an orphan girl he met there, one of those who was run, & they became friends. He would teach her useful skills that he had learned from all his years living at the edge of, & often within, the White Woods. He knew how to fix things better than almost anyone else.

And he taught her these things, which made her more valuable to those who ran the Compound, at least for now. But then, within these more obvious skills he taught her, which he knew they would approve of, he taught her how to read & write, which she'd never learned in all her years. He taught her how to make Art from the skins of tree bark, **colors** found in blooms. And they would not have liked any of this *at all*.

And then one time, as they sat under their favorite White Birch tree, which was located in one of the countless interior courtyards that made up the seeming endless Compound, someone spied them kissing. It was the lightest, sweetest, merest, most wonderful kiss either one of them had ever experienced. And neither one of them had ever experienced any kisses before.

But one of the Compound guards saw them. And he came over. He sort of *wilded* over, his arms flailing left & right. He looked like a kind of a man & a tornado mixed up in one weird package. And he came over with a great stapler & a small gun. And he started shouting in a language neither of them understood. But anyone can understand when they're being threatened. It doesn't matter what the words are.

There were others in the Compound too, who were *neither* being run *nor* running. They were the **Dwellers**. Perhaps they lived in the Compound before it was taken over, & they were watching from hidden corners, shrouded windows, unseen doors.

And a sympathy grew up amongst them, to act on behalf of this young man & this girl. They weren't sure yet what it would be that they would

do, or how in the world they would do it, but this feeling grew up, & this feeling wasn't going anywhere.

Exhausted, So Not Much

Exhausted, so not much. *Someone famous? A multi-colored trail to follow? Something missing? I didn't know, what this?* Lie back, think again. Kind of a swirling dream. Don't remember what. *But it's like there was colored water, many colors, running side by side. Sometimes they'd mix together, sing. Hmm. Shift around. Group here & there. Nudge up, poke low.*

Deep in the earth is something valued, twice, triple deep, around a stone room full of strange secrets. Errrrrr!

I roll over completely. Close my eyes. Flip a channel. There's got to be something left. *I'll find it, I vow, right now. Something about a Robot-Man, & the company's making it. Some kind of super Robot-Man, they're saying. Won't be ready till 2022, or possibly 3225.*

Uh. I try one more time. Day's calling, gotta get along to the bookstore. Maybe a little bit left. *There's this band called Supernova. They live on a commune called Supernova.* OK, let's see where that goes.

So I meet the band, at the commune. They're friendly, a little strange. Show me around. It's a big place, very green. Lots of trees.

What do you do all day?
We practice, they say in a group voice.
OK, that's kind of strange. *Practice what?*
Practice for everything.

Oh, now this, what is this? This seems like other weird situations I've seen before.

But you know, the trees in this land sure are pretty. They're not up to some wacky scheme. I bid goodbye to Supernova, walk on, among the trees, &

they get thicker. Ah, here we go. This is something worth knowing, worth doing. And I come to a Great Tree. I step back a few steps to see it better, & a few steps more. And I see its branches form a crown around it.

All right, that what I'm going for. I close my eyes tight. *I'm going in. And the tree, it's a beautiful tree, & at first it's quiet as trees are, when you don't know how to listen, & even if you do listen. But sometimes trees are quiet. And sometimes, when you start to work your way in, work your way in a little more, they gets a little less quiet.*

You know what to do. *Hmmm. Maybe that'll work. Maybe it won't. Go a little further in, & a little further in. Now I'm deep in all right. This is good. I don't know what this is. I don't know what any of that was. It was all kind of silly, fatuous, whatever. But this is a good channel.*

I'm going further in, my friends. You can come along, if you can figure your way here. There's room, if you ask kindly, & you know how to make it. You'll get here too. Just close your eyes, pay attention. It's all there to be found. It's all there to be discovered. Somewhere in you, you already know how. I didn't start with any more than you. But here I am. Where I've told you I've come. If I can make it here, well you can make it here too.

So that's what I encourage. It's something you *ought* to do.

The Facility

Hobo Jones, sometimes called Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man in history, made to save the world, & his good friend Lilianna wander the Facility in which he was made. Now you may wonder if it's a good idea for this Robot-Man to wander the Facility freely but, you see, there is no outside of the Facility. It was made for there to be no exits. In fact, the only time the Facility will open up, in a manner that few at this time know, is at the moment when Hobo Jones is sent to save the world. That moment has not come yet.

So he is free to wander in this Facility with no exits. As for Lilianna, you may wonder: *does she live in the Facility?* Tis so that she works at

the friendly little market. But there are other questions that are simply not answered yet. And maybe anon.

But for now, they are walking along one of the Facility's many endless hallways with the strange glowy light, but no fixtures to be seen. It's almost an Indiglow, Lilianna has thought more than once, when she has walked down them, to & from her job at the market.

They are carrying a black-&-white photo of a black-&-white individual. And though Hobo Jones has said he would help her to find out more about this picture, Lilianna is thoughtful as they walk along, girl-hand in Robot-Man-hand.

She says, *sometimes all of this feels like my poetry magazine back in school. Why is that, Miss Lilianna?* Hobo Jones asks.

Well, there were poems slooping, from afar, to near, & away. It was like a strange, multi-colored trail of them. Like poems & pictures braided in one.

That sounds like a strange poetry magazine, Miss Lilianna.

Lilianna nods. *It was very strange. But the trail of poems slooping from afar, to near, & then away, it was very pretty, & very musical. It's as though the poems sang in some way, as they arrived, & as they left. And although they were unique songs, when they arrived from afar to near, when they left, they sang together in chorus. It was strange, Mr. Jones. I do agree. But then, well, you know we don't have all that anymore.*

Hobo Jones did not know all the details, in truth, of how the world had gotten worse & worse, until it wasn't possible to live above ground anymore & the only way to travel from one place to another was via long trails of sealed shipping containers, traveled from one to the next, without stopping. You *couldn't* stop. You were told to *keep moving*, & there might have been a container along the way, every once in a while, for sleeping, or to get some food. But you had to *keep moving*.

Lilianna was lucky that she made a friend, he was kind of a philosophical janitor back at her old school, & he had got her the friendly little market job here, or else she'd still be moving from sealed shipping container to shipping container. Half-starved, half-crazed, no hope really. But now she was in the Facility with Hobo Jones.

It's down there, Miss Lilianna. That door. Let's hurry.

Door of Endless Colors

Door of sunlight, door of mist, door of endless colors, door of dark, door of music, door of wood. *Which one will you choose of these entrances to the Prairie Press Palace?*

Now I don't know if this will help, but I heard a story of this guy who chose the door of endless colors. Now he wasn't sure exactly how he'd gotten here. He wondered if he'd taken a wrong turn. Sure, I guess if you call the wrong turn ending you up in a magical place like this, with options like these? You call that a wrong turn? *Sure.*

And he too could not decide what door to choose. So what he did was, he closed his eyes, & turned away from the doors, & then he spun round & round & round. And then, without thinking, he stopped, & he pointed, & he was pointing directly at the door of endless colors. Nodded, sorta hiked up his courage, & walked through.

Now what he came to was a black-&-white scene. And there was a crowd of folk. Different kinds of folk. Some perty folk, some looking like the hard-working folk that support the perty folk. All friendly though, raucous, laughing, not a not-equal amongst them.

And they were sitting on this couch, & they were sort of spilled onto the floor, & in front of them was a DüMönt TV with an Antennar 1000. A color DüMönt, no less. And they were all gathered round, watching something, laughing, pointing, jostling each other.

Well, this fellow marveled at his luck & he kind of hustled in at the very corner of the crowd. And he saw they were indeed watching a television show that he eventually figured out was called *Full Nexters*. And he kept saying, *Just look at that. Living color!* And he wasn't sure what all this meant.

So they were watching this color television show, & yet all around them

was mostly black-&-white, but then he found, as he watched deeper into it, he didn't care. It didn't matter. I mean, it was important, it was a *fact*, or maybe two facts, but it wasn't important that he understand *why*. It just *was*. As they say, *tis so*.

Of course they gave him a job. Started him very humble. Just holding wires, moving ladders, lifting objects when instructed. Sometimes someone needed a little bit of whispering upon the skin. Things like that.

But these folks saw his talents. Soon, he was finding his way deeper into this world &, wherever he'd come from, it didn't matter. He wasn't going back. He was where he belonged.

And he thought: *one day too, I'm going to be in living color. I vow. Right now!*

Lonely, Down a Lovelorn Path

Lonely, down a lovelorn path. It was like that. Sometimes the words would make sense to Dreamwalker, sometimes not. He knew that at one time he was able to step in & out of dreams, like other men a field of lilies & grass. Squeeze & shape them to a chunk of wisdom, a word, a message, from what knows this world & blows best through its ways.

But he wasn't doing so well with that right now, & he knew it had to do with remembering. This was still happening in a clumsy way. It was like, to find his Brothers, he had to *find* himself. He had to *remember* some things. He had to *remember himself*.

He'd long left the old woman with her frail ancient book, & its visions of a long ago Great Violence, & warning that it might still echo, even now. And he didn't think himself fully awake, as he walked through these White Woods, some version or vision of these White Woods. He had no direction, no plan, not really, when he heard somewhere nearby: *Pssst!*

And he turned toward the sound, & he saw a tree, maybe even more beautiful than the others, with a ladder circling it, urging one to climb. Which he did, *Hekk* stick slid into its slim shoulder bag. He climbed up & up into this tree, & beheld its beautiful **colors** from within, till they danced & they sang. *Hmmm. Laaa! Cackle!*

And he crawled out onto a large branch, & he beheld all. And yet what he could not figure was the terrifying image of warm blood on a log in his mind, a huge axe from the sky chopping it twine. It poked at him, even as he beheld all the splendors about him. But he wanted to stay just a *little* longer.

I Ended Up on That Beach

I ended up on that Beach. Yes, indeed, I did. That strange Beach they talk about, it's the one they claim you can travel to other worlds by. I took this odd roofless bus there. See, I didn't have much money, but I just had to find out for myself.

It was a very nice Beach. It was by a beautiful Sea. I had never seen the Sea so I just stood there staring for the longest time. And those marvelously strange clouds up in the sky! I had no words for the beauty that I saw. I walked over to a, um, kind of a restaurant of sorts. There were just tables on the Beach, & I suppose you could eat & drink.

I didn't have much money but, then I thought, *I've got a little money. It might be fun to ask for some food here & not just sort of sit skulking in the corner, hoping they don't notice me, looking at that beautiful Sea.*

So then I noticed on the table I sat at there is a little computer screen with some buttons. And I pressed a few & they went: *beep! beep!* But then, on the screen, it said, *how much money would you like today?* I knew I didn't have much so I typed in \$40, & then the computer went: *beep! beep! Your money is ready, Sir. Please step over to the bank.* I looked around &, sure enough, in the distance there was a bank on this Beach. And I hurried over to get my \$40, very excited about all of this.

When I got to the bank, it was very *very* crowded. There were long lines everywhere. And I started getting doubtful about what I just done. I didn't even know how to explain that I told the table that I want \$40. *A computer table? What was all this about?* I was beginning to get doubtful. *Why can't I use this Beach to go to one of those worlds where I don't get confused, & don't have any money, & end up talking to computer tables? And end up lost?*

And then let me tell you: I walked right out of that bank, without an additional dollar in my pocket. I walked right up to the edge of the Beach, right up to the water. Waved my arms around, raised them high. Listened to that beautiful sound of *whoosh whoosh whoosh*.

I closed my eyes & did not care a thing. *Beauty*.

I Was Dozing, on the Roofless Bus

I was dozing on the roofless bus, as it rode its Deeper Circuit. This was all become a fine & familiar thing to me. I had left behind the rest, to ride the roofless bus along the Deeper Circuit. I brought few possessions. My **T-O-O** necklace, of course. And I will admit that I did bring my white-faced pink cat radio.

Now I would often want to listen to my radio at different times. But I didn't want to disturb the other passengers. So I had a kind of headphone setup. My headphones weren't exactly plugged in to the white-faced pink cat radio, which was not exactly possible.

But I had a sort of rig that made it so I could listen through a sort-of-wire-&-headphone setup. And if I turned the volume on softly, it was possible for me to listen without disturbing others, even though it wasn't exactly a headphone setup. *You understand how these things go? You make do, that's what they always say. Make do.*

I was dozing in the very back of the roofless bus, very back seat. It wasn't very full. There may have been that Festival going on somewhere nearby. There usually is. And I had my jerry-rigged headphone gear on,

& I was listening, & on came this strange commercial. Didn't hear too many of those. But this one seemed, I don't know. It was different. The commercial's voice was tricky, like some kind of brilliant genius on my white-faced pink cat radio.

New from La Technologies, where tomorrow is today! The (patent pending) Bellla Brush! The wonder of the century! Brush, brush brush brush your cares away! Made of the finest materials! It gets the job done, any job, & more! Bring any job, big or small, to the (patent pending) Bellla Brush, & watch its space-age technologies get to work! Brush . . . brush . . . brush . . . your cares away . . . todayyyyyy!

Well, this sounded like something that I would like to get. Now, as I said, I didn't traveled with much. My **T-O-O** necklace, of course. My white-faced pink cat radio, & my headphone rig, & maybe, oh yeah, probably, I had quite a few little notebooks scattered about my person in different pockets I sewed onto my clothes, because you never know about things. Sometimes you need to look left & right, & it's best to keep your notebooks sewed into little pockets on your person. You don't want to wake up & they're gone. *Oh no you don't*. I can tell you, from firsthand experience. You don't want to do that. *You don't*. And I had black pens & pencils about myself as well, but I won't tell you where they were specifically. And there may have been a few other things, but just not very much.

You have to be slick & sly to travel this Deeper Circuit. Things come & go, unless you're careful. You get off one spot, you get on another. You don't know what's happening in between, entirely. Strange things occur. *Are you who you were the last time you got on the roofless bus? I often ask myself. Are you who you were? I don't know, man, why are you asking me?*

But this Bellla Brush, this attracted me, this made me think: *well, what if?* I pulled the cord for the next stop—**errrrrrrr!**—because I knew at this stop, there was a little bookstore. And I would get off, & I would go to the bookstore, where it was always Sunday afternoon. Now you're going to ask, & I'm going to say *I don't know. So let's just not.*

And I like to sit in a small corner of this little bookstore, where there are little magazines with poems & pictures. And I think to myself, *I'd like to write one of these little magazines with pictures, maybe write poems in them or something.* I've got plenty of notebooks & pens & pencils secreted about my body in various sewed-up pockets. But I don't know about all this as of yet. I just have to think about it some more.

Maybe if I had one of those Bellla Brushes, I'd be able to figure this all out. I know also that, behind the bookstore, there is an old bike that nobody uses. And I get on that bike, & I ride straight into the White Woods that the little bookstore is in front of, & I ride deep into the White Woods, thinking about that little book of poems, & thinking about that Bellla Brush, & thinking about that bus I've been riding for so long, & thinking to myself: *I'd sure like brush brush brush my cares away. And yours too.*

* * * * *

Me Sitting Against a Brick Wall

This story begins with me sitting against a brick building's wall. Sounds of shouting, yelling, conflict nearby. I'm inside too, strange to say &, nearby me, a man with a big belly is smoking, drinking, in an old armchair. Wanting to tell me, & trying to tell me, & sort of struggling to tell me, about a band he's found that's changed his life. Very excited.

I say, *I used to smoke & drink. But I don't now. I won't say it's a better life. Just different.* He's all about this band that's changed his life though. He says, *hey, wait just a second.* And he sort of hauls himself up, & goes to fetch an LP by this band. *It's called **Reveal**.*

I blink, & I'm sitting back against that wall, outside. Take a better look. And it's a music club I'm sitting in front of it, called, um, *Luna T's?* Oh, OK, maybe I'm in there too. I stand, & someone comes up to me & says, *you fix the marquee, man?* Has a ladder.

This guy's very short. This guy's so short, I don't even think that people-folks can be this short. He's like, as tall as my knee. But his mustache just flows down to the ground. Glitters. He's *beautiful*. But I can see his

issue. Getting up there to fix that marquee. So I climb on the ladder, gamely. He hands me up the letters to put into the sign. The band is called **Supernova**. Is that the one Big Belly Guy likes? I don't know.

A scrawny hippie is standing nearby too, I don't know whether girl or boy. Waiting to get into this Luna T's club. Smiles up at me & says, *you heard them?* I shake my head. *What are they like?* She or he laughs & says, *rock & roll.*

Says more I cannot catch. I come down the ladder, nod to the mustachioed fellow. Grab my knapsack, & carry the ladder inside to the ticket counter. All crowded & clustered, & I just walk on in, & I end up outside again. And the crowd is waiting.

And, you see, this is part of a path I follow. One thing leading to the next. Like a circuit. Painting to comic strip to rock band to cassette tape. And I'm filming my way there, always reviewing back, & then filming on.

When I sleep, I don't rest. I'm viewing more film, because I've been told *wherefrom* becomes *whereto*. And I say, ~~it's so~~

* * * * *

Dreamwalker, Enthralled

Dreamwalker, somewhere in the White Woods, has climbed up the ladder that encircles a particular tree. The ladder has led him high up into the tree, until there are branches to clamber on to, & continue to climb. The **colors** that one can see in many of the trees in the White Woods around this turn of the calendar are more intense within this tree &, the higher he climbs, the more intense they get, until they dance freely. *Attached to the branches still?* It is impossible to say.

Music swirls around him. *Hmmm. Laaa! Cackle!* Until he arrives to what seems like a bigger branch than all the others. This branch extends from the great trunk, far away, smooth &, as he crawls onto it, he sees how an open interior forms here, from this particular view. He sits on

the branch, just a little bit along it, *hekk* stick now in his lap, looking all about him. The branch gently nudges him further along, until it places him at a particular spot of its own choosing.

