





Welcome to
Impville!

Editor's Introduction

This volume is the seventeenth in a series of annual *Samplers* featuring the best prose, poetry, & graphic artwork published by Scriptor Press in the previous year.

At almost any given moment in this world, a kindness to person, beast, or other being is occurring in one place; & a cruelty is happening somewhere else. Seems important to keep both these in mind. And always your choice which to tend toward: kindness or cruelty. Worse than cruelty: *indifference*.

Choose kindness. It's worth the cost.

Ⓚ & ♥,
Raymond Soulard Jr. Ⓚ
4/7/2016

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Editor & Publisher
Scriptor Press New England



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Algernon Beagle



Don Oso Antiguo Visits Bags End!

Hello Sampler readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Sampler editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this story presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this story from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

Part I

It was were pretty quiet in Bags End. I always get nervous when things are so calm & peaceful because I know deep down in mah beagle bones that quiet now means trouble later.

Then things got very interesting 1 day when me & Godd the small pink bear were walking home from school. We were meandering through different levels & hallways.

It's kind of funny having Godd in your class. You see, Godd can be kind of forgetful. Mister Owl the teacher asked Godd a question 1 day & Godd said, "I am not sure."

"How can you not be sure?" I asked.

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NEW ENGLAND

Bags End News
No. 193 November 6, 1990
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Don O Antigwo Vizits Bagzend!

Evin tho us Bagzend gys
keep coming an going, Ranny keeps
telling me not too worry becauz
the imaginashun nevr gros old
an tird an dys. I think he's z
jest beeing a dum old lazybug.

Enyway, last tim I waz
telling about how me an Godd
found this plas calld Island
beyond the edge ut Bagzend an
how we brawt bak this fat
old bere who blos bubels an
speeks a langwig calld Spanish.

Wel, wen he met Shlela,
this fat bere calld Don O
Antigwo ~~be~~ bowd down an got
awl humbel an stuf lik Shlela
waz a reel king. O ya, an he

"Yah, I thought you were all powerful & all seeing & all knowing," whispered Betsy Bunny Pillow.

"But not all remembering," said Godd with a small chuckle. I like Godd's small chuckle.

So anyway, me & Godd were walking along when Godd got curious to see off the edge of Bags End.

"Careful, Godd! You might fall off! Then you would be lost forever!" I said, wondering what it would be like to be lost forever, & especially what would happen if Godd was lost forever.

"Look, Algernon! There's something out there!" said Godd, who was leaning over the edge. I ranned & grabbed Godd back. I wondered if Godd floats like the Blondys. Probably not cuz didn't Godd pass the Law of Grabitee?

Anyway, I looked & saw something in the darkness. This was different. What I saw was sort of there & not there at the same time. Godd & me waited & in awhile it became clear what we saw. A sun, a sun?, was coming up & shining on a land made of ice. All I can say is, when you pal around with Godd, you never know what's going to happen next.

It was a short distance between us on the edge of Bags End & the beginning of the land of ice. Godd wanted to hop the space.

"Doncha mean jump it, guy?" I asked.

"No, hop it. I haven't hung around with Sheila Bunny all this time for nothing," Godd said, & before I had time to get scared & run away fast, me & Godd were hopping through the air & landing on the ice place.

I looked at Godd with a mad face. "Hey! Didn't you know that beagles can't hop?"

Godd shook Godd's head. "I forgot, I guess. It's a good thing cuz if I remembered you would be lost forever."

I shivered. I guess Godd's bad memory has certain advantages. Godd is pretty smart. Almost as smart as Sheila.

Godd caught Godd's breath & said, "Let's go."

So off me & mah friend Godd went into the place of ice beyond the edge of Bags End. I wasn't too scared cuz I guess when you're with Godd, things can't go too wrong. But who can tell?

Anyway, we started walking along. There wasn't too much to see, just ice. I was kind of bored because usually adventures have more exciting parts.

Then Godd noticed something ahead of us, a funny shaped ice thing. So we went up to it & saw it was a cat made out of ice.

"Hi!" said Godd in a friendly deity kind of way.

"I don't think it can talk, Godd," I said.

"Greetings, friends," said the ice cat all of a sudden. Its eyes, now wide open, shined like purple ice. "Welcome to Iceland," he said.

"Say, isn't that near the Arctic or something?" I asked.

"Well, that may be but this is the real Iceland & it isn't located anywhere. We float from place to place in reality & fantasy & other places. Right now, we're headed for Heaven," said the ice cat.

"Hey, that's where my pal here lives," I said.

"How long will you be here near Bags End?" Godd asked suddenly.

"For awhile. It's hard to say just how long. You see, we have a rather strange, uh, mode of transport which you will discover. But for now, why don't you venture further into Iceland? It has a special kind of beauty you may grow to appreciate."

Godd motioned me to come along & so I did. We said so long to the ice cat & walked further into Iceland.

1 of the places me & Godd the small pink bear went through was the Ice Forest. It was different from regular forests cuz, first, the trees were made of ice & second, not all of them grew right side up. Some grew upside down, some grew sideways, some grew connected between the trunk of 1 tree & the trunk of another. Strange place.

Then Godd discovered how to eat fruit from the fruit ice trees. Godd saw that if the ice fruit hanging down from the branches was breathed on, the ice would melt & a fruit would fall off the tree to be caught & eaten. By the way, O! Ice fruit! Yuk!

(I should tell any new readers to mah stories that I only like one kind of food, which nobody knows about, & the rest I run away fast from.)

There was a little ice town we came to with ice houses along a ice street & ice people & animals who were all very interesting except that none of them moved.

Then, all of a sudden, we came upon this fat pink bear sitting in the middle of nowhere, puffing on a pipe that would blow out soap bubbles. He had a kind of a sleepy grumpy look on his face, & he was most definitely not made from ice.

"Hi there, guy," I said in mah inimitable friendly Algernon way.

The bear looked at me for a second & then continued staring elsewhere. I have tried staring elsewhere mahself, but I never can because I don't know which direction to look in.

"Hey, fella, doncha speak English?" I said with a few speckles of grumpyness in mah voice.

As an answer, the fat pink bear turned to Godd the small pink bear & said, "*Siervo, ahora estoy preparado para partir. Me ayude a montar el jamelgo.*"

Well, it didn't sound like English or Puppy or Bunny or El or any of the languages I had heard of.

"Do you know what he said, Godd?" I asked mah friend.

"Well, my Spanish is a bit rusty, especially the archaic colloquial dialect he is using, but I think he just told me to help him get on your back to ride you. He called me a servant too," said Godd.

Well, I got mad now. "I am not a horse! I am a beagle. Nobody rides beagles, especially fat guys! And mah chum Godd here is no servant! Godd is, well, Godd is Godd!"

I was real close to the fat guy's face. He looked at me for a second, then took his pipe from his mouth & rapped me hard on mah nozobone.

"O! help! O! mah nosebone! Listen, ya dum fat guy, I don't like you! I am so mad I might just run away & hide!" I cried.

Godd looked at me with a sly little smile. "Algernon, I think we should humor this old gentleman bear. I will be his Servant & you will be his Steed. I think he needs us to go along with this game."

Well, Godd asked very nicely, & looked like such a cute little guy, that I didn't want to say no.

So Godd helped the fat bear onto mah back. Boy! What a fat guy! I struggled along slowly with Godd walking next to me. It seemed like the way back was shorter but that might have just been one of Godd's little tricks.

Iceland had moved close enough to Bags End that we didn't need to jump across to it.

I guessed we had to bring this fat guy to Sheila first, so we headed for Sheila's Throne Room.

We found Sheila slouched down in her Throne, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & reading a book.

When she looked up & saw the fat bear on mah poor backbone, & Godd the small pink bear standing next to us, she started laughing real hard. She laughed so hard she fell off her Throne.

The fat bear said something to Godd at this point. "*Hemos desagrado su majestad, la reina del conejito. Tenemos que ir de rodillas y suplicarle miseri cordia. ¡Ayúdame fuera esta jamelgo*"

sin valor!”

Godd said before I could ask, “He said we have displeased Her Majesty, Queen Bunny, Servant. We must fall down on our knees & beg her mercy. Help me off this worthless nag!”

Sheila was laughing even harder now. Boy! I wasn’t laughing. I runned behind Sheila’s Throne where it was safe, & peeked out from behind it. What I saw was Godd & the fat bear sorta bending down funny. Sheila couldn’t stop laughing.

Finally, Godd the little pink bear whispered to Sheila, “I think we should go along with this for the moment, Sheila.”

Sheila whispered back, in a sort of serious voice, “OK, Godd, if you say so.”

Godd stepped back & said, “I humbly present to Her Majesty, Queen Bunny, the Honorable Don Oso Antiquo, a gentleman, & Her Majesty’s most gracious & humble servant. My Master says that all which belongs to him, his life, his services, & his property, are at the disposal of Her Majesty, the Queen!”

I could see Sheila was trying hard not to laugh.

Part II

Sheila slouched down in her Throne & crunched a carrot (O! Yuk!). Then she talked in Spanish.

“Levántate, Señor, no se arrodillen ante mí. Como usted no es un ciudadano de mi país, se me debe respetar pero no la lealtad. Será mi invitado, Don Oso Antiquo, & visita Bags End & su pueblo durante un tiempo. Estaríamos felices de tener a un caballero de su distinción como nuestro más excelso invitado.”

Godd motioned me to come out, & stand close, & I did, still with fear, & Godd told me Sheila said to the fat bear, “‘Arise, sir, do not bow before me. As you are not a citizen of my country, you owe me honor but not allegiance. Be my guest, Don Oso Antiquo, & visit Bags End & its people for a time. We would be happy to have a gentleman of your distinction as our most exalted guest.”