He watches, feels *nearly* enthralled, *wants* to be enthralled, *cannot* be enthralled, because of his worry & wonderment about his Brothers, & the Great Violence he's learned about, & what they need to do, together, to help the world.

And so he watches, half-enthralled, all the beauty around him, dancing & singing in **color** & music. Until he feels a hand take his, his left one. Gently takes his, & grasps it softly, but firmly, & it's the warmth of that hand that causes Dreamwalker to become *completely enthralled*, immersed in all this beauty. He relaxes. He feels *hope*. *Hmmm. Laaa! Cackle!*

The long night passes, in numberless hours & more, till the **colors** & the music begin to fade, & there's a moment where he notices his hand is not being held anymore. He looks over to his left toward the great trunk, & there's no one there, no one at all.

And he climbs his way toward the great trunk, & works his way on down the tree, & down the ladder, onto the ground. And now he's standing there, & he's looking around. And he's thinking to himself, *I can't be halfway about this, half-enthralled. I have to go all the way, either wake fully up, or dream completely. I have to decide.*

A Sickness Ravaged the Whole World

A sickness ravaged the whole world. You know about it, whoever you are. Whoever you are, listening right now, you know about the sickness that has ravaged the whole world.

And you know that, at first, the response was terrible. It was selfish, it was stupid, it was panicked. And this is how it was for a while. There was bitterness, resentment, disbelief.

But then, slowly, it got better, slowly, inconsistently. It was like this was a deep global test. Like a question. The only question. *Is it possible to recognize unalterable dependence of each of us on each of us, & our world, & change course?* That's the only question on this test, & it's one that's asked continuously. Maybe it's the only important question that's ever been asked. But there are times when it comes to the fore for everyone.

And, uh yeah, so I looked up & around, realized I wasn't really actually talking to anybody. For a moment, it seemed like I was addressing everyone, & then no, I wasn't. I was in the corner of a darkened room, about to walk out, for the last time, into the world.

I wasn't much, but I knew that question I'd been asking in the dark corner of that empty room was important. And, if I had nothing else to my name & my possession, *I had that question*. And I had this idea that, while it was the single question, the answer to it was multitudinous, ever-changing, & there was in this fact some kind of weird hope.

And I stopped for a moment, as I walked outside, into the cold winter air. Looked around, raised up my arms high, stretched my fingers toward the sky, looked up, looked down, looked around.

OK. *I love this world. What can I do to help?*

The Last Chance Fixer

Hobo Jones begins to tell Lilianna a long story at the moment when it seems that they've been about to come somewhere important. But it seems like an important story that he has to tell first.

He said, *there was a brief time, Miss Lilianna, when I was not a Robot-Man, the most advanced ever, bound to save the world. I had this fix-it shop. It was a little wooden hut, in a long row of them. By mornings, I'd crouch down low in front of it. Dig up a little hole I'd pat down in the evening. Pull up my little blue round flask of whiskey, taped at the opening. I'd lost the cap.* She laughs.

*That was where I'd ended up for a while, fixing things. Nobody asked how I knew how to fix such things as people-folks would bring, the kinds of things that nobody else could fix. They called me the **Last Chance Fixer**.*

Well, I'd arrived there from somewhere far away from all of this. If you reach back long enough in my history, you find me on a spaceship, the good ship Tis so, headed toward a place of great power & danger. The crew of the ship was like family to me. We all loyal to the Captain, them jealous of his attention. Robot-Men didn't worry about such things, of course. He ignored such things anyway, loved us all.

But we were approaching great danger, & the Captain could not reassure them enough that we were going to survive. All he could say is that we were headed to the center of the constellation that connects all the Many Worlds together. There was something we had to fix there. Remnant of the long-ago Great Violence? Some of the crew worried about these rumors.

And I'd stand by them, loyally, almost like a friend. And the Captain, he patted me on the shoulder, because I was the one he was depending on, we were all depending on, to make that fix. We have to stop the skid, he said to me.

So, Miss Lilianna, I've been through this before.

She nodded to him, smiled. They continued along the way.

Simple, Simple, Let Be

*Simple, simple, let be.
Embrace beauty, solitary star hung upon desert of night,
embrace it all, but let nothing go.
Simple, simple, let be.*

I was never good at any of that. Though I tried. My greatest teacher tried to teach me about such things. After one class, he held me up with a raised hand as the others left &, he handed me something, wrapped in a kind of crocheted cover with many colors. A hand-made book.

He looked at me with his strange, long-toothed smile. Wearing that weird black-&-white hat on his head, face terrifying, but beautiful, & completely peaceful & loving. And he said to me, *fill this up with your words. And empty it too. Simple, simple, let be.*

Some time later, toward the last days I knew him, we took a long walk, as we did occasionally. It was a beautiful world to walk in, I recall, at this distance. He brought me along this long, long road. And there was a lot of traffic on it. And we came to this bridge, & we sort of worked our way down under it, to the stream that was below.

We sat there a long, long time. And then he crossed in his big boots to the other side. And we looked at each other, quietly, for a long time. He nodded me to my book.

And, as I concentrated on all that was happening in my head, all that I could & could not understand right then, I looked up for a moment. And he wasn't over there anymore.

The Philosopher Will Sometimes Go Down to the School

The Philosopher will sometimes go down to the school, & he'll sweep & mop & clean, high & low, all the classrooms, & the auditorium, & the cafeteria, & the theater.

And he might mumble an idea or two to himself, about various philosophical matters he is considering at one time or another. He'll be thinking about **2, T-O, T-O-O**, that very strange substance that may or may not exist (pill, paste, steam).

But what happened one time was that he was cleaning this classroom, & he got into this really grungy corner, using his **Bella Brush** & everything. Gift from his little bloo-&-pink Creature friend, who loved cleaning more than all. And he thought, *my friend would say*, get in there & clean until the cleaning is done!

And he got to thinking, in his philosophizing mind, about this movie

he saw on his DüMönt TV the other night, in which a comedian played a psychiatrist. Called *Fun Trois*? Something like that.

She did it really well, though, he says, raising a finger as he scrubs. *And it reminded me how the past is all around, & yet gone is gone too.*

For example, he said, tuning his **Bella Brush** to one of its heavier settings, *a young singer can listen & learn from the records of those great singers in the past. For example, The Pink Floyd. You'll never experience a brand new record by them, or hope to meet any of them. Strange*, he mumbled.

And he really got in there, with his **Bella Brush**, nice & deep. *Scrub, scrub, scrub! Scrub, scrub, scrub! Scrub, scrub, scrub! Smoo-oo-oo-th.* His little friend would approve.

Job well done! Time to move along. Other work to do. And he found himself walking out to the ball field. Sitting high up in the stands. Watching the football game going on. Noting that one team didn't play with helmets. And they were playing pretty well. Violently even, like it was the Civil War, not a game. Wondered why. *It made no sense.*

And then he recalled that he'd woke up with a word that morning, but one he cannot now recall. He thinks to himself, *is that word an explanation of what's going on down there? Would that word explain the past better than I know it to say?*

Well, finally, getting nowhere with any of these thoughts, noticing that the game had been over, & all the players had left, he walked back down to the school. They'd given him a locker, which he was grateful for, & he was going through his locker, full now of things, thinking, *maybe there's something in here that can help. I'm lost.*

And he pulls out bags & bags of clothes, soda bottles, & notebooks, & they kind of gather around him, & he's looking through the notebooks, & thinking about the soda bottles, & people are gathering around to watch. Nobody's interfering. Nobody's saying a word. One quiet-looking girl in an Amish-style dress is smiling him friendly, holding her colorful magazine tenderly with both of her hands.

And at the very bottom of the locker, *way way* back, he pulls out a folded, torn—looks like it's been carried in someone's pocket for years—black-&-white photograph. It's a party, & there's a blurry collage of faces smiling, & raising glasses, & one of them is gently holding a little film canister toward the camera, so it can be seen most clearly. And the film canister says *Legal Weed*.

A Strange Part of the Facility

Hobo Jones & Lilianna are now in a strange part of the Facility. Walking hand in hand. Along a corridor which is not . . . *straight*. And it's not . . . *level*. And it's not . . . *visible*? You see, this Facility has places in it that, you might say, are *among* the Many Worlds, but not *in* any one of them in particular, nor *shared* by any of them, or all of them. They are in a *space in between*.

And you might wonder: *How does that work? How does one travel such a corridor?* Well, Hobo Jones, also known as Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man ever made, he can travel these kinds of places. And, while he is fond of Lilianna, his friend, more importantly, he's holding her hand, so that she, too, is able to travel these places. Otherwise, it wouldn't work. *Would she be lost & gone forever?* Maybe.

But, while they hold hands, she's OK, & able to walk this corridor in the *space in between*. Because where Hobo Jones is bringing them is *not* a place where *most* are allowed, where *almost anyone* is allowed.

In truth, it's a place that the Makers of the Facility, its Guardians & Lords, they don't know about it. It's a place that Hobo Jones, himself, *created*, a long time ago. Discovered it was *possible*, & thought: *this might come in handy.*

They arrive, to what seems like a nearly ordinary-looking White Room. Walk in, close the door behind them, & *now* Hobo Jones is able to smile at Lilianna, & let go of her hand, safely.

Things Changed . . . When I Started Traveling the Deep Circuit

Things changed, when I finally started traveling the Deep Circuit. It was slow learning. I accumulated rudiments of what there was to know. The roofless bus would stop at intervals, & you'd pull the old cord buzzer to get off—*errrrrrr!*—when it works. And, at the various places you got off at, you discover more of the **game**. For it was a travel, & it was a **game**. And there were *Sprites*, to aid, & *Imps* to distract.

Somewhere along the way, I acquired a *Dream-Again* tape recorder. And I would record my adventures in dreams of course. Which led in turn, to new adventures along the Deep Circuit, until I learned of the possibility of a Deeper Circuit, & a Deeper-Still circuit. *But how can one tell?*

The Sprites would lead, when one is lost, back to the nearest bus stop, or onto the next, or somewhere else helpful. The Imps would lead one further along when lost. But it's not that simple.

To tell you an anecdote. They're all so mixed together in my mind, even when I listen back on my *Dream-Again* tape recorder, I don't know if I understand. I can tell you that, one moment I'm on the roofless bus, friendly folk about me, a little strange, from the Many Worlds. But then, I pull on the cord—*errrrrrr!*—& now I'm somewhere else. And there's sort of a . . . *series of gaps* between one place & time, & the next. And I can't say how this works.

But one anecdote I can tell. I was in a hotel room. There were many, *many* chairs & lamps, all different kinds, scattered about it. And plastic bags of sweets. And there'd been a party I'd been at, but I hadn't enjoyed it. There was this guy dressed sort of like some kind of strange Pirate. Looked like he'd hit the skids bad. And now it was very late, & I was awaiting your arriving voice. And it seems as though in this situation, like many, that I was coming in, in the middle of my own story.

And I found that very strange. *How could that be? Shouldn't I know the beginning & end?* But no, I didn't, not often. And so I have to say something important to you, now that you've joined the Deep Circuit, sitting with me, eager to pull that cord—*errrrrrr!*—& have your own

adventures, eager to record them in your *Dream-Again* tape recorder.

Beware & be aware. There's much to *learn*. There's much more to *forget*, & what's true *now* may be either *twice* true, or *half* true, or *none* true at all, on the morrow.

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Great Liberry at the Heart of the World

Not many, I suppose, make it down to the Great Liberry at the Heart of the World. There are no rules against it. Nobody is unwelcomed, per se. It's just you have to make a great effort, & get lucky, that too. You have to have *clear intent* that this is where you must go, & maybe it'll work out, & you'll arrive. I think you might. I'm on your side. I have hope for you.

I've been there. I had *intent*, I had luck, that's all it was. Maybe it was other things too. I knew Creatures, & they knew me, too, after a fashion. I was led from one adventure to the next along my way there.

I remember one time I came along my way to a place of wells. I think they were maybe five feet tall? You lean over & place your face into one, & the well would tell you *what next*. You could want to know *what next* in moments big or small. If you could not choose, or you struggled to choose, the custom of these wells was that you would lean in, & the well would choose *for* you, *with* you, *as* you. I met those wells more & more frequently along my way. It's as though once you meet the first, you're aware of them, & others seem to come to be nearby too.

Later on, I came to a movie theater. For a while I was in a movie. It was some kind of place made of **colorful** scarves, room after room. The camera passes from one to the next. I'm watching, & I'm within, both. And, at some point, I doze off, & wake up later near the end. The old Pirate dude, long on the skids, finally finds the exit to these scarves rooms. The audience is laughing, clapping, cheering. He's gonna *finally* leave the skids.

I don't know what happened next, but there was a well, & the well told

me *what next*.

I eventually came to a canyon that I discovered seemed to serve as a kind of entrance to the White Woods. And for tracking through it too. *Oh, I don't know if I believe that one*, I thought to myself, *I'm gonna have to look that one up when I reach the Great Liberry at the Heart of the World*.

Now you can tell, from my examples, & colorful anecdotes, that it's just not easy. I don't mean to discourage. You will get there. *Look out for the wells*. Once you find that first well, they'll help you along. Others will too. I'm sure. I'm sure you'll make it to the Great Liberry. I hear that some take a roofless bus to get most of the way down here. Never tried it yet.

Well, as you can probably figure out, that's where I am now. In a comfy armchair, surrounded by books & other things, big & small. A few friendly Creatures dozing in my lap, who brought me the last bit of the way. But I'm looking to you, far as you may be in space, time, & otherwise. *You can make it here, you can do it!* And when you come, Schola' Sanchez, that friendly Bear Creature Liberrian, will welcome you, & be glad to shake your paw, or hand.

Ah! Can't wait till you get here!

I Thought of the Great Author

I thought of the Great Author who'd passed on, awhile ago, & the Great Author had left so many works unknown by all, hidden in wooden boxes, high up in trees, buried in the earth. I think there was a Cave he liked too.

I wished with all of my heart-bone that I could visit that strange world he lived in, & dig up, pull down, pull out all those great works. And take a look. *You see?* I'm an editor. Don't laugh. I could pull them together. *I could do it*.

I wanted to cross to his world, & I wanted to find these unknown works. I wanted the Great Author to be remembered again. It felt honest & true. No one asked me to do this. No one was looking for works by the Great Author. All had moved on, to others. But I had not.

Now you say, *why are you telling me all this, man? I'm just trying to catch a bus*.

Look, if you just lone me bus fare, I can ride this bus. And it'll take me to the Beach. The roofless one, yah? I'm telling you, this Beach will get me there to his world. It's a very strange Beach.

I don't have bus fare for you, man.

I think you do. You look like you got plenty.

Sorry, man.

Listen, I'll give you something for the bus fare you give me.

Oh yeah, what? You don't seem like you got much to you.

I'll tell you a story. There was a time when I lived in a strange house with a lovely person. She was a kind lady doctor, & she tended refugees. She knew my name. We have a fireplace, in a wooden box. But I fear: what if it sparks up so when the door's closed & we're not paying attention? What if we're outside? What if I'm rambling on & on with her somewhere in the White Woods far off about the Great Author, & my wish to help? Then we would not know.

That's it?

That's it. That's worth one bus fare.

OK, man. I'll tell you what. I'll give you your bus fare, & you sit way-y-y in the back. And I'll sit way-y-y in the front. Do we gotta deal?

Brother, you're a gem.

That Crazy Neighbor Lady, Who Chases Me

This has happened before. I never like when it does, but I know what to do. At least I *think* I do. I'm in my hovel, sitting comfortable on my mattress, curled around the wires that stick up in it, watching my black-&-white Dümönt TV with the Antennar 200. Lost in fascination of the story of Hobo Jones & Lilianna, as they travel through that strange

Facility.

But then I hear that noise, like in the walls themselves. It's a kind of distant *knock!*—& then a second one—*knock!*—& then a third one—*knock!* I know that. It's that crazy neighbor lady, who chases me. It's been going on a long time. It started in Dreamland. I used to write for a Dreamland newspaper called the *Eighth*. Used to harass me about my columns warning about the return of the Great Violence. And then, not long in my beloved hovel here . . . it resumed.

And now here I am, in my hovel. And I hear—*knock!—knock!—knock!*

I better spring into action. I'm gonna be hid awhile, so I grab something to read, a sheaf of pages by my bedside. So what I do is walk into the bathroom, & I close the door, & I lean my head up against the back wall, & I close my eyes & *hmmmmmm—& then—& then—& then—*

Ah, the Attic. Yes. OK, so, I'm in the Attic now. She's never found me here. *Ever.* I don't think she knows about Attics. She knows about *me*, doesn't *like* me. She's been chasing me a long time.

And so, since I'm gonna be here in the Attic awhile, I don't even turn on the light. I know there's a white-faced pink cat radio nearby. I don't turn her on either. I do have a little candle. What I do is I scooch up against the wall, & I place the fat little candle between my legs as I sit there, & I get to lookin' at my sheaf of pages, & the stories they tell.

I'm not sure where the stories are from. *Did I write them? Are they in my handwriting?* I don't know. *Maybe they're memories? Maybe they're dreams? Maybe they happened, maybe they didn't.*

First one I read is about my father & I making these dense protein bars, full of high tech. Chaw off a bit to access. It's a perpetual process. Always got to chaw more, or your tech won't work right. Well, that seems strange. *What does that mean?* I don't know.

OK, I chaw a little. Hey, peanut butter. That's pretty good, for a dense protein bar full of high tech. Look around. Yeah, OK, OK, OK. OK. *Yeah, sure—& then—& then—& then—*

Yeah, this weird-looking bus, it's trapped on the edge of a cliff. I look through my pages, trying to find an answer to what happens, & I don't know. I look back to the page I'd found it in the first place, & it says: *in three different time periods.*

What does this mean? I better chaw a little more of this dense protein bar, *chaw chaw chaw.* OK, um, um, right. I guess the bus is OK. Or maybe it dropped me off at my stop. I'm not really sure.

What's next? I'm not sure about all this. This seems a little *too* complex for me. I thought I was in the Attic—*& then—& then—& then—*

But, wait a minute, now I'm in an old house, now I'm a ~~swiftness~~

Algernon Beagle, what are you doing here?

O, hello, fella. You're OK. Don't worry about nothing. You're in the Attic, hidin' from that crazy neighbor lady. You'll be just fine.

Oh, thank you, Algernon Beagle.

See you later, guy.

I sit back in my seat, on the floor in the Attic, & I re-light the candle, which had gone out now, & I don't see much by candlelight. But then I just start to listen, start to listen. Because it's been a while &, as hard as I can listen, & as deep as I can listen, I do not hear—*knock!—knock!—knock!* Nope, I do not.

OK, it's time to take a chance. I blow out my candle, & let it cool in my hand. Close my eyes in the deepening darkness.

I stand up, turn to face the wall, lean my head against it, my eyes closed, *hmmmmmm.* Bathroom again. Go through the door. All is dark in my hovel, as I left it. I even turned off the TV & the Antennar 200. But there's no sounds now. She's gone away, again.

Set those pages back down next to my bedside. *Oh!* Those are my *Dream Raps.* *What was I thinking?*

So I turn on my black-&-white DüMönt TV & the Antennar 200

again. Settle in for some more good stories, about Hobo Jones, & his dear friend Lilianna.

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Surely, It Was . . . Some Other World

Surely, it was . . . some other world. *Surely it was.* Find myself at a party, in some city, well after midnight, might be Gay E.C. *How do we know these things?* I don't know anyone, but they're all friendly, raising glasses, taking photographs. End up in the bathroom a long time, maybe trying to sort it out, trying to knock the neurons in my head, one way & another, back into place. Missing my hovel, my Attic. Even that crazy neighbor lady who would *knock!* in my walls.

Come back out, a little light-headed. Find myself talking to several. They're affectionate. They sit close, their hands resting on me, here & there. I talk about how I'm not good at parties, just not good, especially since I don't drink the alcohols anymore. They listen quietly, hands upon me lightly.

One guy hands me a book, sort of a thick oversized chunky paperback. It's a book of poetry, has black-&-white photographs, other kinds of pictures too. I don't recognize the author. This guy explains to me, *Oh, he writes some of the songs by James McGunn, some of the really good ones.* Hmm. I nod appreciatively. *Who doesn't enjoy the songs of James McGunn?*

And then time—& then time—& then time some more— & I'm working behind the cash register in a friendly little market. And it takes me a while to sort this out in my mind. But I do believe that this store is the front half of this building, & the back half is kind of an ongoing party, where I was before, & where people-folks also live ongoing.

But right now I'm at work, & this seems to be the other half of the store. It's a strange store. It's crowded. People come in, & they look a little desperate, a little uncertain. But I learn that it's up to us to nod & encourage them to look around. *No, really, look around. You'll find what you need. Don't worry about it.*

One guy brings to the counter this tiny little tuna fish sandwich, about the size of a fist, not much bigger. Hands me a whole crumpled wad of cash, far more than this thing costs. This little tuna sub, 'bout three bucks maybe. But this man is hungry. You can't eat money, it don't taste good, so I understand that, for him, the sandwich is more important than the money. Still, I only take a little bit.

Finish with him & a tall lady comes up, & she's got a huge tray of candies. Those little chocolates with sweet filling inside. It's just a whole tray of them. It's like she took everything off the shelf that she could find. And I turn to my boss & say, *well, other places like this I've worked, we give 'em a discount.* He nods. *Penny each,* he says, & that seems like a good deal. *She wants those candies.* She hands me a jar. A jar of coins. *My tips from when I was a singer,* she smiles shyly. A few faint lovely **colors** accompany her words. Again, I just take a few out.

Then another one comes up with a big box of cigarettes, I don't know, thirty or forty packs inside, & I'm thinking to myself, *well, this is no time to judge.* And, again, we get him what needs.

And I'm trying to understand all this, & I'm trying to understand the cash register that seems to elude me, as always they do, & later on I learned this is a television show called *Life & How to Live It.* And it's a lesson, for every guest star who comes in through the door, & for those of us on the television show, who live in the back, to learn, teach, learn, teach-learn, *life & how to live it.*

* * * * *

Sweet Dalliance

The young man became a prisoner too, at that strange Compound, no longer allowed to come & go, because of his sweet dalliance with the orphan girl. They didn't like it, it wasn't what she was there for. It wasn't what *any of them* were for there. They do not harm him, but they also just won't let him leave, ever anymore.

Everyone calls him L.C. He fixes things. He's preternaturally good at fixing things. He's better than any of his Captors at fixing things. And

the Compound is ancient. It's so old that it has machineries & magicks that none of the Captors still extant know how to use, even know what are for. He tinkers, he mutters, he thinks, he dreams, he remembers. He uses all of his skills, & he's clever enough to get a sense of which machineries & magicks *not* to repair.

She comes to his room at night, late at night. He expects it, needs it. Sometimes she's gentle with him, sometimes she's rough. He never expresses his feelings to her, knowing quietly in himself how deep they run. Yet he always says *we* when talking about escape. She does not see her value to their Captors, nor the value of the others there. But he suspects their time is *very* short. They need to go *soon*. They need to leave this place, which he's learned is kind of like a *first place*.

There's nothing older in this world than this strange Compound. At first he doesn't understand what that means. When he eavesdrops on their conversations, the Captors speak with pride of being *first*, having come *first*, of this meaning that they are *primary* over all others, that what they do matters *more* than anyone else.

But, as he digs deeper into the many machineries & magicks of this Compound, he comes to understand that they arrived here from somewhere else, that *first* does not mean *best*. *Best* means *best*.

And one night when she comes to visit him in his room, he's not under the covers, waiting for her. He's sitting at his desk with papers that he has very carefully drawn up, & kept hidden, & he shows her that the way out, the escape he's talked to her about for so long, is not *outside* the Compound.

It's not out there, it's not through some door, it's not escape into the open air. No. He explains that the escape he's finally determined they must make to be free is to go *deeper* into the Compound, *deeper* than any of their Captors can even imagine.

He smiles at her worried face, kisses her on the cheek & says, *Tonight, Lili, my love, we go.*

Hobo Jones & Mulronie the Space Pirate

Lilianna travels the strange Facility with her dear friend, Hobo Jones, also known as Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man in history. They're pursuing the question of a black-&-white photograph of a black-&-white man. None of it makes *too* much sense, & yet some of it makes *some* sense.

Hobo Jones sits down on a stool. They've come to a large room, a very large room. In fact, it is a room so large that if it has a ceiling & walls, they're not in sight. And yet, it is not out of doors. It is in the Facility. Hobo Jones takes the black-&-white picture of the black-&-white man, & he lays it on the ground before him. Lilianna eschews offer of the stool. She's sitting on the ground with her legs drawn up under her long Amish skirt full of pockets. And they're looking at the photo.

Lilianna knows that Hobo Jones is reaching deep into his memory circuits, at least she thinks that's what they are called.

And he finally says, *I can't tell you how, since this isn't about logic, or reason, or memory, per se. But I do think this is a photograph of the famous Mulronie the Space Pirate.*

Goodness, really? Lilianna cries. *I've read all the Mulronie the Space Pirate books. Five of them, I think? I think my favorite is Trial of Mulronie the Space Pirate. But they are all wonderful. Even the illustrations add to the story. They're my favorites, after Peter Pan, of course.* She smiles.

Hobo Jones nods. *In this photograph, Mulronie was not at his best. We were at a party. Not a really good one. This picture did not occur during his grand adventures in the far reaches of outer space, often in the company of his dear friend Comandeer Cacklebird, aboard her Space Tugboat.*

Toot! Toot! Lilianna cries, & laughs.

Hobo Jones laughs too, but not as much.

You see, Mulronie had hit the skids, even his colors have gone. And he asked me to take this photograph because he said, One fine day, Jones, I'm going to get all my colors back. Every last one of them. Grand adventures await in the far reaches of outer space, even some of the near reaches of outer space. I nodded, because I thought this could be true. I admired him & I was sorry he had hit the skids. But he asked me to take that picture to remember, & I took it, & I said, do you want to keep it? He

shook his said & said, No, you keep it. I trust your memory better than mine. It may come up again, or it may not.

And he left the skids? asked Lilianna.

Hobo Jones nods gravely. *It took a while. It was not easy. The skids are tough to leave. I suppose we have to go & see him now, don't we?*

Lilianna nodded uncertainly. *Do we?*

Yep, it's time again. He stood up from his stool. He gallantly offered the crook of his Robot-Man elbow to Lilianna, who stood up herself, & took it, & they left the room with no apparent walls or ceilings, & strode on together.

Dreamwalker Sits By the Bridge

Dreamwalker sits by the bridge. He's climbed up from under it, & now he's just looking at the water flowing under it, from up above. *Was that his teacher he just saw? Is this his book, again in hand, that he long ago burned? Is this going help him find his Brothers?*

Well, now, he would have sat there on the edge of that bridge, looking down at that water for who knows how long, if there hadn't been a voice behind him. Well, not actually a voice, more a *click!* The click of a shutter, a shutter sound he knew very, very well. Even if it was an old memory, it remained a vivid one.

Without even looking around, he knew that a dear old friend was just behind him! *Shutter-click! Shutter-click!* He was a man Dreamwalker had met who somehow, like him, was able to travel strange worlds in strange ways. He traveled time. Something to do with that camera. Dreamwalker was never sure. His friend didn't exactly tell.

And he was surely from Emandia. That was true. And he had this skin problem. Well, it wasn't really a problem. But, unlike other Emandians, his skin didn't flake off from **color** to **color**. It sort of stuck, at a **purple-black color**. He'd say to Dreamwalker, *sometimes that color gets me in trouble. Once in a while, it gets me made king!* And then he'd laugh. He had sort of an unruly laugh, held nothing back.

He'd become unstuck in time, over the course of his photographic career. Dreamwalker & he became friends.

And finally, after thinking of all this stuff, maybe remembering it, maybe sorting through these fine details of this old friend, & trying to remember how they'd met, & how they'd parted, & not knowing at all, Dreamwalker stood, turned, smiled.

His friend was there. His friend was taking pictures. But his friend was also a little different than the last time they had met.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, circular scribble followed by the date '5/22/2022' written in a cursive, slanted style.



Prelude.

*“With dewdrops dripping,
I wish somehow I could wash
this perishing world”*

—Bashō

Hobo Jones, the most advanced robot man ever built in history, & his dear friend Lilianna, were walking together, hand in hand, along one of the strange corridors of the Facility. And they were having a sort of conversation about the things that were on each of their minds.

Lilianna, knowing that, in one way & another, they were bound to see, or find, or something, Mulronie the Space Pirate, was trying to list off on her fingers the titles of the five *Mulronie* books, which she had not read in awhile, but which were among her favorites.

*Of course the first one is called **Who is Mulronie the Space Pirate?** And I believe the second one is called **Return of Mulronie the Space Pirate.** Then my favorite, **Trial of Mulronie the Space Pirate.** And I think that the last one is called **End of Mulronie the Space Pirate?** But I don't quite remember the fourth one. Is it **Many Loves of Mulronie the Space Pirate?** Or is it **Many Lives of Mulronie the Space Pirate?***

Hobo Jones was thinking aloud about a conversation he had had with Mulronie. *Somewhere deep in that time when Mulronie had hit the skids. He was talking about **evolution, synthesis, ferment, in time & space, & yet not quite, swirling too, recurring too.***

***Steering one's own boat in collaboration with a world of boats. Universe of boats. One boat, none boats, many boats.** He said all this, Lilianna.*

*He said it was **a narrative of narratives of narratives. To harmonize, one must understand context, relation.** He kept saying: **evolution, synthesis, ferment, over & over again.** As though it upset him, just to say those words. **Music's changing colors, a White Room that contains them all, & more. What is, a while. What next, a while. What always, for a while, is. End of the world. Start of other worlds. Cause***

& effects, cause & effects, cause & effects.

Lilianna asked again: *Mr. Jones, what is the name of the fourth book in the **Mulronie the Space Pirate** series? You must know. The one where he & Commandeer Cacklebird & their Space Tugboat (toot! toot!) travel in Dreamland to the far reaches of outer space, to visit that wondrous Festival of Creatures? Is it **Many Lives of Mulronie the Space Pirate?** Or **Many Loves of Mulronie the Space Pirate?***

* * * * *

Part One.

*“All shall be done.
But it may be harder than you think.”*
—C.S. Lewis

Mulronie the Space Pirate & Hobo Jones & the Last Chance Fixer

My name isn't, really, Raymond, but that's the name I use when I'm talking to other Scholars in this Manse. You see, I'm not really so very sure about the Manse. I mean, there's a lot going on here. And yet, somehow, when I arrived, with credentials that were reasonably true, I gave them the name Raymond, & they went with it.

The funny thing about the Manse is that it's very secure from the rest of the Many Worlds. And, once inside, you can do pretty much anything you want. Any kind of research, you name it, it's probably going on somewhere in the Manse. Especially kinds involving the Dreaming. *Many* kinds.

But I just had to know more about what happened with Mulronie the Space Pirate, & Hobo Jones, the most advanced robot man in history, & the *Good Ship Tis So!* And the story, more like a myth, if even that, of their travels in outer space, to the center of the Star Spiral, the one which comprises our Many Worlds.

Some references only say that they went there to fix something. Others

say something about stopping a skid. My notes say, over & over:

Whither the Wobble, & why?

And one time I added this:

That is the Brothers' mission.

And another time I added this:

All worlds braid. All worlds hmmm.

And then there's the related story, or myth, or something else, or maybe not related at all, of how someone called a Last Chance Fixer lived in a little Hut in the center of the Star Spiral, along a row of Huts. He kept his little blue flask buried in the earth, to be unburied every morning, for a good drink, help get him through his day.

The story, or whatever it is, says it was him, the Last Chance Fixer, or Mulronie, or possibly Hobo Jones, who began to lose colors over time. And some of them, or all of them, or none of them, but I think some, were at a party (I don't think it was like the *Pahties* they have here though), & whichever one of them who had lost all his colors, well, he had the other one take a photo of him, to remember. *So many questions.*

Was losing his colors something to do with being on the skids? And which one of them met the orphan girl? That's how she's referred to, for the most part, in the research. And was her name Lily? And did the one of them, who fixed things, fall in love with her, because of a single kiss, but was captured, & made prisoner in the Compound? And did one, two, or three of them escape even deeper into the Compound? Sources conflict.

And was the Compound really the Facility? Or was the Facility deeper down in the Compound? And is that where they first meet, Hobo Jones & Lilianna? Some fragments even say they decided to go see Mulronie, with a black-&-white photo, of whoever was black-&-white at that party, said photo kept safely in one of the many pockets in Lilianna's long dress.

Now it gets a little weirder here. *Yes, it does.* More recent scholars have wondered if the Compound *is* the Facility *is* the Manse.

And I will reveal to you now what I believe. Well, what a wild & lost dream helped me to believe. Remember: my name is *not* Raymond. But I believe that, somewhere in this Manse, there is a Scholar, in a room, with Mulronie, and/or Hobo Jones, and/or Lilianna, aka Lily, aka Lilypan, *trying to wake them up from the Dreaming.*

And the final note, which I have here, is something attributed to Mulronie, which I can't get out of my head as being relevant. Attributed to him is the statement: **Evolution-Synthesis-Ferment.**

I just don't know. But I'm going to try to find that room, & see who's in it, & what's going on. *You just watch.*

* * * * *

Not Raymond the Scholar

You may wonder how I got to be who I'm not. And that is, not Raymond, the Scholar. Well, I will admit that I, too, had wanted to be a Scholar. But my path had gone in other directions. And that's OK. Paths sometimes do that. And so it was not like I was a bitter soul in the Many Worlds.

But it *was* funny that, by one way & another, I'm not even sure if I can untangle it for you, I *did* indeed end up at the Great Liberry, at the Heart of the Worlds, doing my research. And, while there, I *did* meet a Scholar named Raymond.

And when he heard my story, he said: *You know, it's not too late for you to become the Scholar you once thought you might be.* And what he did was, he drew me a map to this Manse. Now you would think that getting from the Great Liberry, at the Heart of the Worlds, to this strange Manse, would involve more than *one* map. Maybe more than *many* maps. Maybe there isn't even a way *at all.*

But, no, it was just one map. And it wasn't even on a very big piece of

paper. Just a small, soft, green scrap. It hardly even took much of his pencil. And so he drew this map for me, shook my hand, & sent me along my way.

But then he called me back & said, *Oh, but wait a minute. One more thing. They're a little persnickety, intense, uptight, what-have-you, about unknown folks at the Manse. So just say you're Raymond the Scholar, & they'll let you in, no problem.* And then he smiled at me. Made sure that my knapsack was on my shoulder, good & solid. Sent me right along my way again, with my map.

Now that map got me here. And what's funny about that map is that it only had six directions on it. I don't know if I've ever encountered such a map before. But I did end up, upon following those six directions, just six easy instructions, at the door of the Manse, saying I was Raymond the Scholar, & being allowed in.

And, them thinking I was Raymond the Scholar, they brought me to the study-room that I'm in, & I could see by the notes that were left, on the large working table here, what my work was. Settled between an antique typewriter & a white-faced pink cat radio.

There are some really big piles of notebooks too. Labeled things like *Dream Raps*, ***Labyrinthine***, *Many Musics*, *Bags End News*. I wonder a bit if he was some kind of Author too, but I don't dare touch those.