When I heard this, I said, “O, Sheila, please tell him I am not a horse, so he won’t break mah backbone no more!”

Sheila gave me a grumpy look & said, “You have a choice, beagle. Cooperate & I won’t put a saddle on your back & a muzzle in your mouth!”

“What kind of choice is that?” I asked.

“The only kind you get, Steed! Besides, how are you going to get the story of all this for your newspaper, if you’re not there to see it?” And with that, Sheila slouched down further in her Throne & went to sleep.

“Yippy-i-o,” I said as the fat guy climbed on mah back again.

I struggled slowly along with my heavy burden. The fat guy was asking Godd all sorts of questions about Bags End. I understood Godd’s part of the talkings easy cuz Godd can talk both Spanish & English at the same time. Godd is tricky like that. Godd then told me the English of the fat guy’s talking.

“¿Cuáles son los principales productos de bolsas final?” [“What are the chief products of Bags End?”]

“Bags End doesn’t produce anything, except maybe pleasure & amusement for those who read & hear about it.”

“¿Cómo apoyar a sus ciudadanos? ¿El estado dar trabajo?” (“How does it support its citizens? Does the state provide work?”)

“Well, nobody really works. Most of the people in Bags End are children who play & go to school.”

“¡Absolutamente increíble! ¿Pero, cómo es el ejército? ¿Hay impuestos? ¿Reina Sheila utilice el tesoro real para apoyar al Estado?” (“Utterly astounding! But how is the Army supported? Are there taxes? Does Queen Sheila use the Royal Treasury to support the State?”)

“There’s no money in Bags End. There’s no need. Bags End is a fantasyland.”

“Ahh, así que este reino posee colonias entonces, cuyos productos & apoyo de ingresos la corona & el estado de la madre.” (“Ahh, so this Kingdom possesses colonies then, whose products & revenue support the Crown & the Mother State.”)

“No, Your Honor. Bags End has no money, no taxes, no colonies. Bags End is an anarchic, pacifist, neo-Victorian fantasyland.”

Don Oso Antiquo sighed sadly. *“Ahh, entonces este es un lugar de fantasías infantiles & sueños. Las cosas que me dices me recuerdan a mi propia juventud, hace tanto tiempo. Mi madre, una hermosa mujer noble, fue mi querida acompañante en mis primeros años de vida. He perdido a su toque benévolo del Señor cuando tenía sólo 12. Pensar en ella me hace sentir triste & más rudamente anciano.”* (“Ahh, this then is a place of childhood fantasies & dreams. The things you tell me remind me of my own youth, so long ago. My mother, a beautiful noblewoman, was my dearest companion in my early life. I lost her to the Lord’s benevolent touch when I was but 12. Thinking of her



makes me feel sad & most rudely aged.”)

Godd the small pink bear looked really interested.

“What was your mother like, Sir?”

“¡Ahh, mi pequeño! Madre fue una diosa a los ojos de mi hijo. ¡Tal gracia! ¡Esa dulce voz! ¡Cantaba canciones a mí de mundos mágicos como sus bolsos final, de los lugares donde la juventud es eterna, donde la alegría está siempre en el aire que respiramos, las frutas que usted come, el sueño que te envuelve bajo las estrellas!” (“Ahh, my little one! Mother was a goddess to my child’s eyes. Such grace! Such a sweet voice! She would sing songs to me of magical worlds like your Bags End, of places where youth is eternal, where joy is always in the air you breathe, the fruit you eat, the sleep which engulfs you beneath the stars!”)

Don Oso Antiguo’s voice was soft & sad.

Then Godd said, “Well, now let us meet new people, gain new memories to cherish.”

“Muy bien, siervo. Si tuvieran la amabilidad de ayudarme a volver a este nag, & velocidad de la triste cosa junto, encontraremos la extraña & habitantes de esta tierra maravillosa.” (“Very well, Servant. If you would kindly help me back onto this nag, & speed the sorry thing along, we shall encounter the strange & wondrous inhabitants of this land.”)

During the next few days, I dragged the fat guy around, meeting different Bags End guys.

Before I tell you all about it, I must say that I got to like Don after awhile. He was kind of grumpy, but he really liked to learn about us different Bags End fellas.

I tried to ask Godd about him & where he came from. Godd would only smile a small smile & say, “When Bags End became illegal, it opened the door wide for new & strange travelers from the realms of the strange & fantastic.

“I think, though, that this traveler is here to teach us all a few things. Let’s listen closely, Algernon.”

Grand Finally!

Somehow I always find mahself in strange situations that I don’t really understand. The latest pickle I was in (O! Pickles! Yuk!) involved this fat pink bear named Don Oso Antiguo. Mah funny little friend Godd the small pink bear found him beyond the edge of Bags End, & now we were showing him all over the place. He thought Godd was his servant & me his horse. Let me tell you, that fat guy was heavy on mah poor backbone.

So there we were, slowly going along & Godd was

explaining in the fat guy's language, Spanish, all about Bags End. Then he would tell me the English of the fat guy's talkings.

"Bags End is on many levels, one atop the other, connected by ramps. Most levels are hallways with doors on each side, just like an apartment building. At the other end is the edge, beyond which Algernon & I found you," Godd said.

Just then, along came mah silly Bumping bruther Alexander Puppy, & that nice language-knowing guy Allie Leopard. Alex is a tall yellow Puppy with a silly but friendly face. He speaks a strange made-up language called Bump, which annoys your old English-loving pal Algernon to no end. Allie is a nice green-eyed fellow who seems to like both real & fake languages of all kinds.

Alex, who doesn't know to be suspicious of strangers, went up to the fat guy on mah back & bumped him in a friendly way.

What came next was really weird.

"Alex says, hello, welcome to Bags End. My name is Alexander, & this is my friend Allie Leopard," said Allie.

"All with 1 Bump?" I asked.

"Bump," said Alex.

"Alex says he reminds you that he has told you at length of the beauteous simplicity of Bump Language in its consolidation of what needs to be articulated," said Allie.

"Silly brother," I muttered.

"*¿Qué es este extraño y nuevo lenguaje, Bump? No he sido informado de que en la corte Castellana.*" ("What is this strange new language, Bump? I have not been informed of it in the Castilian court.") said the fat guy.

"Bump is a dum language mah brother made up & it isn't real. He just pretends it is," said me, both grumpy & explaining.

"Now, Algernon, be agreeable," said Godd the small pink bear.

"Bump Language doesn't bring out mah agreeable side," I muttered again.

"Bump is one of the many languages you will hear spoken in Bags End," continued Godd to the fat guy, in his tricky English-Spanish-both way.

"Bump. Bump," said Alex.

"Alex says he believes Bump Language's simplicity & unadorned beauty will eventually win it many converts," said Allie.

"No, he didn't!" I yelled.

The fat guy got off mah back & approached Alex. "*Me*

gustaría saber más acerca de este idioma. Quizás nosotros en España podrían beneficiarse de Bump Idioma." ("I would like to hear more about this language. Perhaps we in Spain could benefit from Bump Language.")

And so the fat guy & Alex walked along with Godd, & Allie translated their conversation.

I decided to slip away for awhile. It seemed like a good time to go see Miss Chris in Connecticut.

Miss Chris was in her TV room on Suzy Couch, sucking her thumb & sitting with Sheila Bunny & Betsy Bunny Pillow & Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow. She is in the Army of the Babys.

"Take a walk, beagle, there's no room here," said Sheila.

"Hitch a ride to the other side," whispered Betsy.

"Gwenerals Mwiss Chwis & Bwunny are in high-level military confwence. Pwivates are not allowed," said Sargent Lisa in her funny tongue.

I was gonna leave when Miss Chris came & got me. She held me along with Sheila & Lisa, & she got comfortable on Betsy.

"How are you, A-wa-wa?" Miss Chris asked, using the nickname she sometimes has for me.

"I am OK but there is this fat guy who keeps riding me, & that dum Alex was talking Bump stuff, & I was playing with Godd until they took Godd away, & now these guys are real mean," I said with a upset voice.

Miss Chris got me to tell her the whole story. She thought it was very funny.

Just then, the Blondys came in, all 3 of them, & they were floating Alex, Ally, & the fat guy! Godd came in too, floating without a Blondy. He forgot his own law!

Well, it got pretty crowded on Suzy Couch.

Miss Chris took at good look at Don Oso Antiguo.

"*Buenos Dios, Don Oso Antiguo,*" she said politely.

"*Ahh, un niño de la cultura & gracia. Que me recuerdan a los hermosos niños de la courty de la corona de Castilla. Excepto, por supuesto, que no son españoles.*" ("Ahh, a child of culture & grace. You remind me of the beautiful children in the court of the Castilian crown. Except, of course, that you are not Spanish.")

Miss Chris agreed with a smile. Then everyone got quiet cuz a lot of good TV programs were on, like Fraggie Rock & Bugs Bunny. Godd the small pink bear translated quietly for the fat guy, who found a lot of the progams funny.

"*Me gustan estas hospitalidades en esta caja mágica.*" ("I enjoy these entertainments on this magic box.")

Miss Chris had all us guys around her & in her arms. It was quite a crowd. I noticed that the fat guy's face got kind of happy cuz Miss Chris was holding him, & Godd the little pink bear's smile was even trickier than ever.

After the TV programs were over, Sheila said we should get back to Bags End so Miss Chris could do her homework. Well, Miss Chris didn't like that idea, but Sheila was stubborn.