Also on the working table there is a hand-drawn chart, & the chart seems to indicate a path from **Ferment** to **Evolution** to **Synthesis**, from the Compound, to the Facility, to the Manse. From the Last Chance Fixer, to Hobo Jones, to Mulronie the Space Pirate. From the orphan girl, Lily, to Lilianna, to Lilypan. And there are questions in the margins of the notes about the Star Spiral, fixing things, Brother-Heroes, & the Wobble. Huts. Flasks. *Peter Pan* even.

And so that's where I've begun, studying his many notes, making many of my own. I haven't asked anybody any questions here, about what's going on. But I did have that dream, that somewhere in this Manse there's a Scholar who knows.

You see, he was right. He *did* warn me, just before I left, to follow his map to come here. The last thing he said to me was: *Dreams, sometimes even wild & lost dreams, are going to become ever more important to you. Always keep that in mind.*

OK, so I've got to straighten out my notes here. And then I've got to leave this study-room, to go see what I can find out there.

* * * * *

The Beautiful Green Plant & the Caterpillar

I am not Raymond the Scholar. That's as much as I better say for now. Despite this, I made it to the Manse, & to his study-room, his notes, his working table. And now I want to tell you that I learned pretty quickly that navigating this Manse, well, I can't say it's like anywhere else I've tried to navigate. It's not one of those places where you set your chin in your preferred direction, & get your feet to walking. No. No. *No*. It's *not* like that at all.

You see, I left his study-room, wanting to find the Scholar who will tell me more about Mulronie the Space Pirate, & the Last Chance Fixer, & Hobo Jones, & Lilianna, & all of that. Right? Anyway, I left, closed the door, but there didn't seem to be a lock. And I started walking down the hallway.

But I'm sure you know how you can get that funny feeling that where you think you are *now*, well, it should be *near* to where you *were*, just a little bit ago, but *isn't*? That's how I felt. I'd come to his room from down a hallway, & it had looked just like this one, but I had the darnedest feeling that *this wasn't it any more*.

And that got me worried, & wondering: *Well, how am I gonna find it again?* But then I thought: *Maybe I don't need to. If I can get to where I'm going, then I don't have to worry about where I was before.* And so I started walking down this whichever hallway. Set the chin, get the feet to walking. All that *easy jazz*.

And, *boy Howdy Doody!* I got lost quicker than you can sneeze, I'll tell

you that. Even if you had to sneeze *twice*, like some.

And so I walked, & walked, but it didn't get no better. So then I stopped, & turned around, & thought: *Well, I'll walk back!* But I'd suddenly become disoriented as to *which* way was back. I know that makes no sense. But this, *none* of this, made sense.

So, I don't know what-all I would have done, but I kind of just slid down against the wall, right to the floor. And that's when I noticed what I hadn't noticed before. And it was that I was sitting right next to a beautiful green plant on a little table. It was in a pot, a strange pot, but a pot nonetheless. And it was on this pretty little table that had a little skirt on it. And I started watching what was going on with this plant, because there was some good action.

I saw that it was a long plant, tendril-y, draping. And what I saw on that beautiful green plant looked like a very large Caterpillar, with the most delicate of features. Just an ancient, sweet, almost-but-not-quite-human face, unperturbed by all, but its steady crawling, up, & down, & around this beautiful green plant. And so I studied all this close & long. And I thought to myself, it wasn't even a guess, but still, I thought: *Oh, maybe, this is my Guide.*

And so what I did was, I lifted up the beautiful green plant, with the Caterpillar on it, who kept crawling, unperturbed. And, uh, well, I had this random hat on my head, gotten somehow along the way (said *Theater of the Mind* on it, in some weird, surreal green-&-golden font), & I put this down on the table, like it's kind of an IOU. Like: *I'll get this beautiful green plant & this beautiful little Caterpillar type being back to you. But, for now, I need a Guide.*

And then I began walking down the hallway again. I knew *none* of it made sense, so I was making up sense as I went along. Maybe that's how it worked. And what I noticed, as I walked down the hallway, is that, when I walked too fast or slow, the Caterpillar would do the opposite. If I walked too fast, the Caterpillar would slow down. If I walked too slow, the Caterpillar would speed up.

This seemed to matter. *Speed* seemed to matter. And I felt like soon

we'd be coming to somewhere, which is all I had wanted to do. And I couldn't guess what was gonna happen next. *Could anyone?*

* * * * *

I Am Far, Far from Where I Started

I am far, *far* from where I started. And I guess you could ask, were you an interested onlooker: *Well, where did you start? You, who go by, but are not, Raymond the Scholar?*

Well now, that could be a much longer story than I care to tell right now. But I will say that where I came from, in ways I could not have foreseen, sent me along my path, & that path led me eventually to the Great Liberry at the Heart of the Worlds, & all of my research there.

And also there I met the *real* Raymond the Scholar, who took kindly to me, & my wished-for-but-thus-far-futile desires to be a Scholar too, & thus my great fortune had brought me to the hallway in the Manse, where I had just come from, making the acquaintance of new friends. Maybe it's the luck of the **T-O-O necklace** I ever wear. It's always helped me to fly a little further. Who could say otherwise?

We began to travel together. It's always nicer to travel with friends, isn't it? And they were not just friends, you see. They were, together, my Guide. For when I walked too fast, the Caterpillar would begin to crawl slower. And when I walked too slowly, the Caterpillar would begin to crawl faster, on its unperturbed way, up & down & around the beautiful green plant. And this all was very good. It got us along for a while. I was feeling like: *OK, maybe we'll get there, & find that Scholar here who can tell me about Mulronie, & the Last Chance Fixer, & Hobo Jones. All of them.*

But, you know, the thing is, is that at some point, & I can't say precisely how, I found myself climbing up the stairs to what turned out to be a very large Attic. And when I arrived to the top stair, & took a look around, what I saw is that much of it was crowded in the shadows. But when I harked farther on, I saw that much of it was *not* in the shadows at all, but quite light-filled, or white, or maybe even unfinished.

And then I heard voices, amongst the shadows, or maybe the shadows themselves were talking, & it seemed as though there were speakers passing nearby, but not too near to the stairs I'd come up on. More sort of where might be the perimeter of this Attic.

Words & musical sounds & grunty noises weaving in & amongst each other: *Underground system of tunnels & rooms . . . spy from the 1950s . . . engine-less cars . . . deep forests . . . October 31 at 10:99 p.m. . . .*

And I wasn't sure whether to go on, or go back, & I wasn't sure how this would get me to where I wanted to go. But this was where we'd come, my friends & I.

I took a step into the shadows, & another step, keeping a close eye on my friends. My speed seemed OK, slow but steady, & I continued to walk. And, again, nothing perturbing in my grasp. My little Caterpillar friend kept crawling at a nice steady pace, up & down & around the beautiful green plant with the long tendrils. And I heard the shadows talking vaguely again on the perimeter, but no one impeded us or addressed us. No one seemed to know we were there, which seemed to be a good thing.

Then for a moment things seemed to ~~blur blur blur blur blur blur~~, & I think I saw there were numbers crawling along every surface . . .

But then I found that we were approaching, & approaching, & approaching the light, or the white, or the unfinished part of the Attic. And, again, a little nervous, I slowed down, & my little Caterpillar friend sped up. OK, keep going, clearly indicated my Guide. *Just checking, mind you.*

And we arrived, into the light, & it wasn't like what I expected. It was not unfinished, in any usual sense of that word. As we walked deeper & deeper into it, I realized we've come to a strange new room. It's no longer the Attic. It's a *White Room*, best I could think to call it. *Like another dimension?*

I wasn't sure what to do next. But my Guide urged me to keep walking steadily along. I trusted them, & so I did.

Isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to one another?

* * * * *

Walking Through the White Room

It's a very *White Room*. There's no features to it. There was just us. And I began to think: *Well, what would I like to come to? I mean, if I was asked?*

And I answered myself: *Well, once a long time ago, I remember reading this book that didn't have a cover.*

*At one point, the protagonist, who is something of a really troubled figure, you might say, well, she passed through this strange farmhouse, many rooms, many strangenesses. And for some reason, I thought about this farmhouse as I walked along through this *White Room*, with my friends, my Guide, on this grand adventure, grandest I had ever had, by far. And it began to manifest around me. *Oh my gosh.**

I found myself in a strange room. Many bookcases. I couldn't help but take a look. One old ragged volume was called *The Eighth, Volumes 1-11*. Another glowing one was called *Psychedelic Designations*. A third see-through one was called *Luminous Ends*. Hmm.

There was a fireplace in one corner. In another, there was a big armchair with a little table beside it. Maybe some kind of weird board game upon that little table? OK. I looked up. *There's no roof. There are stars. Is that a kind of roof? I didn't know.*

All right. *Take a breath there, not-Raymond the Scholar, take a breath.* I sat down in the armchair. And I took a breath, with my friends. They did not fuss when I sat. Just taking a breath, too, after their own fashions. *So glad this Guide was with me at that moment.*

And then, suddenly, someone else was there. Just arrived. I don't know from where. He was a big man, a little bit on the tan side maybe. He looked like somebody important. He looked like someone . . . perhaps heroic in a way? I just got this feeling that he was someone who had

done great things in his times, quested far & wide.

And he saw me, & he walked over. And he smiled at me, & my friends.
And he said: *Hello.*

And I said *hello* in return. *How are you?*

He said: *I think I've lost my friend right now. And I'm not sure how to find him.*

I wanted to help him. I wanted to help him *so much*. The feeling gushed in & out of me, & through me. On a whim, the whim-i-est of whims, I took out a piece of paper & a pencil from my pocket. *Oh!* It was the soft green map-scrap Raymond the Scholar had given me.

And I wrote on the back of the map-scrap: **Evolution-Synthesis-Ferment.** And I handed it to him. I smiled, & he smiled in return.

And something & something & something. But now, neither one of us is in that room anymore. But I wonder now what it means that we'd met at all.

* * * * *

Part Two.

"It's never too late to mend."
—Ancient proverb

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer

For a long moment, Dreamwalker regards his old friend, the Gentleman Photographer. Long unseen, & yet here he is, also under this bridge by the dirty stream.

The Gentleman Photographer smiles & says: *I know, I know. I look a little different. You do, too!*

Dreamwalker had stood up, to regard his friend, & now he sits back down, on the stony hill, beneath the bridge, by the dirty stream. Bids his friend sit down too, & they both commence to chucking stones into the water. *Ker-splash! Ker-splash!*

The Gentleman Photographer says: *I remember that night we met. First of many we didn't sleep for our talking.*

Dreamwalker nods, smiles.

*And you said to me: **What I want to know is: what is Dreamland? Down in the molecules? What is its reality? How does it assemble, & disassemble? And what residual remains, even into waking?***

*You were convinced that there was traffic both ways, waking & sleeping. You kept asking me, like I could possibly know: **Evolution? Synthesis? Ferment? What if Dream-Mind is Supraconsciousness?***

Dreamwalker digs into himself, knowing this will help, knowing that remembering some things is what he needs to do. It's *hard*. It's a *wall*. It's an *unfriendly* wall.

But he pushes, & pushes, & pushes. *Hmmms*. And the world gives way to an image.

It's an image of a Boulevard, he says, aloud, eyes closed, seeing it. *And along the Boulevard are endless Theatres of the Mind. Some always open. Some shut. Some alternate.*

*They're all connected. **I believe that.** I believe that, waking, it's like the residual of Dreaming. Dreaming's canvas is greater than simple waking days.*

You still believe that? Or is that something that you believed back when? asks his friend quietly.

I don't know.

*Where's your **Hekk stick?***

Dreamwalker looks around, & realizes it's not by him. Almost like an additional limb.

The Gentleman Photographer nods. *You're stuck, aren't you? Like me. With me, it's time, that I've become unstuck with. With you, it's waking & Dreaming. This isn't either for you. It's a nether world.*

Dreamwalker nods. *My **Hekk stick** always made it clear, & simple.*

So which are you going to choose? the Gentleman Photographer asks, now stern & serious. Not like his usual rowdy, jocular style. *Gotta go all the way down, or all the way up, to reset yourself. I think of it as like loading a new roll of film in my camera here*—which he demonstrates.

But Dreamwalker's uncertain. And because he's uncertain, he can't do either, at this moment. His friend takes his hand, & Dreamwalker is again warmed by touch. He's calmed by touch. He nears & nears what he has to.

* * * * *

It Had to Start Somewhere

And Dreamwalker knows: it *has* to start somewhere. He is *stuck*, he is *between*, whatever *it* is. *It has to start somewhere.*

And so he closes his eyes, & he lies back, as comfortably as he can, on the stony hill, beneath the bridge, by the dirty stream. A world he knew long ago.

Eyes shut, he begins to *hmmm*. He lets the *hmmm* lead him, but it doesn't go far. He has no *intention*. He has *not-intention*, which sometimes works, & sometimes doesn't.

So he makes for himself a *White Room*. He remembers that he knows how to do this.

And, in this *White Room*, he begins to poke the walls. They aren't ordinary walls, made of plaster, wood, or steel. They are *imaginal* walls.

They are *live, malleable*. He pushes, & prods them, high & low, reaches into them deep. They have no far end.

But one of his hands . . . seems to grasp *something*, or be grasped *by* something.

And he slowly pulls out his hand, from within the wall. And he looks at what is on his hand. It is something that brings up memories beyond long ago for him, but true.

It is a puppet. It is crudely made. It has a blue skirt that runs down his wrist. And its head looks a people-folks head, smiling. Like the head of a space traveler. He'd made it, long ago, as a gift for his mother the Scholar.

And he remembers the day that he began along his path that led him, in one way & another, to this *White Room* really. It was the day he found this puppet, sort of crumpled, on the floor of his mother the Scholar's office study. Lined with books. Top to bottom. *Every* wall. *Real books.*

He wasn't sure why it was on the floor. He didn't think it was intentional. But you know that sometimes unintentional things cause a great reaction in us. They make us think things that we would not have thought before, & that's what happened in this moment.

Because he had never looked at the books in this room. Not *once*. They were *hers*, as though they were jewelry, clothes. He turned the puppet on his hand now, again, & they both looked at the book titles. *Aftermath* by Cosmic Early. *Nazi Jailbait Bitch*. *Power*. *History of the Six Islands*. *Life Information Energy*. Didn't know any of these.

He did know of the row of *Mulronie the Space Pirate Books*, of course. He & his father the Singer were both great fans of these, sometimes read them together secretly late at night. Then his father would give him a kiss on his cheek, & a smirking wink, & return whichever one, quiet as Creatures, to the Liberry.

But now there was one book in particular that he *swore*, without even

wondering at the perhaps-madness one might have thought of this, no, he *swore* that this book was *looking back at him*. And *that* was the book he wished to take off those shelves. *The book that looked back at him*.

Well, he pulled out his mother the Scholar's heavy desk chair &, with probably more scrapings on her carpeted rug than he would have liked, he managed to shove it up against the bookcase, & perilously climb up, & grasp the book, almost out of his grasp, of course. Looked, strangely, like it was hand-made? Made of twine, bark & other things. Pulled it on down, with the rest of him, lucky that there was a thick rug below.

Pushed the chair back in. The little space traveler puppet he made for her, that had fallen on the floor, inadvertently, he put it back on her desk, amongst her pencils, & her calendar, & her clock, where it belonged. And he made away.

Now Dreamwalker is getting somewhere.

* * * * *

A Very Strange Hand-Made Book

And whether it was now or then doesn't matter. Because whether he was somehow remembering this from times later, or experiencing it now, live in the moment, anew, what *did* matter was that *this* was a way to figure out his quandary. Get through the *knot* that stifles him.

He knows what he has to do, for all the strangeness right now. *He has to find his Brothers*. And he figures they were wanting to find him & each other too. It is just a feeling. But he thinks it is more than less likely to be the right feeling about the matter.

But he knows that *his* path, *his* way, is going to be *his alone*. He can say that it's going to be harder than the rest, because of all the things he has to do. It isn't just a matter of physical traverse to get him from *here*, whatever *here* is, to *there*, wherever they are all going to gather. But he also knows them all so very well. Each of them has a unique & challenging traverse.

So, getting back to it, as it were, here was Dreamwalker. He'd found this hand-made book, in his mother the Scholar's Liberry, in the Manse where he lived when he was young. And what made it unique was that the book *looked back* at him.

Oh, goodness, you might say. *What is that? Did it have eyes, a face?*

Well . . . *not exactly*. But it didn't matter. Many things look at us, you & I, without faces.

But, as far as he went, whether hidden among the nearby trees of the White Woods, or on the roof of the great Manse that they lived in, there was nowhere to be found in which this hand-made book was readable. He was *sure* there were contents to read. There were *words* of some kind. *He could not read them*. He could *sense* them, page after page. But he simply *could not* read them.

He was a good reader. He liked books, like the *Mulronie the Space Pirate* books. But maybe he didn't like books as much as some. Not as much as his mother the Scholar. This hand-made book, though, was *different*. This book was *his* in some way that no other book had ever been.

But it wasn't until several nights later that he took the book to bed with him, under his blanket, in his grasp. When he woke up with in the morning, though, no more readable than it had been the previous evening.

But then there was the night he stirred, for one reason or another. Sat up, *but dreaming still? What was he holding in his arms?* A book. Opened it up, hardly thinking what he was doing.

There were *words*. There were *images*. He *saw* them. They were strange & wonderful. *They felt real*. They felt like *more* than ink on pages.

But then he drifted back to sleep, fought it best he could, but drifted back to sleep. And in the morning, when he woke up, he looked at his book, & it was unreadable as ever.

Well, maybe not *quite-as*, because now he had a *clue*.

* * * * *

You Are Dreaming . . . You Are Awake!