So we all went back to Bags End where mah adopted mommy Pat gave everyone dinner except your old pal Algernon (O! Yuk!) I just hid in mah room.

Later, Miss Chris came & woked me up. "Come on, A-wa-wa! Commander Q is interviewing Don Oso Antiguo!" she said, & we went into the Bunny Family's living room to listen to the radio.

Commander Q is this neat radio guy who does a program at night. He was interviewing the fat bear with help from Godd the little pink bear.

"How do you like Bags End?"

"Un lugar encantador de fantasía & sueño. Es realmente divertido & encantadora. Me recuerda mucho de mi propia infancia feliz en la corte Castellana hace muchos años." ("An enchanting place of fantasy & dream. It is truly amusing & delightful. It reminds me greatly of my own happy childhood in the Castilian court many years ago.")

"Some people say Bags End is weird, not a fantasyland of a desirable kind."

"No, Señor, yo apuesto a diferir. Sus idiosincrasias son la esencia misma de su encanto. ¡Imaginar! ¡Una almohada hablando & un juguete lazybug & un pup que habla un 1-palabra idioma! ¡Qué asombro!" ("No, sir, I beg to differ. Its idiosyncrasies are the very stuff of its charm. Imagine! A talking pillow & a lazybug toy & a pup who speaks a 1-word language! What amazement!")

"And how did a gentleman such as yourself come to visit Bags End?"

"Ahh, mi amigo, he viajado mucho & amplia en mis muchos años. Me largo para ver mi casa en Castilla, pero temo & esperamos que el remolcador suave del señor me tira a mi última morada." ("Ahh, my friend, I have traveled far & wide in my many years. I long to see my home in Castile, but I fear & hope that the Lord's gentle tug pulls me to my final resting place.")

"Why did you leave Castile to travel about? A gentleman rarely has the pleasure to leave his land & dependents, & simply set off."

"True. Pero mi tierra, mi casa, no es lo que una vez fue. Castilla se ha convertido en intolerantes a las diferencias entre los individuos. Desde la voz de un caballero de envejecimiento pesa pero ligera como una pluma sobre las decisiones de los jóvenes, me sentí debo vagar hasta que encontré mi paz nuevamente, o hasta que me encontró a mí." ("True. But my land, my home, is not what it once was. Castile has become intolerant of the differences among individuals. Since the voice of an aging gentleman weighs but lightly as a feather upon the decisions of the young, I felt I must wander till I found my peace again, or until it found me.")

Later, Miss Chris brought a lot of us guys to bed with her. There was me, Sheila, Betsy Bunny Pillow, Alex & Allie, Godd the little pink bear, & the fat guy.

When the light was shut off, Miss Chris called out, "Suzy Dark, Suzy Dark, can you come out & play?"

In the darkness, we heard a little girl's voice say, "Hi, Miss Chris!"

"Is Freddy Dark & Baby Dark & Mommy Dark & Buster Dark there?" asked Miss Chris.

A lot of voices said yes.

"¿Cuáles son las misteriosas voces que claman por la noche?" ("What are the mysterious voices that cry out in the night?") asked the fat guy.

Godd the little pink bear said, "That's the Dark Family. Suzy is the little girl, Baby is the baby, Mommy is the mommy, Freddy is Suzy's big brother, & Buster is the tricky guy."

"¡Qué pregunta aquí que incluso las tinieblas voces & está vivo!" ("What wonders here that even the darkness has voices & is alive!") said the fat guy.

Well, we listened to the Dark Family for awhile. Suzy gave Baby a bottle, & Buster tried to get tricky, & Mommy Dark scolded him.

Finally, all the Dark Family calmed down to sing a dark ditty which Godd the little pink bear translated for the fat guy.

*Darkness come & Darkness go
Darkness sad & doncha know
Darkness bright, it's time to go
Darkness like a rapids flow*

*The darkness tween the stars is swift
Tho it frightens tiny children oft
Tiny ones, turn your pretty fears off
The stars they rest in their darkness loft*

*Wind will roam among the trees
Hunting wayward Lady Breeze
It's lonely Darkness she loves to tease
His little trembles she seeks to ease.*

*Darkness come & Darkness go
Darkness glad & doncha know
In Darkness love will come & stay
And like forever river will flow.*

“*Qué bonita melodía*” (“What a lovely tune”) said the fat guy. He was sleepy & soon we all were asleep.

The next morning Miss Chris brought all us guys back to Bags End, & she went off to her school.

Godd the little pink bear explained to the fat guy that it was time for everyone to go to Mister Owl’s school. The fat guy decided to go along too.

In the morning, Mister Owl was teaching everyone about the letter L. A argument broke out between Betsy Bunny Pillow & that silly Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow about what was the best L word.

“It’s lollipop, of course,” whispered Betsey, who loves lollipops. O! Yuk!

“No, it isn’t. It’s lwieutenant,” said Lisa.

“You dum baby, what do you know?” whisper yelled Betsy.

“Listen, you dwum insubwordinate pwillow, if you dwon’t show pwoper respwect for your supweriors, you will go on weport to Gwneral Shweila!” swaid, I mean said, Lisa.

“Well, my Allies will be most interested in your statements, & they will be considered carefully before further action is taken,” said Betsy in a scary kind of way.

“*¿Cuáles son estos aliados? ¿La Reina es el Comandante de las fuerzas armadas?*” (“What are these Allies? Is the Queen Commander of the armed forces as well?”) asked the fat guy.

Godd the little pink bear, who was busy doodling pictures in a little pink notebook, said, “Well, it’s kind of hard to explain.”

“*¿Es como jugar, es que no, todo esto? ¡Qué maravilloso lugar!*” (“It’s like playing, is it not, all of this? What a wondrous place!”) said the fat guy.

Later, at recess, I heard Godd the little pink bear talking to Mister Owl.

“I would like you to give the children the rest of the day off. My friend & I must depart, & I think he would like it if all of you were there to say goodbye,” said Godd. Godd didn’t have a small smile which was unusual for Godd.

“Where are you going?” asked Oliver.

Godd smiled sadly. “Well, I have to get back to Heaven, & my friend’s time for returning there is at hand as well.”

I didn’t hear Mister Owl’s voice cuz I got real upset.

I found the fat guy surrounded by a bunch of fellas & he was blowing all sorts of wonderful shaped bubbles. I didn’t stop though. I kind of scrunched under him to get him on mah back & I yelled, “Come on, Allie, we have to save the fat guy!”

I heard Sheila & Betsy voices call me crazy as me & Allie (& the fat guy of course) ran off. I didn’t stop running till I was in mah room with the door closed. Then I noticed that mah silly Bumping brother Alex was with us too.

“Bump?” he said.

“Alex says that he is both surprised & pleased by your show of spontaneity. He further remarks that perhaps you aren’t such an old fuddy-duddy after all,” said Allie.

“*¿Cuál es el significado de esto? ¿Tiene mi nag enloquecida?*” (“What is the meaning of this? Has my nag gone mad?”) demanded the fat guy. Lucky Allie was with us to translate.

So I told him, with Allie’s help. “You’re gonna die, fella. I heard Godd say so. You’re gonna go to Heaven & not come back no more! When I go, it’s just like a visit, but you will never return!” I was very upset.

The fat guy looked at me & smiled a very nice smile. Then through Allie he said, “I know where I’m going. It’s where I have been headed. Last night I realized I would never see Castile again. It was in a dream. I was playing with my beautiful mother & she was saying I would soon see her again.

“But, Momma, I am here & so are you! I can see you now!” I cried.

“She just smiled at me & held me close, her smile held me close, her smile above all held me sweet, gentle, & close, & I realized I would see her very soon.”

I looked at the fat guy, & I guess I kind of gave up, which is not mah usual way. I mean, he wanted to go. I don’t though. I like to play in Heaven once in awhile, but I would rather live in Bags End.



“That’s my view in reverse, Algernon,” said Godd the little pink bear, who’d found me.

“Are you leaving too, Godd?” I asked.

Godd smiled at me, not too sadly though. “I have to bring my friend here to Heaven & show him around a bit.”

Soon, most of Bags End was assembled in the hallway which ended in view of Iceland.

I asked Sheila for permission to ride the fat guy back to the place I found him.

“Sure, kid, knock yourself out,” said Sheila, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & trying to keep her crown on.

So me & Godd & the fat guy walked onto Iceland. We even passed the ice cat we saw the first time.

“Did you discover our place’s secret?” the ice cat asked me.

I shook mah head. “Not really,” I said.

“Iceland floats on the power of melancholy & dream,” said the ice cat. “In this case, that of Don Oso Antiquo.”

I nodded politely but didn’t say nothing. I think philosophy is like an onion, it should be used in little bits & not all the time. What am I saying? O! Onion! Yuk!

The fat guy got off mah back & found his bubble pipe. He sat with Godd the little pink bear blowing bubbles like happiness.

“Well, seeya, fella,” I said.

That fat guy said something in a nice voice.

Godd said, “Don Oso Antiquo says you are a fine steed after all, especially considering you are a beagle.”

I laughed. Godd laughed. The fat guy laughed. Then I left. And they left too.

I returned to Bags End & kept to mahself till Miss Chris invited me to hear a Ramie bedtime story on their house’s front steps beneath the stars.

Miss Chris, Sheila, Betsy, Alex, Allie, & lots of other guys sat looking at the stars.

I felt sad as I sat there. I had liked the fat guy. I was sad he was gone. I even kind of missed mah backache.

Miss Chris picked me up & hugged me closest of all.

“I don’t understand it, person mommy,” I said to Miss Chris in mah sad beagle voice.

I kind of cried & then I fell asleep. When I woke up, it was a baby day just up to crawl around. I got up to see what would come.



* * * * *

A Suvivalist’s Manifesto

1. In preparation, stretch.
Moderately at first,
then recklessly,
capitulating muscles and tendons
to their intergalactic limits.
2. Scream primevally,
in unadulterated rage,
standing on one foot,
while mincing with rehearsed cuteness.
3. Arrange some essentials
like popcorn and tellurium.
Jog in place for several hours
refusing, then daring, any gland to sweat.
4. Call out enthusiastically
to a neighbor, preferably
in another State,
while subconsciously adjusting
the stars-and-stripes bandanna
on your head. Begin writing.

Robbery

When moving from the comforts
of a small town to live in the big city,
relocate near a brothel.
Voices in the dark have no shape,
and fellatio can be endearing.

Mornings are just that.
Fuck tact, respectfully.
The wind in your hair is
from that song you hated.

Something Other Than Desire

You were wrong about the Palmer Casino,
you were wrong about Bigfoot,
and now you're wrong about this.
You're just fucking wrong.
That Bigfoot reference
may have been irony.
I'm not saying that it was,
but it may have been.

* * * * *

Tom Sheehan



Fahrenheit, Electricity, and a Flexible Flyer

[Fiction]

She is more than Fahrenheit, she is electric, not the lightning kind that will blast you hither and yon, but wired, the connections to all of me, my eyes bright and seeing the stars mirrored in the river, almost where they belong, bucket-spilled or tossed across the sky above Vinegar Hill, above all of Saugus—above old Scotts Mill directly across the street from my house, above the Iron Works from 1636 leaving figures and ideas larger than fossils on the land (like the 300-year-old remnant of the slag pile), above Rippon's Mushroom House where I'm bound to work in a few years like most of my older pals, above Stackpole Field, where I'm bound to play with some of the same pals—and me on top of Theda Burton's back side and she is bumping and bouncing and being electrically delightful as we are on a Flexible Flyer sled rushing down Bridge Street toward the bridge, halfway fallen into the Saugus River, and provides but a dangerous and narrow passage across one side of it. I am in a danger zone too, though pleasure abounds (and I will remember this first ride with her for 75 years.)

She's 15 and tall and beautiful and electric and has already told a few others that her ticket is punched for the whole night of sledding; and I am 10 or 11 and as innocent as a new spruce sapling on Major Appleton's Pulpit, where that distinguished major made a speech over 200 years ago denouncing the tyranny of the Royal Governor, Sir Edmund Andros, and eluded Crown troops by hiding in a local woman's oven. Such impressions float in the air and are grasped in seconds for those aware. *History! History! History abounds*, lights me up; the red men, the Sagamore, the Sachem, arrowheads and rasbora chips all over the place, ax heads. A geologist finds Saugus red rock down along Cape Cod where it was driven millennia ago. The ghosts of other villages visit here in my little village, this piece of land, this corner of the North Shore above Boston, this little burg breathing of old. How many centuries of unknown dead lie within the graceful, now wooded topping of Round Hill where we hold Easter sunrise services? How many souls there embedded—or freed?

But newness comes on this midst of keen awareness: there is half an airplane in Theda's yard, an orphaned Taylor Cub, shorn of wings, belonging to her brother Tony, now flying in Europe. There are controls that stand in place, and a seat that fits me, and glass windows I can look out to see, sometimes, the clouds below me. It only waits a mechanic and a teaching pilot and a long due pair of reconstructed wings. I know they will come to new being as soon as Europe quiets down, all that slyness of words slips out of older lips, Tony comes home from his fighter plane or his bomber's seat.

Unbelievably, that beautiful girl Theda with a lovely figure, a comfortable



figure, is somehow forced to share these memories leap-frogging all around me even where the river is banked by reeds like fire arrows at the ready and love-lies-bleeding and *aruthusa bulbosa* and secret flowers with Latin names I haven't correctly pronounced yet; how interminably they crawl outward, inward, downward, absorbing, taking the parts that Saugus throws into the river: *Oh!* I have seen the secret drainage pipes, the vine-covered culverts, the diversions some odd characters employ.

But the wind rushes over me. Saugus and history are everywhere and I am captured by my senses. Without doubt we are moving over unseen arrow heads, old Indian trails, and perhaps the Sachem had a teepee nearby, but the First Iron Works in America lies in these grounds, too, and the old Scotts Mill, a red brick mastodon, looms over all. But, before all this, before shadows were thrown, I feel the newness, a place that captures any eye, but once there were no eyes to adore it. Perhaps in the silence of a new dawn one man walked onto the scene from afar and saw the river and the salt marsh and the ocean and knew it was a wonderful place. I can see him summon others and they bring their lodge poles and birch bark boats and begin to fish the river and the ocean and dig the clam flats and feed anew on this new place that becomes Saugus. Continually I see the images of the new people who come and hunt and fish and die and bury their dead and accept what is provided in this very fair place.

I hear myself ask: Is it enough to know your place? I am on a sled with a beautiful girl. The electricity comes with another shot. I feel wonderful. I don't know where or what, but it's wonderful. If I went searching for it, I don't know where I'd find it, this feeling of wonder, this new awe.

The electricity comes again. I know it is electricity, the kind I found when I cut an old extension cord with a pair of wire cutters and did not know the cord was plugged in. She has jump in her coils hidden somewhere in that long, soft girl. We pass over the first bump on Bridge Street and my whole body shakes with the quick awakening, a jolt exchanged for a bump in the road, a joy for danger. For a short spell we are air-borne until I settle down on her again. Am I a pilot in the air, or a new adventurer? I have choices that strike gratifyingly quick; my senses leap. Young is beautiful, adventurous. Did who found these shores know such powers? It has to be someone before that gallant Genovese came courting the new landfall, the expanse beyond.

The wind on my face startles and chips at me and there are stars that refuse to go away from the overhead without a bothering cloud and their egos lie paint-brushed upon the river as though they are waiting for summer to come back. I inhale Theda, Saugus, history, winter, a new freedom breaking loose with noticeable abandonment. The moon is loaded with routes and roads cut by scary arms of broken oaks and old elms the way maps can get you lost too. This is where the elms remained standing gracefully huge, healthy and tall in row upon row and street upon street until the blight comes and devours them, seemingly from the top down to the roots.

History surrounds me and is held in a stolen silence for the fortunate who see its edges, who breathe it in, conscious of the leftovers, the once-hot slag pile of the iron works simmering for three centuries, the occasional artifact toed up on a

path and smelling of coal and on the coldest days of the year speak solely of steel in a new form, or where arrowheads catch the summer eye or an ax head comes with a shovelful of earth. Johnny Waugh, our mailman, collects so many arrowheads and ax heads on his deliveries, the collection makes me shiver. He eventually delivers his vast collection to the library, dies too young, historian, collector, Indian buff.

Ahead, in the massed spread of the partly buried First Iron Works in America, I see the slag pile, a mound, a ninety-foot sloped mound now covered with snow but once was built on the sweat of indentured Scot slaves, or servants as they might have been called. But it dips to where the river still runs, still calls stars down to its bosom, to the wide curve below the Saugus Town Hall, and in the flat of these grounds lie the Iron Works from 1636 and on for a dozen years under all the pile-on of centuries and I see the impulses in it. But nowhere near electrical. Nothing like that new charge I know with delicious acceptance.

Theda bounces. I shiver. The charge leaks damage, I swear. My mind searches. I see faces of people who used to be here and are not here now. They may have had big lips or big ears or clansmen's brows, they may have been skin and bones and baggy in their clothes and had eyes like fire pits, their hands calloused tough as old boots, their dreams tossed like flies at sparkling trout, but they were daily covered with slag dust, barrow dust, detritus, the smoke residue those Scots were tied to, for the price of passage might have been a whole lifetime of servitude. I see arms white-gray in the dust, brawny arms sweat runs on, binding them into years, from some highland or mountain pass and the ship that brought them here where I coast on a sled with steel blades, brought them white-gray to my eyes three centuries later, see smoke and char and cinders they worked with, while counting years, if there was any counting to do for them, by them.

I know they had tobacco and grog, but no electricity, except the kind I know, invented back then, and long before, the kind I have from connecting to Theda Burton. I am 11 still and I am riding on her backside and she is 15 and lets me ride 10 times in one night and the wires never short out.

She is soft and I think I could fall asleep on her and the Flexible Flyer until Kingdom comes or that noise in Europe will fill boats and planes to come our way. Her brother is in the Army Air Force and his half plane, the Taylor Cub without wings, sits in their back yard. I think a hundred times about flying that plane and wonder if the wind on my face would have the same edge as going downhill in the middle of all the history that has played out here in this little corner of the world, on top of a girl smelling like a whole flower shop on Main Street beside my aunt's house.

Planes do anything they are pushed to do—fly over Sumatra or Ceylon, Somerville or City Square in Charlestown where I used to live. And they can drop bombs.

Girls, though, are coy and explosive in themselves, and smile like nothing else in the world.

Just after Tony goes in the Air Force, I am once more sitting in his half plane. It is dark. I am flying thousands of feet in the air, not worrying where I'll go or how I'll land when I get there and Theda's hand is suddenly, out of another night's

darkness, on my shoulder and she says, "You got her off the ground. Pretty good for a young pilot, a young steersman. Where are you headed?" Does she know her hand is full of dreams? Makes night stand at attention? That the view is a permanent treasure and the scalped and neutered oak tree the plane leans on leans its tortured limbs onto a climbing moon Vinegar Hill just let go of, the moon ascending and leaving shadows behind?