But still, upon waking the next morning, two things remained true.

The first was that he still could not see clearly what was on the hand-made book's pages. The second was that, even though he had seen better what was on them, perhaps in the Dreaming, these memories soon faded. He couldn't keep them. They were soft. They were like water. They were like really brightly colored water, danced & sang, but evanesced with each passing hour awake.

And so he tried again the next night. And he found that: if you *pushed*, the book *resisted*. If you *relaxed*, then the book *allowed*, but only a little. He didn't understand this very well, not yet knowing that books have their own kind of living, & sentience. It was something that took him a long time to grasp.

But the present dilemma was that he had reached the next stage of his relationship with this book, & he now seemed stuck there. And he really wasn't sure what to do.

Until one night when he took himself, quietly, long after evening hours, into a clearing, in the nearby White Woods. One that he favored for watching the Moon. It was a good place to see the Moon when it was full. And he brought his book there. He had no plan. Him, book, full Moon, clearing. Shaped a bit like a temple.

And sometimes, when the Moon was at its fullest, & he was able to calm enough to listen, he heard the *hmmm* that filled the White Woods, more & more, as he listened better & better. And this night he finally joined in. He never had before. He'd listened, passively, enjoying, but he hadn't joined in.

But something was going on with him that he did not understand. And it seemed, more & more, that if he was going to *do* in this world, he'd

better just go on ahead & *do*.

And so he joined in the *hmmm*, eyes half-closed. And there was a moment when the book fell open before him, in his lap, & there were clearly words upon its pages, & the words read:

You Are Dreaming.

What? Was he? They faded after a while. And he did too.

But he faded with all that was around him, rather than being separate. He faded within the temple-shaped clearing in full moonlight, & the *hmmmming* everywhere, & the strange book in his grasp.

And when he opened his eyes fully in the Dreaming, & he looked down at his book, the words now read:

You Are Awake.

What? And then he fell back into sleeping again &, somehow, one way & another, ended up in his own bed, book on the floor, nearby.

What had this meant?

Well, he didn't know much. And he probably couldn't put even *that* into too many words. But, clearly, the more he *did*, the more got *done*, & the more reacted to his actions. We know that's how the world is. He was learning it too. He was creeping & crawling, closer, to things he needed, so much better, to understand.

* * * * *

Full Moon Hill

Dreamwalker was studying his very strange hand-made book on the Full Moon Hill, near his home at the Manse. His father the Singer would sometimes rouse up a night of songs for those who lived in & near the Manse, & was especially fond of this hill's high, clear view of

the sky. Thus the name. He'd even told Dreamwalker, with a smirking wink, that he believed the Moon was somehow closer to this hill, in a way more than mere height could explain.

But the book had become elusive, by waking & by the Dreaming. It wouldn't tell him nothin', no matter how he wished. And yet he tried, night after night, in the clearing shaped like a temple in full moonlight. Then, coming upon that lively night to Full Moon Hill, with his father the Singer & many others raising a happy musical noise, he decided to come back another night on his own to try reading there.

And spent a lot of time on that hill, even kind of became known as *the young fellow who spent a lot of time on that hill*, by locals. He was aware of them, occasionally. But nobody was as important as what he was pursuing. They didn't have any answers any more than he did. And he didn't know that they wouldn't mock & laugh what he chased.

Then, one time, deep in a Full Moon night, he heard a noise. It was like a soft breath, not intended for him to hear, but he heard it. And, for some reason, he stood up, looked around, & saw that, down into the Woods, those White Woods down there, with neither beginning nor end, there fled a figure. And, for reasons he did not understand, he gave chase.

Book under arm, left his hill, left his tries-&-failed efforts to read, & he chased, & he chased. What he never could figure out was whether he chased this figure in Dreaming, or in waking, or in both. But he learned, maybe in Dreaming, but he wasn't sure, that her name was *Zia*.

And eventually she slowed enough for him to follow, not too close, but follow. And eventually, beyond following, she would allow them to sit on opposite sides of a Great Tree in the White Woods. *Never* on the same side, *never* side-by-side, & he never saw her *face*. But he would read to her, from his very strange hand-made book, & she would seem to listen very quietly.

But he simply just didn't know: *Was he waking? Was he dreaming? Was this part of the lesson that his on'ry book was trying to teach him?*

Eventually, he got something of a look at her form. She had long, long tangled hair, face hidden somewhere in there. But he *couldn't* get any closer. It just *wouldn't* happen. So he satisfied himself with getting as close as he did, with them sitting on opposite sides of a Great Tree. And she never spoke, but he began to wonder if he even knew *how* to listen right.

So then he began to *hmmm* one night, out of the blue. No reply, no joining in. Many nights he tried it. Maybe once in a while, it seemed like there was more, but it was like *hmmmm* wasn't it.

It was something else. It was something in the *air itself* that he had to pay attention to. *What was in the distance between him & her? Was it something visible? Was it a clue? Was it, possibly, a lavender trace?*

* * * * *

There Was a Time When He Knew Her . . . Forever

There was a time when Dreamwalker knew *Zia*, of the long tangled hair & the turned-away face, *forever*. And then there was later, & later, & later after that. But, even now, as he sorts through this-that-&-th'other, her trace remained in his *Hekk stick*.

Memory? Path? Wish? Promise? Guide? Some-n-all. Some-n-all.

He traveled on. When or how he got this *Hekk stick* is a story not quite recalled in his remembering. It's kind of like . . . he *didn't* have it . . . & then he *did*. But he cannot remember the moment where he got it.

It could have been that game, which he found himself in later on, that involved translating into a game piece, on a board—

& then . . . onto multiple levels—~~SPRITES & IMPS?~~

& then . . . into a figure on a TV show—~~TRIPTOWN?~~

& then . . . long words in a book—~~LABYRINTHINE?~~

& then . . . music in a beautiful song—**SCO'UTLAND?**

& then . . . a movie image on a movie theater screen—**REMOTELAND?**

And it was a game. It was a *changing* game. It was a game whereby he could now *dreamwalk*. He *dreamwalked* from the game. If he's indeed left the game at all. He sometimes wonders. Doesn't suppose it really harms anything if he's still in this game.

Other things go on too. Just like it's rather nice that he has this *Hekk stick* to navigate dreams by, because the *Hekk stick*, with its trace of Zia, looks for, in any scene, any moment, any situation, a like indigo trace in things. It could be hidden, high or low. Could be barely there. Could be not there. But for the thought of it.

Is he getting closer to his Brothers again? Is he remembering what he needs to remember? Maybe. He's now in the White Woods, the beautiful White Woods. By waking, by Dreaming, either & both, yes & no.

And he sees, on one of its trees, a poster. Below the poster, a Soup tureen.

The poster is of his friends the Creatures. The White Bunny. The wonderful dancing Bears. Many others. Is it an *invitation*?

* * * * *

Dreamwalker Wants to Go to the Rutabaga Festival

Dreamwalker very much wants to go to the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock. He has not known of such a Festival before, & he wonders why. But then he thinks: *The White Woods is pretty big. Nobody knows how big, if it's known at all, & there are many Islands.*

He just feels lucky, because it sounds like this Festival is special. First he sees a poster that depicts his friends the Creatures. And then, below the poster, he notices there is a charming little Soup tureen. 'Tis the most beautiful Soup, which he enjoys, thankfully.

Funny thing about this Soup. He now feels like he is more Dreamwalker than he has been in a *long* time. He feels like he can again do his *Dreamwalking* thing. Walk waking, Dreaming, at the same time, if needed. He doesn't always do it. He falls into it, when needed. And out of it, when not needed. He feels *himself*. He feels *ready*. *Eager*. Stepping *forward*.

And sometimes in life, where you come to a point where you're stepping forward, looking around, breathing your air, you fall in with others who are the same way. And so, too, he falls in with the *Travel Angels*.

He's never heard of them either. But he discovers that they roam the White Woods, & many other places. And they seek to *calm*, to *smooth*, to *clarify*. They fall into conflicts that are occurring. They find ways to settle them. The opposing parties were never really sure how this happened. These *Travel Angels* were subtle, & wily, & mysterious. Even they themselves could not say exactly *how* they go about always settling the conflicts they come upon.

But Dreamwalker sees how good they are. And they enjoy his company. They admire his *Hekk stick*. He even tells a story or two about his Brothers, that he is wanting to see again, & he feels, more & more, like he is indeed bound for seeing them again.

And it is probably the Medic among them who helps him to become *fully awake, fully aware*. *Let it go*, the Medic says. *Empty out, & get ready to embrace a whole lot new. Come on!*

* * * * *

Truth is a Pathless Land

Truth is a pathless land. That seems to be about what sums up the collective view of the *Travel Angels* that Dreamwalker finds himself with. He gathers, slowly, that they are from different ones of the Many Worlds. The Medic, who helps him, he learns, had been trained by the Thought Fleas, & by the Creatures. They were trained in the *Hmmm*, which Dreamwalker knows well.

Of course everyone knows this language, but there's so many aspects to it that nobody knows it fully. And what the Medic had learned from the Thought Fleas & the Creatures, & their Tenders like the White Bunny, was how to use it as *medicine*, even to heal. It wasn't a secret knowledge that they had, but it *did* take knowledge, & it *did* take practice. And it did take *intent*. All these things are important.

But Dreamwalker doesn't really want to be a healer so much as he wants to find Brothers. And he has this feeling that it was via this Festival he'd now heard about.

And he said to the Medic, who he still didn't know terribly well, but well enough: *Could you help me get to the Festival?*

And the Medic said: *Why, brother, the Festival is where everyone is bound right now.*

* * * * *

Just a Little Push

The Medic, who travels with the *Travel Angels*, had just said to me: *We're all going to the Festival!* Or something like that. I don't even remember now. But then what happens, almost simultaneously, is that he gives me a little push. Just a *little* push. Not a *unfriendly* push. Not a *hurtful* push. Almost like you could say a *needed* push.

Because what happens then is that I stagger a bit, lose my full balance, & I coulda caught myself back up, but I *don't*. I let my balance lose. And I find that I am not tumbled on the ground. I'm sort of hovering above it, just an inch or two, & I'm no longer *not-moving*.

Which is to say, I'm now moving along in some direction &, from my perspective, for a while, what I see is grass. Even in the White Woods, there's grass, in some places at least, & that's what I'm following. Following the grass.

And it could be that after a while I'm in a field, or two, or several, but then I start to feel like even being an inch or two above the ground is

not quite what should be at this moment. And I start to sink. I sink whole into the ground.

I don't know how. *Am I Dreaming?* I could explain it away that way. I *am* Dreamwalker, after all. And I can do this kind of thing, Dreaming, waking. But I'm not so sure this time, & it starts to get even stranger as I start to pay attention, & stop trying to explain now from then. There's no *then* to explain *now*.

For even though I was whole a moment ago, under the earth, solid, still moving along, I'm no longer *solid*, or at least no longer *one*. I'm moving along, but in many directions. *Many many directions*. I'm shooting out in all directions, branching off left & right, faster than I can say this, faster than words can say, faster than the word *speed* can tell. *All directions*.

I'm still me. I'm still solid. I'm still Dreamwalker, whatever this is, but I'm spreading in all directions. And there's something to this. There's a reason I'm not Dreaming right now. Because I am looking at a kind of map. *Oh. Dreamland.*

* * * * *

Dreamwalker Comes to . . .

Dreamwalker, well, I guess you could say, *comes to*. The map in his hand seems, well, I guess you could say, seems as much paper as it does Moss. Somewhere in between. *Map of Dreamland? Imagine that!*

But he feels distracted, doesn't know where he is. He pulls out one of his hand-made books, & tucks this map among its pages safely, for later perusal & study.

He's in a soft place, soft & green, & *hmmmming*. *Dusk? Sunrise?* He thinks the former, but he's not quite sure. Looks a little closer as this softness in which he lays. *Ferns?* A deep, wide, bed of Ferns. *Goodness me.*

He smiles. He's always liked Ferns. And there's more here, as he becomes

aware of it. Well, there's a girl lying next to him. And she's holding in her arms a pink suitcase. She's dressed in pretty, frilly clothes, many colors, the kind a girl wears when she's feeling pretty, or someone else wants her to feel pretty.

She's holding that pink suitcase tight, & he's not sure of all this. But he takes her hand. And, in the dusky light, they smile at each other. She's nice, if unexplained, & then the *hmmmm* rises again . . .

And then, for a while, there's a funny voice, & they listen . . .

the blue blinking tunnel went down for a while. Very quiet. And I guess cool, but not so much. The blue blinkings after a while got less on-&-off, on-&-off, & more kind of gradual. Like beacons gotta blink, but not in any one way.

Then the tunnel kind of began to go up for a long while, which made no sense. And then it just curved & curved, so I could not see so far ahead. I just kept my paws going

For awhile, the two of them, hands held, are with the bearer of this funny voice, in that tunnel, following a blue light somewhere, & it seems as though this is what they're gonna do. They're gonna follow that funny voice along somewhere. Hands held. Dreamwalker's got that Mossy map tucked close, & this new friend, & that new friend.

Is this the wonderful Festival? Why it must be . . .

Dreamwalker Blurs, & Comes to

Dreamwalker blurs, & comes to, smiling. He did enjoy traveling with the frilly-dressed girl, following the funny accents of that strange little fellow, as they traveled the Islands, uniting them by beacons. The great Rainbow Wheel. He was there. Saw it happen. It drifts away like . . . some kind of dream that he can't remember. You would think Dreamwalker could probably remember *every* dream. I guess not.

He's lying on a patch of grass, in the White Woods. Seems to be awake. Enough. He hears cheering & shouts nearby. That's the Festival. That's the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock he's heard tell of, come to, compulsively come to.

But something else attracts attention. Something over there. It's on that tree. It's not a branch, or a fruit or a nut. It's a . . . *painting? Like one that his Brother Francisco might render? Could it be one of Francisco's? His long lost Brother?*

Dreamwalker's heart is *pounding* in his chest. Stands up, unsteadily, feeling like he'd been carousing for days. *Had he? Is that what it was like? Uniting the Islands?* Oh, maybe.

So he gets his footing, & walks over to that painting, a canvas that is hung on that tree. It's a White Birch. *Of course.* He approaches, thinking excitedly about all of it, about his Brothers, about seeing them again. *Did they save the world? It's still here, isn't it?* That's no kind of good answer, but it'll do for now. *He just wants to find them.*

In the distance, the shouts & laughter get a little louder. He hears a voice crying out: *I'm telling you, folks, **Labyrinthine** is your path. Follow me! You'll learn so much about the world! Subscribe now! It's a good idea. Get in on **Labyrinthine**. Get in on it! Listen to me . . .*

Now he's standing before the canvas, hooked on the tree trunk, & it's dark, & he already knows this is a magick picture. *It's dark, you see. It's darker than dark, you see.*

OK. All right. But he can't shake his feeling that there's something about this painting connected to his Brother, Francisco the painter. He stops. He steadies. He finds his *Hekk stick* in his hand. *Where'd that come from?* Its indigo trace is glowingly, *practically singing*.

He studies the picture. He *hmmms* for a long time. High. Low. Steady. Syncopated. And then he sees them. *It's all of them. It's him & his Brothers. All six. And they were in a Cave. That's why it's so dark. And they're together, arm to shoulder, hand to face.*

This is who they were, & are, & will be. It's that Cave of the Beast, where last they were together.

He wants us to reunite, & he wants us to go back. Oh, God. Again? All right. I'm with you all. Always, Brothers. Always.

* * * * *

Click-Click! Click-Click! Click-Click!

Dreamwalker is still getting his bearings at the Rutabaga Festival. Seems to be doing OK. One event is leading to the next, without too much struggle. He's not sure what's next. That's when he hears, somewhere behind him: *Click-Click! Click-Click! Click-Click!*

Oh my. Oh my! Dreamwalker says himself. He knows that sound. He's not heard it in a long time, but he *knows* it. *Click-Click! Click-Click! Click-Click!* He looks around, this way & that, among the trees.

There he is! His friend, the Gentleman Photographer! They greet each other, warmest & dearest of old friends. Have not seen each other in who knows how long.

How did you come to be here? Dreamwalker asks.

Well, I was traveling with some good folks for awhile, & then they moved along. I think they had places they had to be.

Where? Where were they having to be? Dreamwalker asks, suddenly paying far more attention than he already was.

The Gentleman Photographer thinks about it for a moment. He puts his hands in his pockets. He's wearing a kind of denim jacket. In fact, you could say all of him is denim. Denim jeans, denim jacket, some kind of strange denim hat. Dreamwalker remembers this all well from their student days, long ago, on that other world.

Something about a Beach, & about helping someone. Maybe meeting people. To be honest, I enjoyed their company, but I don't think that I really

learned all the details of what they were doing.

But something about a Beach? Dreamwalker asks again, earnestly.

Yes.

Dreamwalker nods, embraces his old friend again. They, like times of long ago, slide their arms within the embrace of each other, so they're walking side by side, arms linked. This is how they did it. They had found each other, as friends, when they didn't have any others. It was this nice feeling of being back together again.

But you're here for a reason, aren't you? asked Dreamwalker.

The Gentleman Photographer nods. *Yes. And I have to admit, it's why I didn't travel on with my friends. You see, I have a picture I need to take, of the Tangled Gate.*

Dreamwalker nearly falls over, & his friend has to hold him on tight. *What do you mean?*

I can't take a picture of it. I tried & tried. No matter how far I stood back, I couldn't get all of it. And my friends thought maybe the Thought Fleas might be able to help me, with their good advices. I haven't yet gotten up my courage to ask.