Funny thing is she answers her own question and offers an impression, her head cocked at a jaunty angle, her deep black hair catching midnight in a glance, "Off to manhood one of these days," and a kind of dry sadness fills her eyes, which seem to carry a star or two for extra baggage, like the river does on so many nights even when the ice comes with a safer crossing than the old bridge. Stars, even the dead ones, still find their way wherever. I wonder if Copernicus, Galileo, da Vinci, or Newton knew all that.

On a smaller scale, I wonder if I'll ever know what she knows.

"Johnny has the plane's wings in the cellar," she explains. "Almost fixed them up before he signed up. Now my mother says she worries every night that he won't come home again and get those wings out of the cellar. She says she doesn't mean it, but she does. Mothers are supposed to worry about everything."

She sounds like one of my teachers, who used a ruler on Rod Jenkins' hand once right in the coat room until Rod pulled his hand away and she caught her own thigh, high up, the sound of red pain following. That's history too.

As Theda talks about the idle wings in the cellar, ideas and images scatter my brain, each one taking hold for minor seconds, small mirrors, pages flipping madly in a book. Then an aeronautic image takes control. On the previous summer my father took me to Muller's Airport in Revere, sometimes called Riverside, and we got in on the tail end of a plane story, proving to me that planes could go anyplace in the performance of assignments or deeds.

The airport manager, a friend of my father's, told us that another Taylor Cub, besides the one I "flew" on deep nights, had landed weeks earlier and the pilot, after taxiing to the main hanger, asked the airport manager if there was a trustworthy young man around who wanted to earn himself some money. The manager produced such a young fellow who was given a hundred dollars for himself and instructed to go to Suffolk Downs and bet another certain amount on a certain horse in a certain race, wait for the pay-off, collect, and bring the winnings back to the pilot. He is also told, "And keep your mouth shut, tell nobody, and there will be future errands." The pay-off is huge, delivered, and the errand boy provides his home phone number where he might get future messages to meet the plane and place a bet.

As the manager says to us, "Last week he must have gotten the call, the plane came in, taxis up to the main hangar, and the pilot and his passenger see the crowd of other young folks around the airport, obviously having received information that the hot tip is due, the fix in. The pilot guns the motor, runs the runway strip and takes off. He hasn't come back yet." (The plane, we're advised, belongs to a high police official in Buffalo, New York and is never seen again at the Revere airport.)

My brother spent hours making model planes from kits produced by Paul

Guillow's Company in Wakefield, then he'd fly them off our third floor porch when we lived in the other end of town and a Hart Bus Line bus would run over them or a Hupmobile or a Graham or a DeSoto, all gone their own way too, just like his model planes disappeared under stronger chassis with tires larger than manhole covers.

But now it's winter, flight restricted, and I am trying to decide if winter comes up the river or down off Vinegar Hill, it comes so suddenly. Up the river, it would come in blocks of ice, solid shadows, part of the Atlantic surge; off the hill, it would come in drafts of cold air, gusts of wind off the peak of the hill, carrying parts of Lynn with it, the GE plant, smells of the city; I couldn't make up my mind because both entries had special touches of special places.

"Let's go again," she says. "The stars are beautiful. The night is so beautiful. My mother worries about Tony and Europe and England where she came from." It is as though she is swapping this time for some other time, some other place, and I think that is what dreams are like. I ask myself, am I a dream sharer? Does she share something with me I can't reach yet?

There's only the electricity—and the river—and the stars—and the flightless plane until I am in control—and this whole flower shop that is all mine for another plunge down Bridge Street into history—and into what is coming to me like flipping the pages of a calendar.

We get to the bottom of the hill and pass, with excitement, across the damaged and dangerous bridge.

Pal Georgie says, "It's about time I had my chance to ride." He's bigger than me, older by a year or so. And handsome in a dark way.

Theda stands upright with her Flexible Flyer. "I sold all my tickets to him." She points to me, the stars in her eyes. "They're good until midnight when we all head for home." She looks like the queen of the hill when she scans the face of her wristwatch and says, "He has almost an hour left."

Suddenly we hear from the Town Hall the blasting of the fire alarm, and a minute later two fire engines, their red lights flashing along the river, are heading away from us, heading for the southern end of town, the sirens blaring through the night. I hope all goes well there at arrival, that a sudden new history is not being made, like a false alarm, of sorts.

I have my own alarms sounding, too, my own history being made, starting with these moments.

* * * * *

listen
it's now and it's here
stand up, do your thing

each passing day
don't wait for miracles
but be ready

too late to be early
i meditate on time

silence breaks
birds and toilet flushes
neighborhood greetings

dusky blue
melody of morning bird
before duets

blurred lines
where i start and where i stop
still, i say "i"

perfect reflection
all is crystal clear
where's my pen?

again explosions
sounds of war back for encore
as i sip coffee

amongst the crowd
one disbeliever
in search of a friend

superhero
saves the needy
in her dreams

mind float
above body
one kite string away

thought after thought
down a highway
time to let go

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Dream Raps

The Best Kind of Pilgrimage

The best kind of pilgrimage is the pilgrimage deep into the sea. Deep down into the sea. And if you go deep down into the sea, you will of course encounter Creatures of the deep-down-into-the-sea kind of nature. The kinds of Creatures who like it way down below. That is where they prefer to travel & to keep their company.

But you may ask yourself: *who are these Creatures that are living deep down below the sea, keeping their company there?* And so you swim up to them & ask, *who are you?* And they may sing out to you, there in the deep, deep sea where you have taken your pilgrimage. They may sing: *We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none. Come to our party. Come sing & dance with us!*

And thus you will have your answer, of a sort. What other kind of answer would you expect from the strange & wondrous Creatures who live deep down in the sea & keep company there?

Except to say one other thing: if you look behind them, there is a wall, a very steep wall. The wall reaches from deep down in the sea up, up through the depths to the very surface where it arrives, & you think to yourself: *my my my, what's all this? We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none. Come sing & dance!*

I Am Near the Festival Again

Oh man, I am near the festival again. And I'm one of the musicians. I've created this audio piece. It's two hours long, to be played later in the night, on the stage there on the cracked desert floor. Something always seems to be playing on that stage, save during the highest heat of the day. Its back wall reaches high up into the sky, giving shade much of the day, is buried deep into the dusty earth.

At some point, I bring me & my beloved's boots inside some kind of building—some kind of room, a wooden box deep inside a hole in the floor—for safekeeping. And I write the letter S on the box, in dust.

Later on, I'm listening to a man telling his story of going to college, complications, stupid tragedies, ends of the world. Someone's world. I'm counseling him like the old days at the festival, & I'm remembering those old days, & I break down crying, remembering how I did this.

And finally it's night, & there's a band on the stage & I feel like I should know who they are. They're longhaired hippies dressed in crazy costumes. And they launch into a song called *The Pink Floyd*, which sounds like The Pink Floyd.

We go on next. Grand finale? *No. The festival never ends.*

And all of this is so intense. *You tell me dreams aren't real, you tell me dreams aren't real.*

I Must Be a Boy, Full of My Fires

I must be a boy, full of my fires, because there's a longhaired girl with golden boots on her small feet. But, more important to my world, there's her father. He's a teacher, & he doesn't like me. Isn't that always the way? Oh, first he has me read some student essays. *One, I say, is good, though is not relevant to the assignment. I would tell the student to start with the first sentence again, but keep the rest tucked away.*

Another essay just isn't very good. About a pilgrimage to the desert, or maybe a TV show about one, & then to the sea, or maybe just a bright pink cartoon dolphin riding the cartoon waves on that girl's low-cut halter top. They took a buggy ride. She wouldn't even kiss his cheek after.

But this teacher, father to the longhaired girl, doesn't like me no matter what I say or do. Somehow we end up together at a baseball game, behind the backstop. In this future or past time, players have to wear sandwich boards—which of course makes them clumsier to play, but adds advertising revenue to their teams' fortunes. One player's sandwich board reads: *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!* Another player's sandwich board reads: *We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none.*

The teacher takes it out on me, leveling criticism after criticism at me, as though it's all my fault. He takes all of this personally.

You've ruined the game of baseball! He cries, his eyes yellow with rage. I say: *is there nothing you can do but disapprove?*

He says, *I'm old & you're fucking my daughter. And I'm old. And I'm old.*

One of Those Low-Budget Movies About Time Travel

It's like one of those low-budget movies where you're told it's about time travel but it never really goes anywhere. It kind of just all takes place in some guy's apartment. That's exactly what this was like . . .

There was this apartment building I was living in, & there were three apartments on the third floor, a small one & a big one & a medium one. And I seem to have lived in all of them from time to time. And the landlord's wife had a fondness for me, which was nice, especially when my rent was late.

But then what happened was that my credit card was stolen from the old wooden box I kept in the hole under my bed, & the thief ordered lots of pornography sent to me, & this did not go over well with the landlord's wife, who somehow got wind of what was being sent to me. Maybe she peeked, I don't know.

But later in the film—this was the time travel part—, we are in one of the apartments trying to get back in time to the other. It's one of those where you're told: *oh, it's forward in time—oh, it's back—my goodness! Look at the powdered wigs, look at the jet packs!* That kind of thing.

And then there is, of course, a heroine to this film, but she's not very bright &, as for escaping the pursuers, we end up at a baseball game & she doesn't understand that to get lost in the crowd, you have to swirl into the crowd & *get lost in it*. She sort of stays on the edge of the crowd uncertainly. She is not a very bright heroine. Longhaired, lovely, but little more. Once told me she believed she was born in a spaceship buried deep in the earth.