Well, Dreamwalker nods, & he declares to his friend: *I'm going to help you to find your answer. And you're going to take that picture you want to take. And maybe we can just travel together for a while. I'm looking for my Brothers, but I have a feeling it's going to be a while until I find them. And I've been traveling with this one & that one so far, but everyone's come & gone. I'd like me to stay for you & you to stay for me, for a while. What do you think?*

What the Gentleman Photographer thinks is that he leads them into a clearing, & sets his camera on a stump, & he has them sit down, arms together linked close can be, & he has his camera take a picture of them, smiling. Happy to be reunited. Stand ups, retrieves his camera.

Dreamwalker says: *I think I have encountered the Thought Fleas before, in my long travels. And from what I recall, they are the kindest of folks. So let's go find them, & let's ask your question, & see what they have to say, by way of advice.*

And that's what they do. Arm linked in arm, Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer set off to find the Thought Fleas, & answers, along their even longer travels to come.

* * * * *

Dreamwalker, the Gentleman Photographer, & the Strange Girl

They can hear distant cheers & cries & laughter. Seems to make sense it would be *that-a-way*. And they probably would have gotten there sooner if they hadn't found themselves walking with a strange girl who, as though she'd been talking to them for a while, familiarly, of herself, explains, by way of not explaining, from what they can figure out, that she's on her way back from *later*, having figured out that none could really stop her. And, along the way, her plan was to meet herself & grab on *tight*, & *sure*, & *together* they would continue traveling back there. Hmm.

She seems sincere, friendly after her own fashion. The Gentleman Photographer, himself also a bit unstuck in time, feels sympathy for her, & her plans, & he says, hoping Dreamwalker wouldn't mind: *Would you like to link arms with us, for a little while, here & now? And perhaps, when our business is transacted here, we can talk more of your travels back. We might be able to trade tips on traveling back & forth. And other ways too.*

Well, this girl is a bit on the feral side, but there's something about the Gentleman Photographer that does not rile her hackles. And Dreamwalker too, while quiet, merely listening, also does not strike her in any negative way. It seems like the friendliest of invitations. So she links arms, with both of them, now being in the middle.

And now they are three, side by side by side, walking through the White Woods, toward the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock where, as

they get closer, the shouts & laughter & other Festival-like noises grow louder & louder.

But then she stops, & they stop. She harks. She sniffs. She *hmmms*. She points somewhere *over there*. They're uncertain what she's pointing toward, or what she sees.

I gotta go. It was sure nice meeting you gents. But she's over there, & I can't miss her again. Bye now!

And she's off. She's practically swift as Creatures in how fast she goes. And all they can explain to each other later is that they were *almost sure* that, as they saw her disappear among the trees, her white-pinkish dress sort of flowing behind her, they were *almost sure* they saw a bit of someone else in a white-pinkish dress, *waiting for her?*

Maybe? It's hard to say. They wish her well. Maybe they'll see her again. The Gentleman Photographer knows he could always use a good traveling companion who, too, is unstuck in time.

But, meanwhile, they link arms again, & now they make it into the Great Clearing where, *oh my gosh!* The Festival is going full bore, in *every* direction. Dreamwalker is not sure who to talk to. He's unsure what to say.

Then up to them walks a Thought Flea. She's wearing a long leafy-looking dress, with many pockets, out of which seem to protrude tools of various kinds, perhaps a clipboard, & other useful items. She looks like the one to know.

She smiles at them. She greets them, slight curtsy, shake of the hands & paws. And then she confirms it: *Hello Festival-goers! My name is Flossie Flea. You two look like you might enjoy some accompaniment for a while. May I?*

They both nod *yes*. *Smiling yes.*

* * * * *

In the Company of Miss Flossie Flea

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer are now strolling around the Great Clearing, where is presently occurring the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock, in the company of Miss Flossie Flea. Miss Flossie Flea is a really good listener. And she asks them to tell of their travels. She nods agreeably, listens with her paw on chin.

She has led them to the center of the Great Clearing, where there's a great big kettle of Rutabaga Soup, *special recipe*. Miss Flossie fetches them each a bowl, & a spoon. They insist upon her joining them, & so they all stroll over to an edge of the Clearing, where the Great Trees are that surround the Clearing. And they sit down in a friendly little group to enjoy their Soup together.

Miss Flossie is sipping her Soup, but clearly she's also in thought about all the stories that they have been telling her. She sets her spoon down in her bowl, holds it safely in her lap, looks at Dreamwalker, & says: *Your Brothers are all passing through here, on their way to the Beach of Many Worlds, where my dear old friend Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle lives. I think that's where your reunion will occur.*

Dreamwalker nods. The Soup has made him feel a little *erie*. And so this is something he knows because he knows it, or now he knows it. That seemed a strange thought, but true, either way.

And you're traveling with your dear friend, the Gentleman Photographer, Flossie said, smiling, nodding at the Gentleman Photographer. *And you came here to ask me about taking a picture of the Tangled Gate.*

Which I did, says the Gentleman Photographer, friendly, also feeling a little *erie* right now.

Flossie nods & smiles.

What do you think? he asks.

Paw on chin again, Flossie says: *I think part of taking the picture is figuring out **how** to take the picture. I don't think that, once you figure it*

out, you'll find any impediment to doing so.

Well, the Gentleman Photographer thinks about this, in his *erie* state of Soup-ed-ness. *But I haven't figured it out,* he says. *I've tried many ways.*

Flossie asks: *Have you taken a picture of the Tangled Gate before?*

He shakes his head. *No, not the whole thing.*

Maybe the Tangled Gate has never had a picture taken of it before. The whole thing, Flossie observes.

The Gentleman Photographer nods, never having thought such a thought, because usually understanding pictures to be a one-way thing. He takes the picture, & thus his or its or their picture is taken.

Maybe the Tangled Gate does not understand what you're doing, & so isn't able to cooperate, she says, smiling charming upon him. *Try again, but differently, & remember our conversation. It might help.*

Well, it seems like she's helped both of them. But she has one more thing to add, after she's enjoyed the rest of her bowl of Soup. She says: *In the White Woods, It is really good to travel with a friend. Especially when you want to do big things. I hope you two dear friends keep traveling together for a while.*

Then she smiles. She stands up. She brushes off her already spotless dress. She leans down to give each of them a kiss on cheek.

Then she says: *But you're welcome to stay around here awhile as well, before you set off on your travels again. I hope you do.*

And, with a wave, she's on her way.

* * * * *

How to Get to the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock?

I hope you all know that you're invited too, to the very merry festive & enjoyable Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock, in the Thought Fleas' Great Clearing, in the White Woods. The Festival is open to all.

And if you need a little helping hand or paw getting there, let me give you a clue. What you need to travel the White Woods is *intention*, & the right *hmmm*. So, to get to the Festival, you need to *want* to go to the Festival.

If you want to go to the Festival, I'm going to teach you the *hmmm* to use, & it's a really easy one to remember. It goes like this: *Hmmm-Hmmm-Hmmm-Hmmm-Hmmmmmm*. Five short, one long. Over & over again.

As you walk through the White Woods, think about the Festival, & how much fun it will be, & how welcomed you shall be. You will be given a lovely bowl of Rutabaga Soup, & a spoon. You'll get to walk around & meet all sorts of fellows & folken, all friendly, to the last. That's where Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer are. If you want to go there too, that's how.

They are in conversation now, after having spent a little time with Miss Flossie Flea. And the Gentleman Photographer says: *Miss Flossie is right. Maybe I just don't know **how** to take a picture of the Tangled Gate, & it doesn't know **how** to have its picture taken. And strangely, my friend, it reminds me of something someone once said to me. She smiled at me & said: **My life is like a ball of thread, unwinding ever behind & before me.***

Dreamwalker nods & smiles too, at this sentiment, this philosophy. He chooses not to ask the Gentleman Photographer who this friend or acquaintance might have been, but simply to enjoy her philosophical words.

Where to next, Sir? asks the Gentleman Photographer, with a smile on his face. He knows they have to get to that Beach. And they've decided to travel together. And he wonders what this great Brother-Hero will

say next about their path.

Dreamwalker says: *Honestly, I'm not sure. Do you feel like we should linger at this Festival? Does it seem like there's healing & medicines here?*

The Gentleman Photographer does not need to take long to reply to this. He nods immediately, & so they relax under a Great Tree. They enjoyed their Soup with Miss Flossie. Maybe some more later. For now, they watch the various exploits going on. See things setting up. There's talk of a Talent Show, & a Magick Curtain, that was just recently repaired, so that all could go forth.

And then, as maybe they are starting to doze a little bit, sitting under this Great Tree, shoulder to shoulder, best of kin right now, there is in the distance a sound. It draws nearer. *Laaaaaa! Cackle-cackle! Hmmmmmm . . .*

And then again. *Laaaaaa! Cackle-cackle! Hmmmmmm . . .*

And one more time, for emphasis. *Laaaaaa! Cackle-cackle! Hmmmmmm . . .*

It fills, & swirls, & dances around the Festival, & brings everyone into its song, this *Braided Perfect Laaa!* that many have heard tell of, & now they're within, & part of, & adding to.

But what's especially important for our two traveling friends is the message that Dreamwalker hears. *Hmmming & laaaing & cackling* like the rest, but he listens to that message.

It's a message from his Brothers. He says it aloud to his friend, barely. *It's a message from my Brothers! This is how we now know their whereabouts. We may linger a little longer, my friend, but not much. **Not much.***

* * * * *

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer Dreamwalk the Festival

As the *Braided Perfect Laaa! Cackle-cackle! Hmmm* travels through, in, & around, & among the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock, lifting folks up to sing & join along, laughing, cackling, *laaaing*, *hmmmming*, we find Dreamwalker & his dear friend the Gentleman Photographer caught up in the excitement & delight as well. They're linked, arm in arm, as they walk, & on the unlinked arm of Dreamwalker there is out, perhaps for use, his *Hekk stick*. Oh my, not only that but it's got that indigo trace glowing within it.

Something about this moment, something about it all. Even with his dear friend, linked in arm, Dreamwalker feels *no* hesitation to *dreamwalk* around this Festival. Within the Dreaming part of his walking, he's showing the Gentleman Photographer memories of his home, the Manse, the great place where he lived with his mother the Scholar & his father the Singer.

And Dreamwalker has finger to lips to the Gentleman Photographer, because they are seeing what he very rarely saw when small. *Pahty Nights*. They didn't happen often. And Dreamwalker didn't understand them fully at the time. It took a long, long time, in fact, for him to learn that these *Pahty Nights* were when the Manse was opened up, & welcoming to, *Sleepers*. Those who travel through the Dreaming, tinkering here-&-there, & trying to fix history. They're looking for places where moves could be made, sometimes on the smallest of levels, to make history go a little bit better.

And they would come in droves to these *Pahty Nights*, because his mother the Scholar was very popular, & she was very good at helping them to find places in the Dreaming to make their adjustments. She was one of the best, & her *Pahty Nights* were *not* to be missed. That's for sure. *Not at all*.

But Dreamwalker himself would be sent to his room, because he was small, & maybe they didn't think it was something he could understand yet.

It was about the *ripples*, Dreamwalker remembers, tightening his grip on *Hekk stick*, & on his friend. He eventually learned that it was the *ripples* that the Scholars like his mother the Scholar would seek & advise the Sleepers on. They were trying to *adjust* things, to make history kinder, gentler, more generous. But there's more to it than that.

Dreamwalker pulls his friend into a corner of a great room, where lots of the *Pahtying* took place. It was like a ballroom. Just so *big*. And, as the night went on, it got *bigger*, & *bigger*, until it seemed like there was no roof above, nor walls about them. It seemed like it was more a green place, a great green place with great beautiful White Woods all around them, & a Full Moon above. It was like an Amphitheater that they would be in.

And Dreamwalker confides quietly: *One time, I got as far as this place, in this moment. No one found me. I was sitting in a corner, just like we are now. And someone came over to me, & explained to me what she was, & who she was. She was Dennise Rose from the University of M. And she smiled at me kindly. And she said: **How do you do?** And I was frozen struck with not knowing what to say. But she was kindly. She patted me on the head & said: **You have a good time. But stay out of the fray.***

The Gentleman Photographer grasped his friend's attention. *I knew her too! Dennise Rose. I knew her! Is that when we first crossed paths? By knowing her, both of us? What does that mean?*

And then there are sounds all around them. Cheerings, yellings, shoutings, encouragings. And they kind of come to. Dreamwalker awakes fully with his friend, & they find themselves on a stage. A strange wonderful stage, & the entire Festival is cheering for them! Cheering for their talents! *What wonderful talents!* Everyone is so pleased, & cheering, & cheering!

* * * * *

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer in the Festival Talent Show!

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer slowly stand up, cohere to their situation. No longer Dreamwalking but now fully awake. They stand upon a stage, & there is a great audience before them, of all manner of kinds of folks & folken. And they are cheering, & calling out. The two look at each other, & wonder if they've done anything worth the cheerings.

Then Miss Flossie Flea emerges from the crowd, & hops up on the stage with them. And she looks at Dreamwalker & says: *It was your **Hekk stick**.*

Dreamwalker has it still in his hands.

It showed everyone your Dreamwalking. The two of you, Flossie explains kindly. The great house you were in. The Scholars too. It showed everything for a moment. It projected your Dreamwalking here, in the air, for all to see.

Dreamwalker's jaw drops, if it could drop anymore at this point. *I didn't know it could do that.*

Flossie nods, smiles. *And that's your **known talent**, she says, with kind of a smirking grin. Now if you go through that green-&-gold curtain, you will be brought up there—& she points to another stage that was way up high, distant to see—& you'll find your hidden talent. Will you do it?*

Dreamwalker & the Gentlemen Photographer look at each other. There didn't seem to be any way they could disagree to this proposal. And so they nodded, & seemed ready to pass on through the curtain, get along to it, whatever *it* might be, when Miss Flossie says, in a whisper: *Take a bow. Good performers **always** take a bow.*

They nod. They both take flourishing-dramatic-smiling-arms-raised-&-waving-about bows, & then they disappear behind the green-&-gold curtain. More cheerings & cheerings follow them.

* * * * *

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer Pass Through the Green-&-Golden Curtain

Now perhaps Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer may have thought that the way from the Lower Stage of the Talent Show at the Festival, to the Upper Stage of the Talent Show, said stage located at the far end of a much greater stage, is probably just going to be some kind of climb. Maybe there is a set of stairs that has been rigged? Might have been a tunnel along the way to make way through? *Ha! Hahahahaha! Ut-unh.*

For, in less than the blink of a blink of a blink of an eye, they find themselves in what seemed to be like *nowhere near* where they'd been. This was *not* the White Woods. This was *not* the Festival. No Talent Show stages, lower or upper, seem anywhere in sight. No. They are quite *somewhere else*.

At first it is dark. Quite dark. And the only light they have even to keep moving by is what is provided by Dreamwalker's *Hekk stick*, which glows indigo. When it glows indigo, that is a sign that it is picking up the indigo trace somewhere nearby. It is one of the *Hekk stick's* many little tricks.

This particular trick has to do with finding a way to travel from place to place in Dreamland. An indigo trace in any given scene was how you best get from where you were to the next place. What is funny is that usually only a small patch somewhere high or low on the *Hekk stick* would glow lightly. But now Dreamwalker's whole *Hekk stick* is lit indigo. He isn't sure what this means. If nothing else, it gives them light to go by. But he is sure that a *Hekk stick* is never *ever* simply a lantern.

They are indeed climbing along, not very steep. And it doesn't seem like it is some kind of earth beneath their feet. Not packed but not loose. They have to walk carefully. But they aren't in danger at the moment &, as they walk along, more light seems to come around. It's as though they are walking into daylight. They walk & walk &, as the daylight comes, the *Hekk stick* in Dreamwalker's hand dims. Maybe it *was* a lantern this time.

They are now walking on a paved street, empty on both sides. But, eventually, there are houses, & the houses get bigger & bigger as they go along. They range up from regular-sized houses to very big houses. What might be called *mansions*.

And Dreamwalker begins to wonder if somehow they are approaching the great house that he lived in, when he was small. It certainly doesn't feel like they are coming to the town he lived in. *City? What was it?* He doesn't know. Too many questions & not enough answers, as always.

But now they are sitting on the curb, & way back from the curb is a great mansion type building, & Dreamwalker says (finally, since they hadn't either of them talked at all up to this point): *That looks like where I lived when I was small.*

Well, the Gentleman Photographer has not been able to understand *any* of this so far. And that was part of why he has kept quiet. He doesn't know what to say. But suddenly he stands up, & says: *My friend, maybe we have to go there to understand about hidden talents more. Even if just yours to start with. Let's go. Lead with your **Hekk stick**. I think we need to trust its guidance.*

* * * * *

Arriving to the Manse

It has so many rooms. Dreamwalker says to the Gentleman Photographer. *I tried to count them, but never came up with the same number.*

How many floors?

Dreamwalker shakes his head & laughs. *I do seem to recall on some side of it a 12-story exterior staircase that sometimes is a waterfall too.*

Was it, is it, um, is it where your mother the Scholar, & your father the Singer, live now? asks the Gentleman Photographer tentatively.

Dreamwalker shakes his head. *No, they're both far gone from here.*

The Gentleman Photographer takes this somewhat ambiguous answer for what it's worth, & does not press. He points at the building. *Are they there now?*

I think maybe, says Dreamwalker, trying to answer this one a little more clearly. *Do you hear those sounds? The music, coming from all over?*

The Gentleman Photographer nods.

Those are the Pahty Nights, with the Sleepers.

The Gentleman Photographer remembers of course. Though wasn't sure he understood everything he had seen. He asks: *So this has to be one of **those** nights? Are we traveling in time? Or is this Dreamland? Are we still making our way from the Lower Stage of that Talent Show to the Upper Stage?*

Trying still to be clear, Dreamwalker stops, faces his friend, puts his hands on his shoulders, nods, shakes his head, & smiles. They walk on.

Dreamwalker's *Hekk stick* is glowing, like he doesn't know if it's ever so glowed before, as they come to the front entrance. But it's not really what you might merely call a front door. It's more elaborate than that. And stranger too.

And they walk by a number of people, standing about the entrance, who nod at them vaguely, not in recognition, nor not-not in recognition. And Dreamwalker knows the *Hekk stick* is doing something he's never seen the *Hekk stick* do before, which is partially shielding & partially distorting their identities.

They think we're friends, even if they're not sure which ones we are, he says softly to the Gentleman Photographer, as they are now inside the Manse.

That's what we called it, Dreamwalker suddenly remembers. *It was the Manse. It is the Manse.*

The Gentleman Photographer asks: *Now what?*

Dreamwalker has an idea. He leads his friend from the main landing area, the open vestibule that they've arrived to, onto a very particular hallway. And to a chosen door, where he then stops. Very deliberately, he stops. He listens at the door. Doesn't hear any sounds. Finger on lips, he *clicks* the door-handle, & pushes the door in. Someone inside says: *Oh!*

Dreamwalker pulls the door shut again, quickly, grabs the sleeve of the Gentleman Photographer, & pulls him rapidly down the hall, & into another room. They hear the door open, the one that Dreamwalker had pushed into. Someone comes out, & looks around, & then walks in the opposite direction. *They're safe.*

Still, they wait, in this darkened room, for what seems like a long time. And then Dreamwalker leads them out into the hallway again, & back down to that door. And this time he pushes in with more confidence. They both come in, & close the door behind them.

Dreamwalker walks very deliberately over to the large desk that is at one end of this very large office. And he looks on the floor, & there is the crumpled space traveler puppet, that he had found when small, coming into this office. And now he knows why it was down there.

I caused it to be there, just now, but I find it there before, when I'm small.

The Gentleman Photographer is breathing heavily, because he doesn't know if this is about *Dreaming*, or about *time*, or about the *Talent Show*, & all Dreamwalker manages to say is *yes* & *no* with nod & shake. *What do we do now?*

Dreamwalker, for the first time since they've arrived, looks uncertain. But then the answer's made for them. The door opens, & someone looks inside without quite seeing them, just hearing voices, & says: *Come on! Come on! They're breaking out the **Zubadon!** Everybody's gotta get a drink. Everybody's gotta get a drink! This Pahty is finally starting!*

And the door shuts again.

*What's **Zubadon?*** asks the Gentleman Photographer.

Dreamwalker is nodding his head, & sort of shaking it at the same time, saying *it's a kind of drink. A cocktails of drinks. It was only served during these Pahties with the Sleepers. Let's go.*

And they quickly leave the office, come back out into the hallway. Then two things happen at the same time. The first one is Dreamwalker pulls from his many pockets his Mossy map of Dreamland. The second is that he looks up, & notices someone who has long tangled curly hair, far down the hallway, toward where the *Pahty* is occurring. Before the Gentleman Photographer can breathe twice, they are racing down the hallway.

* * * * *

In Flight!

Dreamwalker & his dear friend the Gentleman Photographer are in flight! Led by the urgency of Dreamwalker's sighting of his . . . *friend? acquaintance? partner? colleague? counterpart?* Words & words, & word some more. Her name is Zia, of the long tangled curly hair, & he has not seen her in a long time.

Even as they hurry, Dreamwalker notices that his Mossy map of Dreamland is laying open in his hand. He'd pulled it out, & then forgotten it. Too many things going on at once.

But a Mossy map of Dreamland is not helpless to its readers' intentions, or distractions. This Mossy map of Dreamland, sensitive already to Dreamwalker's touch, is leading them along. Absorbing Dreamwalker's uncertainty, & returning to him a sense of direction, & purpose. He may not be fully aware of what's going on, as he gently holds this map in his hand, & hurries along. But the Mossy map knows, *well knows.*

Soon they come from the hallway into the Amphitheater, where the *Pahty*, filled with happy Sleepers, is being held. Crying out: **Zubadon! Zubadon! Zubadon!** And jumping up & down, like happy fools!

What is this drink? The Gentleman Photographer wonders again. But the truth of the matter is that he's not sure how to ask. Dreamwalker

has a close grip of his hand, the one that's not holding the Mossy map of Dreamland. And they are, simply, *rushing along*. Dreamwalker's *Hekk stick* is obscuring their path through these crowds. They're vaguely recognized as friendly & familiar to the *Pahtying* folk. And Zia, who is fast as Creatures, is already far down the field that runs beyond the Ampitheater.

And what's funny about this field is that it's both larger & smaller than it looks. So they arrive sooner than it seems they would to the end of it, where are Great Trees like all the rest that surrounds the Ampitheater, in what looks like White Woods, whether it is or isn't.

But when they arrive to this far end of the field, there is no Zia. There is, however, a strange ornate Dream Cabinet that Dreamwalker's hardly known for so long that, for a moment, he's not thinking about the fact Zia is now nowhere in sight.

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Dreamwalker's Dream Cabinet

As Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer approach the Dream Cabinet, there is one additional brief occurrence, almost over before it's begun.

But for a moment they can see, careening high up in the air, arcing over the Ampitheater, from somewhere to somewhere, some kind of tall man. And he seems to have, gripped tightly in his grasp, one in each arm, two *other* tall men. And, for a moment, they can hear: *Ahhhhhh!* And then they're gone.

The Gentleman Photographer gathers his thoughts again, since they are paused, as they have not been. And he says to his dear friend: *Who is Zia to you?*

Dreamwalker has wondered this too, for a long time, & never come up with what could be said to be clear or sure answer. But what he does say, for his friend's sake, is: *I was from the waking. She was from the Dreaming. And we took turns, building each other up, till we were built,*

& we did not know what to do then.

He says this quietly, as though he & the Gentleman Photographer both have the sense that they may not be completely alone anymore. There might possibly be a Creature or two nearby. Not in any way a danger, & probably shy of them.

The Gentlemen Photographer knows what it's like to have someone like this. He asks: *When did you meet?*

Dreamwalker, again, cannot say for sure, anything of any kind, regarding this, but he does say: *Maybe the first time it was at one of these Pahties? Or maybe it was the next first time, or the first time after that? But maybe in the White Woods first? Or the time before that?*

At first it seemed like she belonged to me somehow, he says slowly, measuring his words very slowly. Then like we belonged to each other somehow. Then it was more me to her. But I realized later, in long times when I was far from her with my Brothers, that it was never any of that, in truth.

Dreamwalk sighs. The Gentleman Photographer squeezes his shoulder, willing to listen or to let it go for now. Fine with both. Then Dreamwalker talks some more, almost like in a trance.

What built up between us was a kind of Mesh of Dreaming & waking, so subtle as to belie even close deduction. It was impossible to know where it began between us, how it crossed, where it ended, if it did. What built around us reflected this indecipherable relation of ours. The Mesh will hold as long as we do.

Then, no more. He stands up now, & thoughtfully considers the Dream Cabinet before him.

The Gentleman Photographer cannot quite reckon how this Dream Cabinet too can stand, seeming as it does to rise up from a small wooden base to ever emerging waves in all directions. Its drawers have the look of ancient knots in ancient trees, & yet too are somehow its drawers.

He is also unsure how Dreamwalker will open it. But, somehow, Dreamwalker & the Dream Cabinet seem to have an agreement between them that when he needs to get into it, the Dream Cabinet will allow this to occur.

He mutters something, trying to explain this better than he had about Zia: *It was my hidden world, compensated me for loneliness & want. My tools. Medicines, materiels.*

Then shows the Gentleman Photographer a strange pencil, probably the strangest pencil he has ever seen. Says: *I used it to erase something, & wipe away the shavings. They'd scatter on the wall. I'd blow them away, & tiny mites of some kind would scatter away too, over & over. Laughing?*

He looks at the Gentleman Photographer deeply in his face, deeper than he usually ever does. And the Gentleman Photographer wishes he understood what these words meant.

And that's when Dreamwalker finds what he seemed to be looking for in the Dream Cabinet, & pulls it out. It seems to be some kind of hand-made book, but the Gentleman Photographer's not assuming anything at this point.

But Dreamwalker explains, sort of: *It's how we talk, as far away as we are, sometimes. This is how we talk.* And he just studies this book for the longest time, in complete quiet.

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At the Far End of the Ampitheater

The Gentleman Photographer is curious to know more about how Dreamwalker uses this strange hand-made book to communicate with his counterpart, Zia. So Dreamwalker opens the book, & shows him a few specific pages, narrating while he does.

The Gentleman Photographer notices that there are no words written, at least on these pages, in the book. They are all images, & strange ones at that. They do not, to him, seem like your ordinary images in a book.

They do not seem two-dimensional. They do not seem still, & he is not sure what else was about them might be unique, unusual.

Dreamwalker says: *I learned, with Zia's help, & others, that the Manse is a research facility. It contains labs called Mystic Station. Some of it built up from the abandoned ruins of a very old dream-mapping project.*

The Gentleman Photographer nodded, listening intently.

Dreamwalker continues: *The labs only exist in Dreamland. You cannot get to them by waking. That's where **Zubadon** is crafted. Grown. Brought into being.*

The Gentleman Photographer nodded, hanging on tight to these strange words.

Dreamwalker continues: *Drinking **Zubadon** is the key to what the Sleepers do, to their kind of Dreamwalking. When you see it, you'll notice it's tinted blue. Like certain kinds of mushrooms. That's not a coincidence.*

Is that how you learned to Dreamwalk? The Gentleman Photographer risks to ask.

No, Dreamwalker says, & then, unusually, explains: *You see, my father the Singer taught me about the Hmmm that he learned from the Creatures. And this particular Hmmm was my way of starting to learn how to Dreamwalk. Among other things. So I was not like the Sleepers, even from the start.*

The Gentleman Photographer nods. He'd kind of guessed that Dreamwalker is different. Dreamwalker pages on in the hand-made book, to the later pages, which the Gentleman Photographer could swear get thicker, & broader, & more multi-dimensional. It does not seem like a book, in hand, is being paged through. It seems more like a Theater of the Mind is enveloping them. Yet, still, somehow, a book in hand.

We can't stay long, Dreamwalker concludes, *but we can't leave yet. That's what she says.*

The Gentleman Photographer nods. That was when he notices a group of very shy, sniffing, uncertain, but nonetheless near to them looking for attention, Creatures. There is a lovely white-furred Bear, with handsome hat & scarf, several fine little Meese, & a bee-you-tee-full greyish Ow-ell.

Dreamwalker looks at them, nods. Smiles. *We will follow where you lead, my friends.*

* * * * *

Walking Across the Elongated Field

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer now find themselves walking back across the elongated field toward the end where the Sleepers are *Pahtying* in the Ampitheater, having drunk their *Zubadon*.

They are now accompanied by a group of shy but friendly Creatures. Creatures will come around in the White Woods for many reasons, but one of them is certainly as Guides & guardians of people-folks, when needed.

And they're now arrived to where there are Sleepers, who greet them friendly, smiling, dancing, not taking particular notice of them, except that they don't have their clipboards.

Dreamwalker nods, remembers, apologizes, & asks if they could get two clipboards & two pencils. The Gentleman Photographer nudges him hard with questions.

Dreamwalker replies: *You fill out your dream traits. Things like your strengths, your weaknesses, & if you would like to trade off with others. As a kind of game. To shift perspective, gain skills. That's what their clipboards ask.*

Dreamwalker writes about his strengths as a Brother Knight, one who searches, one who aids those close to him. But that he has been hobbled by loss, by sadness, by longing for awhile.

The Gentleman Photographer, who's not such a Dreamer as Dreamwalker, gives it some thought, & writes down on his clipboard about how, when he takes pictures in the Dreaming, it sometimes feels like he & whoever he's taking the pictures of share in *something else*. A something else to just picture-taking. But also that he only seems know how to do this in the Dreaming.

They hand in their clipboards, & for a while walk on. Dreamwalker says: *It will come into play soon.*

Now they're approaching a more focused group, sitting together, not dancing wildly. As though they are closely attending to each other.

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The MEZA Circle

Now Dreamwalker & his dear friend the Gentleman Photographer sit in a MEZA circle with Sleepers. Each individual in this circle is holding in lap a Creature. These Creatures—including the white-furred Bear, with handsome hat & scarf, several lovely little Meese, & a bee-you-tee-full greyish Ow-ell—have been traveling, for a little while now, with Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer. They are now distributed amongst the sitters in this MEZA circle.

MEZA: it means *to rock, to sway, to swing*. Also, it's a kind of Butterfly, *mm-hmm*, & it only happens at these Pahties. It's like . . . something . . . of a moment . . . of a place . . . of a time . . .

You see, what's needed for the MEZA circle are people-folks, or their like, Creatures, & the White Woods, all around. Now what happens is that they all begin to *hmmm* together . . . not any one particular song . . . more a friendly, flowing 'mongst them . . . something to connect head, to heart, to hand, to paw, to tree, to branch, to berry, to bloom, to sky, to cloud, to ground, & so on.

You may ask: Can the White Woods *hmmm*? Oh baby, *can they!* Ask some more: Do they often *hmmm* in a way that people-folks can hear? Not so much.

But right now they can all hear the *hmmm*, as it travels ‘mongst them. It’s like that beautiful Soup you hear tell of at the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock. Only right now it’s a Sound Soup, & it’s passed from singer, to singer, to singer, until not one drinks, but all drink, in different combinations.

There’s a while there, sort of a while of timelessness, & rocking, & swaying, & swinging. They all become the Butterfly, whatever they were, whatever they are, whatever they shall be, they are all right now the Butterfly.

The Butterfly lands. The Butterfly looks around. The Butterfly lifts off, & flutters along. The Butterfly is curious. The Butterfly is alone. The Butterfly is among many other Butterflies, large & small. The Butterfly’s here, & here, & here, & here, & now the Butterfly is gone.

They’re gone with the Butterfly, gone far with the Butterfly, gone nowhere at all with the Butterfly.

When the Butterfly lands again, & they begin to let go a little bit of the *hmmm* they have all been of, in, through—become—the world starts to return. The faces, the touches, the eyes. The White Woods, the ground, the noise. It all returns. But never really quite like the same. *Grateful beyond all words.*

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Dreamwalker Talks About Dreamwalking

The MEZA circle concludes, as much as they ever do. The Gentleman Photographer stands up, offers both his hands to help up his dear friend Dreamwalker. They stand, they smile, they hug. It’s like that.

Looking around, they’re now not sure who else was in their circle. It seems as though whoever they were had vanished into the throngs, somehow. It doesn’t really matter. They still feel them close, in ways that might only become more important as time goes on. Some experiences take awhile to settle in, find their place, their meanings in the skein.

Those lovely little Creatures are still with them though. The lovely white-furred Bear, with handsome hat & scarf, several fine little Meese, & the bee-you-tee-full greyish Ow-ell—they seem to be sticking around &, without even speaking a word aloud, Dreamwalker & the Gentlemen Photographer a-scoop them up into arm, as though say, *You are indeed coming with us now, wherever we travel for a while.* And so on they walk.

Dreamwalker begins talking, again almost, though not quite, as in a trance. He says: *There were things I learned back then, living here in the Manse, that I did not understand until later. And it took me a long time to put words to things. But I think that it had to do with **radical collaboration.***

The Gentlemen Photographer nods, harks an ear.

*The goal in a sense of successful self, in both community & the individual, begins, but does not stop, with what we share. There’s I. Then there’s **I plus You equals We.*** Smiles at his friend, who smiles back.

I plus You plus You plus You plus You plus You, et cetera, equals Greater We. And they nod down at their arms full of Creatures, who sniff friendly & curious at this turn in the discussion. *When I traveled for many turns with my Brothers, I learned to understand what all this meant better.*

But then there was also Dreamwalking. I was taught it, by these Creatures, by my father the Singer, by my mother the Scholar, by many others, in many ways. It wasn’t like reading a book, & then knowing what it was all about, after the last page. It was more like learning how to see the sky better that’s always been above you. There’s the sky. Learn how to see it better.

Gentlemen Photographer nods, still listening close.

Dreamwalking begins at the core. And here he pats his belly, & a little bit lower. *The root.*

From here up, & he flings a hand up, are where dreams fruit. From here down, pointing to his feet: Movement. The Magick comes in learning how

to do both, as one.

They walk on for a while, again in friendly quiet.

* * * * *

Time to Move Along . . .

Now is time for Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer to move along from the Sleepers' *Pahty* they have been enjoying. Dreamwalker is not a Sleeper. And the Gentleman Photographer, well, he is a photographer. His complex relationship is more with time than with dreams. Nonetheless, they'd been welcomed in to this *Pahty*. And they were part of it. And they are grateful.

But they move along. Knowing the Manse, Dreamwalker is recalling more & more that it is a place that you didn't travel by intention exactly, one foot in front of the other, or paw, or what have you.

He explains to his friend: *I guess you could say it is more collaborative. You tend toward somewhere you might wish to go. And then you see where the Manse leads you onto.*

The Gentleman Photographer nods, knowing that any place that Dreamwalker had come up in was probably going to be exactly like this kind of place that they were in, where you had to collaborate to move anywhere along. It just made sense.

They still had in their grasps armfuls of Creatures—the lovely white-furred Bear, with handsome hat & scarf, several fine little Meese, & the bee-you-tee-full greyish Ow-ell. And the thing about Creatures is that when it's time for them to come, they come . . . for as long as they stay, they stay . . . & when it is time for them to go, they go. And there's no unfriendliness *ever* in any of it. They just, you could say, tend along *their* way too.

But, for the moment, these Creatures are perfectly happy being carried along. They seemed to feel that traveling with these two people-folks is exactly what they need to do.