But, somehow, we make it back through space & time to the apartment. I find myself relieved. Further, I find myself sitting on a stool, on stage, in the big apartment, with Creatures, & we are performing. Some of them are leaping through a hole in the stage to perhaps another dimension, so one is told. It's that kind of film. I wonder if they'll come back for the Grand Finale, when we will all sing & dance on the stage together. I have a feeling they shall. For you see, they are professionals.

I Always Get Invited to These Kinds of Parties

You know, I always get invited to *these* kinds of parties. Now there are all sorts of kinds of parties. There's dress-up parties, costume parties, there's proms & wedding parties, & frat parties, & all sorts of things, but this is the kind of party that I get to go to.

Seems to be a kind of a family affair, all sorts of family members. Someone's family anyway. As I entered the biggest room in the great house where the party was held, I saw there moving images on the wall. I couldn't tell if these were films, or videos, or some kind of two-dimensional Creatures in sort of a frame. It was hard to say.

And I suppose the party carried on for a while—there might have been dancing & singing. *Oh, no doubt, some got naked.* There was probably a body of water nearby, maybe the sea, maybe some jumped in, maybe it was the middle of the winter & they jumped in deep anyway with yowls of delight. Fireworks, of course. Mud, Jello, a nearby Woods where strange things happened. Maybe more came in than went out, or vice versa. *Things of this kind.*

And then there was the sort of a finale where this famous longhaired comedian came out, & he was going to put on his show, & he just was getting warmed up, telling his favorite fierce jokes, but his act was cut short. Someone cut his microphone, turned on the stereo, loud. I nodded. *Of course it's The Pink Floyd.*

His act was cut short because there were fanatics in the bunch. And they didn't like the comedian, they didn't like his style, they didn't like his face, they didn't like his long hair, they didn't like that he had ten fingers total on two hands.

And I'm not sure what happened to him, in the end, whether there was something that occurred in the Woods, or out to sea, or in the Jello. Among the naked people. *Things went down. Things happened. I don't know what happened.*

And all I can say is that eventually I end up back at my hotel room, unable to sleep from the events of the night, & from the kinds of parties I always get invited to. I sat there watching TV. It was a program about a town called 1971. One of the many you find on late-night TV where the lab blows up, the world ends, & only the Creatures are left, *again*, living on the lone habitable Island, deep in its magical White Woods, in the Great Cavern, caves & tunnels under the Tangled Gate.

Mrs. Wordsley

Everybody, it seems, has had a teacher like Mrs. Wordsley. Oh, she's not one of your regular teachers, she's not one of those that you have for all sorts of classes over the course of time & maybe you'd come to love her or hate her. No, she's your classic substitute teacher.

And you think, years later, how did this woman make a living? She showed up, occasionally, to substitute. It wasn't like she was there in different classes every day. She was just there randomly, once in a while.

She was strange, too. She'd walk around, carrying a strange wooden box. It had all sorts of symbols on it. You won't find them on the Google, or in big dictionaries, or in arcane volumes in the library. No, sir. It also looked like it had been through fire a couple times. There were scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It was a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas.

And so that was Mrs. Wordsley. And this wouldn't any of it be very important except I was recalling the time that she made me stand up in class. *She didn't make people stand up in class. She didn't make people work.* She seemed far more interested in her box.

But she'd just got her hair cut, which spooked me from the moment she walked into class that morning, & she made me stand up in class & tell her what I had dreamed the night before. And I told her, I stood up, & I told her a dream. Now it wasn't my dream. I don't know if it was anybody's dream but it just occurred to me, in that minute, that sudden panic-filled minute when this substitute teacher ordered me to do this thing that I had never been ordered to do before.

I described climbing a rocky path, a very steep rocky path. It was both muddy & icy. It was very steep & there were many people along this path. And I wasn't sure where I was climbing to, but it seemed very important that I get up there, to the top &, if no other reason was involved, at least I wouldn't be on this slippery, muddy, icy path anymore. *Just begging gravity to take me down & with as much pain as possible.*

And I finished telling this dream that someone had had, maybe I've had it, I don't know but I don't think so. I looked at Mrs. Wordsley, but by the time I'd finished this now very long rendition of what had happened during this dream, she'd lost interest.

She was back sorting through her box, pulling out scraps of paper & other things, some of which possibly moved on their own. It was hard to say. So I just sat down & hoped it wouldn't happen again.



You were going to the sea, young man, she said. Reading shakily from a torn & scorched scrap taken from her box. Don't you know anything about dreams, young man? Don't you know that dreams are real?

I Leap from a Building

I leap from a building, drop toward the ground, slow, & land fine. You see, I'm hurrying to finish my classes. I've got to get that college degree finally. I'm going to go work in an office, & I'm going to have a job with a tie & a suitcase & a hat upon my head, but I've got to take five classes, plus take two make-up exams, & possibly jumping jacks.

And that's just how it has to be. College these days isn't the easy thing it was back when I didn't finish it. Along the way, I go into a club & there are two pool sharks. They beat me easy but I get worked up, say: *I do poetry the way you do pool. Let's teach each other.*

Now these pool sharks have never been approached like this. Usually people fear them, & for good reason, but maybe it was just the tone of my voice, maybe I said it just right, humble & forthrightly, maybe just the right amount of Fraggles in me.

But they liked it indeed, & we began an alliance that day that continued the rest of my college career & it helped out too. You see, I was living in an apartment in a poor, dangerous neighborhood. Its living room floor—such as you could call it a living room—was just a hole, a declivity in the earth. People would come in & would tell me how to cover it up, or fill it in, & none of it made any sense whatsoever.

Finally I just say *to hell with it* & set up a movie projector & we show horror films in the declivity. One of them ends with a lab blowing up, & the end of the world, & the beginning of a new one, & I'm so glad I got that college education.

I'm Sitting at My Old Bar

I'm sitting at my old bar, at my old corner stool, with my glass of ice water, & there's a man, sitting a couple stools away.

Now he's a man who has seen his best days come & go, or so it seems, & he's drinking directly from the bottle that the barman left for him, understanding that need tonight.

He starts talking eventually, saying it had taken him a long time but he had managed to pull together the suit that he was wearing at that moment. He explains that it was a combination of about three or four suits that were too beaten up to wear respectably, & so what he did was take the best pieces of each—a lapel here, a button there—and pulled them together into what he was wearing at that moment.

I give him a fair assessment because I figure that's what he wants, & I say: *I think it'll do, looks good.* He nods, he knows. It was a lot of work, it was a struggle.

He explains that he's on his way to the transport plane. He explains that there's a division of passengers among roles. There's the artists & the cooks, the poets & the felons, there's the counselors, on & on, like that. Roles. And like passenger sits with like passenger for the duration of the trip.

I say: *when does the plane leave & from where?* And he says: *I know it's soon & I know it's near but that's all I can say. But when I finish this bottle, I'm going to walk out into that daylight street in my suit, & I'm going to take a sniff of the air, a big sniff, & I'm going to follow it until I find that plane & join the other passengers on board.*

You Walk Around as Three People

You know, it's often times true that you walk around as three people. And sometimes these three people are the past, the present, & the future. And sometimes what happens is that you're in a state of mind where they all mix in together, one plus two plus three.

I am in a neighborhood, full of houses, apartment buildings, sidewalks & stores, cars on the street, flag poles in the air, clouds in the sky. I go into a used bookstore, oh yes, this again. It's nice. I walk around for awhile. I don't buy anything, maybe I don't have any money. It often was true in this past present & future that I'm describing.

I comfort myself by memorizing poems to recite to my longhaired lover on the nights she'll come see me, crutch holding her up on her footless right side. I select a book with no cover or title page & read to myself, then speak quietly, over & over: *Who are these Creatures that are living deep down below the sea, keeping their company there? And so you swim up to them & ask, who are you? And they may sing out to you, there in the deep, deep sea where you have taken your pilgrimage. They may sing: We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none. Come to our party. Come sing & dance with us!*

Maybe she will kiss my cheek twice when I recite these words to her. Better than the usual twisted silent hour in the dark.

I then go visit old friends that live next door. *Oh, this is a treat.* I have not seen these old friends in decades. They are friendly & welcoming. *Whoo hoo! Whoo hoo!* I say. It's been a long time.

I talk about the art we used to make together & I wished that we'd had better equipment to make it. I tell my friends: *you're so lucky to have a bookstore so close to you, next door.*

But after awhile, sitting in their warm living room, a friendly soft light, music on the stereo, over & over an album called *Mellow Moods & Moments with The Pink Floyd*, I begin to feel trapped. Like, I have to go. This is wonderful. *I have to go. Why would I think that? Why would that be true? What would be the secret to that feeling?* I don't know.

But I go. And I don't look back. Because, you see, when you're three people, past present & future all at once, you don't need to look back, because it is swirling all around you & inside you all the time.

A Friendship That Transcends . . .

It is sometimes fortunate that one has a friendship that transcends time, space, & sense itself. I'm friends with the dead singer. He is not yet dead. We are good friends, & we have other friends too. We gather many nights in a known & familiar room, & know nothing of our various ascents & descents to come.

And so I'm with the dead singer, who's not yet dead, & his friends, driving in a top-down black sedan, out deep in the desert. *Oh! The good times you can have with friends in a top-down black sedan out in the desert, deep in the desert!* It's so far out there, so flat & far from anywhere else, that it's like non-time-travel, like nothing passes, quietly, beautifully, crazy like you can just simply sniff the clean dry air itself, & know that whatever you've lost will come to you again. A pilgrimage into the one & many & everything you are.