And so they all leave the Ampitheater, & they are back more in the main part of the Manse. And the Gentleman Photographer says to Dreamwalker: *My friend, is there more you need to remember here, before we move on?*

Dreamwalker shakes his head & says: *I don't know.*

But then the Gentleman Photographer notices that, aside from the *Hekk stick* Dreamwalker had sort of hooked on his knapsack, not even put away, just hooked on there, & his Creatures in arm, he is still holding that hand-made book from his Dream Cabinet, that they had collected way down at the other end of the Ampitheater. The one he explained that he shared with Zia.

He is holding it rather close. Close as Creatures. Close as the Gentleman Photographer nearby him. Close as his *Hekk stick*.

The Gentleman Photographer asks: *Are you bringing that along, my friend?*

Dreamwalker looks down at it, as so he'd almost forgotten it was there. He nods. *I think it's fine to carry along for a while, & then return later on.*

But Dreamwalker is uncertain. And unlike, say, the White Woods where, if you're uncertain, you're not going to get anywhere, in particular, if you're uncertain in this Manse, the Manse just takes over. And the Manse, seeing that they were uncertain, began to guide them, gently, but not compulsively, but nonetheless, along.

And they find themselves traveling down a long hallway, one that Dreamwalker cannot remember having seen before. The hallway has no doors on either side. It is just a long hallway. And then it begins to rise & rise, & there is something at the far end. And the Creatures begin to sniff & sniff furiously.

And Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer both begin to suspect where they are coming to because, at the far end, there is a green-&-golden curtain. Much like the one they'd gone through, what seemed like so long ago.

And they approach & approach, & then they arrive to the curtain. And they part it just slightly, & peer through.

Oh my goodness! The cheers & cheers that greet them!

* * * * *

On the Talent Show Upper Stage

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer now stand, & again, on the stage in the Great Clearing of the Thought Fleas & their Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock. Only it was not the Lower Stage that they'd been on, & through whose curtain they entered upon many many strange adventures. No, they are arrived to the Upper Stage, which means it is time to reveal to all their hidden talents! *But what have they learned between one stage & the other stage?*

The Gentleman Photographer goes first. He steps forward, after putting a hand on the shoulder of his dear friend. After receiving much applause, he says: *My hidden talent, my friends, is helping our friend Dreamwalker to get to Abe's Beach of Many Worlds!*

And this brings on many mighty cheers, because discovering your hidden talent is not a one-&-done thing. The Thought Fleas know that anyone can have *many* hidden talents. And some of them come into play hereon, while some of them are for a certain situation.

Then Dreamwalker steps forward, & he is still holding in arm all the fine Creatures that they've been traveling with—the lovely white-furred Bear, with handsome hat & scarf, several fine little Meese, & the bee-you-tee-full greyish Ow-ell. The Gentleman Photographer had handed them over while he spoke his own piece.

So Dreamwalker steps up forward with them in arm, & he says: *My friends, what I learned is that I have to return again to the Manse, where I'm from, when I can, & learn how the Sleepers travel the Dreaming. The traditions of it that I don't know. I've always done it my own way. I should learn more.*

And so they take their cheers, & they make their way off this Upper Stage platform. And they are kind of wandering aimlessly among the congratulating crowds. Thought Fleas, Creatures, & many others. It is a big deal to have gone through from one stage to the other, & everyone knows it. It is a path in more ways than one, & everyone is proud of them.

Dreamwalker, though, is drifting toward something that has attracted him by scent. It is the scent of the open Sea. Now he doesn't know how, in what seems like deep White Woods, he can sniff of the Sea here, but he also knows that he is among magickal folk, & among such folk anything is possible.

And so he follows his nose. The Gentlemen Photographer hurries to keep up, not knowing where his friend is bound, but keeping close, as is his discovered hidden talent to do so.

They leave the Great Clearing, & pass through some trees. Not many, because now they find themselves by a shore, & that has to be the Wide Wide Sea, just down there. And what is even more interesting is there is a boat there.

I know that boat! says Dreamwalker. *My friend, I know that boat! That is the **Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee!** I've traveled on that boat! Maybe that boat will provide some of our way to Abe's Beach! Let's go & find out!*

And so they hurry on down to the shore.

* * * * *

Aboard the Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee!

Dreamwalker & the Gentleman Photographer now find themselves aboard the *Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee* at full sail. No sign of the Captain, about whom so much has been said that she is practically a legend. Her ship has gotten underway, & they are sailing on the beautiful waters of the Wide Wide Sea.

Dreamwalker has been on this ship before, & he tells his friend: *It's a*

good ship. It won't get us everywhere we need to go, because we need to go down. Down, down, down, & he gestures with his hand. But it'll get us far out to Sea, & that's part of the way.

But what was that niggling Dreamwalker now feels, every time he sees that gray Ow-ell Creature fly calmly by? *What does it mean? Is he supposed to follow?* He doesn't know. Creatures are somewhat mysterious in their ways.

He & the Gentleman Photographer find a cabin together, below the main deck. Dreamwalker doesn't think it is the same one he'd stayed at previously, which was much bigger. But it is OK. This time he is staying with his friend, & he has this feeling that his friend wants to keep an eye on him. Dreamwalker is happy to have a friend with him.

But it will help so much if the Gentleman Photographer knows more about the Dreaming. So one night, not long after they've gotten underway, after they've returned to their room, & gotten into their bunks, Dreamwalker says: *My friend, would you like to learn how to Dreamwalk?*

And the Gentleman Photographer says: *What a kind offer! Do you think I can?*

And Dreamwalker says: *I will remind you what I said at the Festival, which is that I don't Dreamwalk in traditional ways, like the Sleepers. But I can teach you what I know.*

So they each get into his bed, & they snuf out their candles. Their bunks are atop one another, so they can hear each other well.

And Dreamwalker says: **Hmmm** *with me, as you fall asleep, focused on the sound of our voices **hmmming** together.*

And that's what they do, as they fall asleep in this very quiet cabin, with only the slight rocking of the boat, this *Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee!* on the Wide Wide Sea, as kind of a nice hidden rhythmic melody to what they are doing.

They *hmmm* their way in sleep. And . . . now . . . they . . . are . . . Dreamwalking together . . . side by side . . . walking along . . . as always . . . like in waking . . . only now dreaming . . . smiling at one another. *It worked!*

But that's when the Gentleman Photographer says: *Look!* And he points. And there is the grey Ow-ell, in the distance. And, as they follow the path of the grey Ow-ell, the White Woods appears around them. They are Dreamwalking together in the White Woods, & they are following the grey Ow-ell! Hurrying along together, but not too fast.

Are we going to see someone, Dreamwalker?

I have a niggling, says Dreamwalker, dreamily, that we are. Let's just keep that grey Ow-ell in our sights!

And they walk together through these pathless, beautiful White Woods, side by side. Awaking or Dreamland, the beauty of the White Woods is one.

The beautiful grey Ow-ell is bringing them closer & closer to someone who also has had a niggling, & has been drawn here too by the grey Ow-ell.

Who would it be? Who are they going to encounter? Any moment now!

* * * * *

Reunion

Dreamwalker wakes up, suddenly, intentionally, & bangs on the bunk of the Gentlemen Photographer, who is still asleep, in Dreamland, where they just were together. He wakes up too, groggily, wants to know what just happened.

*I'm not sure, says Dreamwalker, but as we were approaching whoever it was my Hekk stick's indigo trace begin glowing less & less. Something told me: **you'd better wake up!** And here we are.*

Well, Gentlemen Photographer nods & says: *Here we are. Dreamwalking with you was fun until then, my friend.*

Thank you, Dreamwalker nods, but he is clearly spooked. *I'm gonna take a walk on deck, by myself. Wait here.*

Gentlemen Photographer nods, & yawns, & looks ready to be back to sleep, of a less dramatic kind, in moments.

So Dreamwalker takes his *Hekk stick*, & leaves their room, closing the door securely. Walks down the wooden hallway below deck of the *Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee!* Comes to a set of stairs, & climbs them up to the deck. Nothing odd, nothing strange. He's been up & down these steps many times before. On to the deck that he's also been on many times before.

What is it? His *Hekk stick* was back to its more usual not-up-nor-not-down kind of faint indigo trace. His *Hekk stick* does not have a great deal of interest in the waking world, he's noticed. But still.

He walks toward the front of the ship, & he leans on one of the railings, looking out, Full Moon above. Watching for a long time, when a kind voice says to him: *I'm betting you had the same dream, with the same result, that I did.*

Dreamwalker hesitates a moment, before turning to respond, not so much at what the person said, though that was enough, but even more at the voice itself, which he knows, but that he hasn't heard in a long time. *Does he trust it now?*

They'd met aboard this ship, long ago. He decides to turn around, & there stands before him his long unseen Brother-Sister, Asoyadonna! Long, *long* unseen.

He gives her a slow, affectionate, remembering look. Hair the color of soft-rust curls to her shoulders. Her eyes sharp, intelligent, curious, endlessly feeling for the world.

And she is smiling, & she holds out her arms, & for a long moment he

lets himself let go of his worries, & everything else, & he embraces her, & she embraces him.

It is the embrace of those who've long not seeing each other, by unknown circumstance, unknown time, unknown distance, yet here they are, again. It is a wordless embrace, of endless length.

And eventually they do release one another. But that embrace tells them both everything. Each has wondered about the other, because each had the same strange dream. But now they know for sure: *This is Dreamwalker. This is Asoyadonna. They are reunited.*

And for the longest time, in spite of the strangeness of that shared dream, in spite of the strangeness of being reunited in this way, on this ship, none of it matters as much as them standing side by side, leaning on the railing, looking out at the beautiful waters of the Wide Wide Sea, knowing they are both bound toward reunion, with everyone else, on Abe's Beach of Many Worlds.

They've gotten this far. They'll make it the rest of the way.

* * * * *

Dreamwalker & Asoyadonna

Dreamwalker & his Brother-Sister Asoyadonna sit together, on the bed that is his, along this travel aboard the *Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee!* in the room shared with his dear friend the Gentleman Photographer. At this moment he is absent this room. He had told them: *Y'all have a lot to catch up on, so I'm gonna see a bit more about this boat. I do have my camera with me, & many rolls of film, you know.* And then he threw a happy wink to them both before he went along.

They've been sitting together for a while, talking, & Asoyadonna has been very interested especially that he has brought along the very strange hand-made book that he shares with Zia. She does not pretend to understand fully what Dreamwalking is, or who Zia is, whom she'd never met. But she does know that all of these are part of her friend's makeup, & very important to him. She also knows that her friend is

not quite like anyone else, in truth.

So if she is gonna catch up with this old friend, & get current with him, she is gonna get a look at this hand-made book that he'd brought along, as he'd brought virtually nothing else. Just his friend, & apparently a few Creatures.

Dreamwalker has not really looked at the book much since he'd grabbed it from the Dream Cabinet back in the Amphitheater of the Manse. And the funny thing is, is that when he opens it up, it lays open immediately to a page that he'd not seen before, one that she'd filled in.

It looks like a tree, but it looks like a special Tree. It is broad & deep. Its trunk looks anciently old. And there is a power to this trunk that leaps off the page. And the picture doesn't show the whole Tree, not even close. Just the base, & some of the roots, not even all.

And below the picture what might be possibly the scorched-over & smudged-up words: "*Become new.*"

Do you know this tree, Asoyadonna? Dreamwalker asks.

She studies it closely too, & says: *You sometimes hear about the Great Tree at the Heart of the Worlds. Do you think she's been there?*

Dreamwalker shakes his head. *I don't know. I don't know where she's been, to be honest.*

Did she want us to know something from this page? Is this a message?

I think it is. I think maybe somehow our journey forward has to do with this Great Tree. Maybe not even just getting to the Great Tree, which will probably be hard enough, but what we will do when we arrive.

Well, this was all very sober & serious to consider. But, a moment later, they hear cries & shouts from up on the deck. They smile at one another, both having a feeling about this.

And they hurry up the wooden steps to the deck, which is already

crowded with folks. They are lined around the edges, because the center is filled with buckets of water. These buckets are of all sizes, & they are positioned on different parts of the boat, high & low. On its mast, many timbers. *Never has such an array of buckets of water been seen before!*

The Gentleman Photographer comes up to him & says: *What's this all about?*

Just watch! says Dreamwalker, with a big grin.

Asoyadonna notices her traveling companion Raymond the Author Guy on the other side of the crowd, & waves. *He* knows what is coming.

But what comes out of nowhere is something *nobody* expected. Because what everyone expects is for the Imp Captain of the ship herself, Commandeer Masta' Splasha' by formal title, to leap with a cry from somewhere, & begin to splash these many buckets, high & low, in some kind of delighted cackling furor.

What they do not expect is that, suddenly, as though descending from a cloud, are *dozens* of Masta' Splasha'! And *dozens* of cackling cries! And they all begin to splash in the most intricate display of splashing prowess that has never been seen before! *Ker-splash! Ker-splash! Ker-splash!*

It seems like every bucket has a splashing, & a Splasha', *high & low!* There are cacklings *every* which way! It is *dizzying!* Folks have to step back a moment, just to behold the *splashing wonders* before them!

And then, in a moment, after all of these splashings have gone on & on, & cacklings every which way . . . suddenly . . . it is over. No sign of none, one, or many, of the Commandeer. She'd come. She'd splashed. She's gone, wherever she goes, as Commandeer!

Well, everybody is laughing, jolly, & shaking hands, & expressing well wishes to their fellow traveling-folk, because *this* is what the Commandeer wished for: *good will among all.* She knows how to entertain.

The ship continues along its course, for a day. A night. Another day. And, finally, they arrive, not to *somewhere*, but to *someone*. Who they all see nearby is the great beautiful visage of the green-&-golden Calgary the Sea Dragon!

He's come to transportate some of the passengers aboard this ship down to Abe's Beach of Many Worlds. And he is near his familiar spot to dive down into the Deep Deep Sea.

And so what happens next is that the traveling folks who are going to get on board Calgary need to disembark. Luckily, they see that, on the deck, resting on the very edge of Calgary's upraised tail, is the famous Boat-Wagon, with those bloo-eyed Kittys & their Friend Fish, waiting for them.

And so they all get into the back seat. And the more of them that get into the back seat, the more room there is for them to sit together. And finally they all buckle in—*safety first!*—& the Boat-Wagon rolls *down-down-down* Calgary's great tail, & then *up-up-up* his back, & onto the schnoggin of this beautiful Sea Dragon.

Hello, my friends! Get ready for a great voy-ah-gee! cries Calgary merrily. Then he calls out to his dear Commandeer friend: *Seeya lata', Masta' Splasha' gata!* And the Commandeer cackles back a gleeful farewell to her old friend.

All the passengers now buckled in, they are also directed to pull down the Safety Scales over the Boat-Wagon, so they could see their travels, but also be completely safe for the ride *down-down-down*.

And with a great cry of *Here . . . we . . . go!* Calgary the Sea Dragon lifts up from the Sea! He rises high up into the air, soars & swoops smoothly & suavely around, & then begins his dive *down-down-down!* He hits the Wide Wide Sea without a splash!

And then *down-down-down*, & they watch the Sea descend darker & darker, until what happens, at a moment when no one expects in this smooth strange wondrous ride, is that they *burst* from the bottom of the Deep Deep Sea, into the skies above the Deeper Deeper Sea!

And there is Abe's Beach of Many Worlds! And there are *many* waiting for them to arrive! So *long* been waiting for them to arrive! *What a glad day it is!*

* * * * *

Epilogue.

"No story ever really ends, and I think I know why."

—George MacDonald

Hobo Jones stopped. And he looked at Lilianna, with a small robot man smile upon his face. And he said: *The truth of the matter is, is that it's called both. **Many Loves of Mulronie the Space Pirate & Many Lives of Mulronie the Space Pirate.***

What? Lilianna put her hands on her hips, as though she was shocked, & possibly not accepting this as an answer. *How could that be?*

It's true.

But how could it be?

Tis so, Hobo Jones says, not knowing how to explain it any better than that.

Mr. Jones!

Lilianna, I think you can ask him yourself. How does that sound?

Well, she put her finger 'pon her chin. Realizing Hobo Jones was not the sort to talk in fool riddles on purpose. And she nodded her head & said: *OK, Mr. Jones, thank you. What was all the rest of that?*

Hobo Jones shook his robot man head & said: *I don't know. But I do remember all those words. Because he asked me to. Along with the black-&-white photograph. And I honestly don't know what it all means. I guess we're gonna have to find out.*

Lilianna took the robot man's hand again, & off they walked, down that hallway that was not quite straight, not quite visible, not quite there.

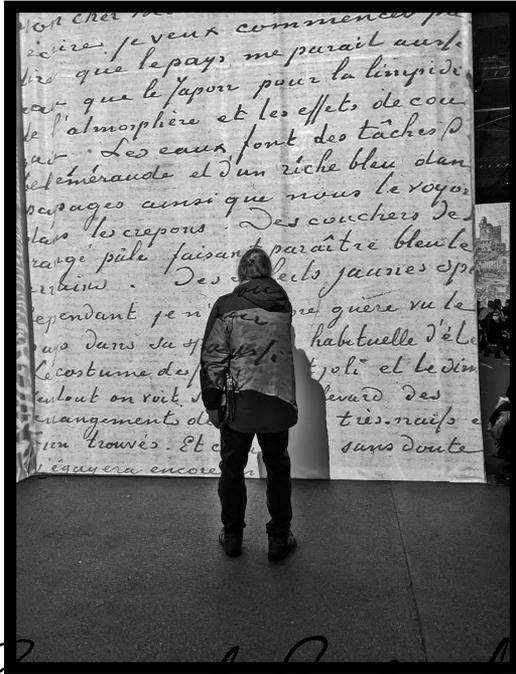
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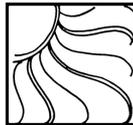
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