Eventually, I find that we are no longer in a top-down black sedan but in a buggy race in the deep desert. Buggies are going every which way, it's almost chaos, how can you tell who's winning & who's losing? How would you know? I grip my wheel & drive hard nonetheless, & try not to crash, & eventually I come to a hill.

Strangely, I drive up the hill. I come to the finish line shack. I've come in fourth place, & I'm feeling very triumphant, but the newly-shorn lady in the shack only wants her \$180 entry fee. That's all. I look around cagily & notice there is a store behind her. I say: *does that store have an ATM machine?* She says it does.

I get out of the buggy & go into the store. Then I slip & slide my way through the store, find a set of stairs that take me down back to the desert floor, & I make away without paying my entry fee.

Later I give a call to the dead singer who is not dead. And I say to him, *thank you, that was such a good time & I came in fourth place*. But I warn him not to become a tragical symbol for his generation. I say to him, quite honestly, *that would be a waste*.

Known & Familiar Room

Now here you are again, in that known & familiar room, among those known & familiar souls from yesteryear. And you are among them, knowing how the years have played out since then, & they do not.

Yet you are with them, among them, a familiar among familiars. The high-high singer, the smirking preacher, the belly-laughing poet, the many brilliant brothers we were. Do you say or do you refrain? What do you do with the knowledge you have? Can you affect things, can you make them better, or just different?

Do you give them the gift of not knowing because you've traveled back to a good night among loved ones & fellows in a good place, or do you take it away? Do you look at each face, & then the next face, & take it away because you know?

Or do you forget for a length of time, just a little length of time, & enjoy this miracle of having traveled back to their company before they run divergent & some down low? Do you enjoy this company of your yesteryear fellows? Is there enough Fraggles in you to enjoy it for as long as it will last?

You're Smoking Something Good on TV

Now you know what happens sometimes is that you're sitting at home in your living room or your bedroom, or maybe you're living in a studio apartment & they're all one & the same, & you're watching something good on TV.

Something funny, something that when you sit there & smoke something good, & watch this good thing on TV, they seem the same. It's like you're smoking something good & watching something good, but it's a twinned sensation. I'm smoking this TV show, this TV show is smoking my pipe, we are smoking together. *We feel together, we're very high together*.

It's very nice, it's sweet, you don't need anyone else in the world but your pipe full of sweet ganja & your TV show, your couch or your floor. There might be a window, there might not be a window, who knows what kind of place you're living in?

You do your best, you work hard, or you don't have a job, it's hard to say. You go through situations, one then the next. Anyway, you run out of good edibles. You've got the show, you've got the pipe, you've got the ganja, you've got everything, but you've got nothing good to eat. Cheese Doodles, ChocoSmax, things like that. Things that are good to reach into because it's a bag full of them & you can eat them, one at a time, in between smoking & watching & laughing.

So you have to go to the local store. Now you've heard things about this local store. It's open 24 hours a day, in your little town where *nothing* is open 24 hours a day. And you've heard stories about this store, that it's actually part of a spaceship. It's like the topmost part of a giant spaceship buried deep in the earth.

And you walk in, & you're looking for ChocoSmax or Cheese Doodles, or things like that that will help you with your friendly pleasing solitary high whether you have a job or don't have a job, whether you have a window or don't have a window.

And you walk in & you think to yourself: *is this really the top part of a spaceship that is buried deep in the earth? Could this be?* You look around stealthily & you see in the back of the store there is a door. Now it could just go back into the place where they keep the mops & the brooms, or maybe it goes back into the cooler because you've got to stock the soda & the milk even when you're making the kind of crap money that they pay you at this kind of job.

Still. You walk through that door & there are stairs down—oh, & the guy at the counter, he's a friend of yours, & he's not watching anyway, a couple of girls came in & they are wearing halter tops, that was it, he's not watching nothing else. So you go in & you go down, step after step after step.

You come to the bottom of the steps, & there's a keypad, & there's a door, & you can get into this spaceship if you know the code. And you think to yourself: *what is the code?* He won't be talking to those girls forever, they'll get bored & they'll leave & he'll come looking for you, because you were talking to him earlier & promised him some good weed when his shift is done, or possibly during. Who can tell? It's a long night, third shift, though you do have to get back to your TV show & you do have your ChocoSmax & Cheese Doodles in hand now.

You think to yourself: *I had a dream last night, were there numbers in it? Yes, there were numbers in it! There was a festival, deep in the desert, & heavy rock music on stages everywhere (including The Pink Floyd & The Pink Floyd Too), & it was a chaos until the bands began to synch up, a few at a time, then all of them, every band, every stage,*

synching up, the drums first, the bass guitars, then the keyboards swirled into place, the lead guitars, & the singers, so many singers! Singing, chanting, humming, words in & around us, we are many, we are one, we are many, we are none!

Furiously you type these numbers into the key pad—*many, one, many, none*—& you hit the enter button, & you just hope, & a little green light comes on, & you push the door in! *You are inside the spaceship, my friend. Go take a look. And a listen. Is that the sound of the sea?*

RS



Joe Coleman

Pastoral

Poor little lonely shepherd lad:
far from his sweetheart,
tired and sad,
with moon and clouds of stars in the sky,
he misses, he needs her.
He starts to cry
—when suddenly one sheep catches his eye
and he thinks, “Why not give it a try?
That sheep is throwing a ‘come-hither’ look . . . ”
He makes his move,
dropping both trousers and crook.

There were fireworks—violins—hillsides shook . . .
a few minutes was all it took.
One might think, if only for decency’s sake,
he’d tell the sheep: “Sorry . . . that was a mistake . . . ”—
but the following evening, at quarter-past ten,
there were fireworks and violins again,
after which, exhausted, with nothing to say,
the lad puffed on his pipe of clay.

Some farmer spied smoke and thought there was flame.
The poor little shepherd was full of shame,
when the farmer happened upon the pair
(though the sheep didn’t seem to care).
Then the poor little shepherd returned to the town
where his sweetheart disgustedly laid the law down,
“If I even catch you
looking at sheep
there’ll be no more kisses from me, you creep!
These lips will become but a dim memory.
Is it going to be sheep—or me?”

The picturesque town never saw such a thing:
a sheep in a veil, with a wedding ring.

Music by Night (for J.H.)

Fine-tuned body beckoning,
I dream you are made of wood and string:
a precious rare violin or guitar.
My instrument. I play an opening bar—

Your shapely contours start to sing.
Your curves are cradled in gentle grip
and even as you are slumbering,
you thrill to my master-musicianship.

Then, virtuosos, we share duets—
your breasts, my chest, our stomach frets.
We languidly strum in harmonic ascent,
each as the other's accompaniment,
through memorized movements restraint forgets.

Vivaldi's *Concerto for Pleasures in B*.
Beside you, upon me, instinctively,
we resonate under talented fingers.
The motif circles, climbs, and lingers,
extending our rapture, sustaining one note—

Two lovers nestle neck against throat—
both of us instruments, players. Both singers.
Well-rehearsed. Nimble. Adagio.
Guitar and vocalist. Violin. Bow.

The most sublime music as has ever been—
crescendo of delicate flesh touching skin.
The graceful guitar—The bowed violin—
The instruments wake—
Let the concert begin.

* * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz

Green Jaguar

[Travel Journal]

Heading into my final ceremony of the year, I felt I was getting pretty good at drinking yagé. And my surroundings were accepting me. I'd woken once in the middle of the night and seen, through my mosquito net, a lit firefly, directly above my head, unblinkingly tracing a long, looping noodle of light.

For this ceremony, Joaquín and I were joined by three French people: a tour organizer, his wife, and an aspiring photojournalist. Frédéric and Claire Fillon knew Joaquín from previous visits with tourists. They lived on the coast and at the moment were trying to conceive a child. They hadn't been able to so far. Frédéric thought a ceremony with Joaquín might help. The photojournalist, Raoul Savoy, was here because his mother had been here with Fréd and Claire, and had suggested to him that he document a yagé ceremony. Raoul, though, had a clinical detachment from his surroundings. He wasn't convinced by any of this: not by the rainforest, nor by Frédéric's enthusiasm, nor by Joaquín. And he couldn't decide if he wanted to drink with us or not.

So when the time comes to brew the yagé, and he asks to come along to take pictures, Joaquín answers, flatly, "No, that isn't possible." After some discussion, Claire and Raoul stay at the hut while, in a nearby clearing, Joaquín and I brew the yagé as Frédéric snaps photos of us—my teacher in his red tunic and me in my green one.

After the vines and leaves have boiled for a couple of hours, I ask Joaquín if I could sample the brew. He said sure and I drank a cup. Before long, the sounds of the forest acquire a peculiar intimacy, as if they are taking place inside my head.

A nearby tree hosts a colony of black and yellow oropendola birds. A couple dozen nests like great brown teardrops hang from the branches. The inconceivably weird and lovely calls of the birds tug my mind skyward.

"*Stek-ek-ek-ek-eh-eh-eh-o'o*," they cry. "*BLOOP!*" They are sky spirits in physical form, like the fireflies, the mamecoco, the coyotes, the anás.

"They help with shamanism, right?" I ask Joaquín. Frédéric smiles and leans in to listen.

"Hn-hn," the uncuui nods, smiling, his voice gentle and high-pitched, as if speaking to a small child. "*Umú*," he adds. "That's what we calling them in Paicoca."

"Umú," I repeat, tasting the black and yellow syllables on my tongue.

"Umú," echoes Frédéric contentedly.

"*Stek-ek-ek-ek-eh-eh-eh-o'o—BLOOP!*" proclaims an umú. I feel delightedly jaguarish and bare my teeth at the forest. "Foes!" I hiss, curling my lips back, practicing the glare. My hands describe paw movements in the air.

inch, out of the hammock onto the floor until only my feet, in green wool socks, are still resting in it. On the floor near Joaquín's hammock, the kerosene lamp's soft yellow flicker takes me back to a winter evening when I was five years old.

My newly-single father was entertaining the three neighbor kids and me with the powers of light. He was 34. His losing custody battle over me was in its final stages. By day, in a courtroom, he was having his psychology publicly vivisected by my mother and stepfather and their allies.

But this evening he was buoyant, visionary. We were in the living room with the electric lights off. He had a lit candle, a prism, and a magnifying glass. He interposed the glass objects between the flame and the white wall, and slowly moved them this way and that to change the shape, color, and intensity of the blob of light on the wall. We kids were mesmerized by the brilliant transformations. Lastly, my father made shadow animals with his hands, and spoke in their voices. The finale was a droll conversation between two camels in the desert.

Now my hands are like my father's, but bigger, and with less hair and more freckles. Lying on my back on the floor, I stretch the hammock between my feet to make a screen and, with the hands my parents gave me, and the light from my teacher's lamp, I silently reenact the camels' conversation.

Who did my dad learn this routine from? The lineage of it might go back to the ancient Hebrews. And it was always a younger camel talking with an older camel, who'd talked with a still older camel, and so on, stretching back to a vanishing point where Adonai Eloheinu devised camels out of divine language.

*Blessed art Thou
O Lord our God
King of the Universe
who has created camels.*

*At this moment flares a brightness
of blazing intensity
as if the sun has
exploded!*

Raoul has taken a flash photo of me. I laugh at the incongruity. Here I am deep in a trance and there's this brusque intrusion of normalcy from outside.

But I like Raoul and I want to help him. It would be great for his project if he could get a photo of me making the jaguar face. I decide to turn over and look at him and do it.

As I turn over, though, the yagé energy takes over with mad force and apparently decides to punish him for his impudence. I ROOOOAR at him, baring my teeth, ROOOOAR again while he shrinks back, gripping his camera, against one of the broad posts that hold up the roof of the hut. I POUND on the floor of the hut as if on a giant drum and ROAR. My feet tranquilly resting on the hammock in nominal obedience to Joaquín's injunction that I remain in my hammock for the

duration of the ceremony, I POUND and ROAR.

Soon, a tiny, analytical part of me notices that one sound I'm roaring is HUMBABABUM, which contains the name of Humbaba, the demon from Sumerian myth, the guardian of the cedar forests, the one Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed, the enemy of civilization who had to be eliminated so the forest could be logged and the city built up. I figure the famous murder wasn't the end of him: the demon is part of what's roaring through me now. I'm a predator, leaper, springer, pounder, tearer. I'm a joy of destruction, an ecstatic killing machine. I've never had so much fun. ROOOOAR!

The machine downshifts.

I grimace and stare around in the darkness, baring my teeth, a crocodile at the edge of a river. Joaquín gets up with his mamecócó, stands next to me, and, for a long time, whisks me off with its leaves as I lie there on his belly.

He gets back in his hammock, and I hold still, and all's quiet.

There's just the breeze in the trees, just the crickets, just the cicadas, just the frogs, just the night birds.

After a while, Joaquín begins whistling. It sounds weak and effeminate. I mock the tune with my falsetto voice and snicker. Joaquín hisses, "Chhhht!" to shut me up, the same sound he uses on his dogs when they're barking and, with a mocking laugh, I fall silent.

Fréd and Claire go for a walk down by the river. Raoul stows his camera and crawls into his sleeping bag.

Silent, I brood: *That demonic feeling I had is energy, freedom, bliss. Attacking and killing as a jaguar, one's fully alive in the moment, unfettered by morality. Not seeing oneself as evil, but as obeying one's God-given impulses. In that case, is it really evil? But with the slightest notion of morality, with the slightest awareness of ourselves as members of a cooperative society, we learn to restrain ourselves. Going berserk isn't evil when a jaguar does it, but when a human does, it usually is, because we know better.*

Berserk: it literally means bear-shirt. Vikings visualized going batshit crazy for battle as putting on a bear-skin shirt. It's like that thing Joaquín said to me recently about the jaguars wanting to turn me into one of them with a jaguar tunic.

"Ahora, aguántalo," Joaquín murmurs to me, "como Waorani mismo." Now deal with it, like a Waorani. *Yeah*, I silently concur. *The Waoranis are all about dealing with this energy.* I flash back to my dream about Noma chatting with Pata while his torso was cut open. I climb back into my hammock pondering the lives and deaths of wild rainforest people, and the times that they kill, and the times that they refrain from killing.

In fact, for a human, it can be hard to deal with this energy without submitting to it. Sometimes when someone kills someone, people say he was possessed by a demon, and it's because his mind was running demon energy like a computer program. It can be good for defending the groups we live in. When a threat comes from outside, it lets us protect one another, up to and including killing the invaders. Discrimination is called for: in

which situations is demonic ferocity appropriate?

My dad was no fighter and my mom insisted I be peaceful, so I didn't learn violence. Sometimes other kids punched me while I stood there unable to respond.

We boys had war movies playing in our heads, imagery left over from World War Two and Vietnam. We're a squad of soldiers deep in enemy territory, and our lives are put at risk by the weakest member of our group. Some kids saw me as that weak one and wanted to toughen me up by punching some violence into me. Has the seed they planted finally sprouted?

I pray that if it's truly the best solution sometime, I can use violence. I resolve that if it's not, I won't. I ask the highest power in the universe to sustain me in this resolution.

Fréd and Claire pick their way back into the hut and gently lie down. In the darkness before dawn, everything is cool, calm, quiet. It's as if the air itself is sleeping and no one wants to wake it. Even our dreams are sleeping.

At eight in the morning, we four outsiders left by motor canoe. With the spray flying around us, I told Raoul over the drone of the motor that I was sorry I'd roared at him. I wasn't, really, because I'd just been going with the yagé's flow, and the yagé had wanted to do that. But apologizing seemed the polite thing to do.

I told him about wanting to help him with a grimace, and the jaguar energy taking over. He answered that he would have defended himself if I'd come any closer. He took down my address and promised to mail me photos, though I would never receive anything from him. He seemed unhappy with the whole experience, as if he were having second thoughts about being a photojournalist.

While Fréd smiled into the sparkling spray from the prow of the canoe, Claire told me that at one point a night bird had been singing close to the hut, and Joaquín had called it with his whistling. In response, it came and perched on the peak of the hut, until my noise scared it away.



Many Musics, Tenth Series The Tangled Gate (Continued)

xxiv. White Birch

"When all your bright scarlet turns slowly to blue,
will you stop & decide that it's over?"
—Townes Van Zandt, "Sad Cinderella," 1972.

In my dream's dream, I am walking,
seeming again, as though quite often,
with Aunt & my dear White Tiger friend,
somewhere beyond Aunt's Garden, where
the Woods begin. "You'll know these
White Woods again, child," Aunt says,
"with other beloved ones in your company."

They hesitate to my will but I nod,
we enter, I am nude, good to feel
this place with all I have, what
its honesty, what its trickeries.

There are of these . . . none. It is plainly
beautiful & now I hear its *hmmmmmm*
easy & true. I look at Aunt, her severe
loving face, the White Tiger, his blue eyes
loving me, *feeling me* deep down. "Why
did I fear this place? What was
I missing? What am I missing now?"

Aunt holds my hand as we walk deeper,
no paths here to follow, the White Tiger
on my other side, close to my needful
touch. I know into awareness that
this is vision, this is dream. They are
with me, now, they are very far.
They love me. This how they tell.

Come to a clearing deep in these
White Woods. One tree in its center,
several close-growing trunks. I approach,
touch the one main glowing trunk, broken bark,
warm to it, look up, count six leaves
among its bare branches.

I look fiercely at Aunt, at my White Tiger
friend. "Tell me *it!* Tell me the *it*
you would give me, have me know! *Please.*"

They speak, like one voice. "Release
to the Gate. As much as you will
want to resist, release. *Release it all.*"

I want to know more, to ask more,
but I find my mind's bones staggering
toward waking, a what? *a refugee camp,*
people are strangers to each other,
how will we join? How do kin become?

I wake. Disappointed, my bed, my cabin.
Cleaned up & tucked in, mostly as the
dreaming man had left me. Last of
daylight through my port window.
Wishing I could have more earth creatures
for tonight, knowing would be awhile.

A commotion outside my door, many
on the stairs up to the deck, voices,
laughter. I follow, hoping the dreaming
man among them.

No usual ship's deck to be found,
'tis criss-crossed with planks, atop
which in great number the buckets
of water & little stools last seen
in the Captain's quarters.

Her newest trick? We crowd into corners
& free spaces to wait & watch. But
she does not appear. Wait, wonder,
grow bored.

Then, from the clouds above, a great
full moon appears, riding high monarch
in the dark starry skies. And then,
perhaps of course then, we hear
a delighted cackling midst our number.

As grand & tiny as ever, her smile
delight's definition itself, yet the Captain
does not commence her trick. Gazes us
one then the other, then back again,
peering, recking, mockingly fond,
the Captain looks & looks. Then a single soft word.

"Together," she says.

Her leaping, cackling cry follows her as
she lands in & out of the first bucket,
& onto stool, & leap & splash & again!

Good. *Good. Together.* Hiking myself
onto the nearest plank, then stool,
I cry it all & into the nearest bucket
of water, & am stuck. And climb out.
But I get up on the next stool & this
time discover one must hit the water
already leaping toward the next stool!

Leap in the past tense! Leap having already
leaped! Leap & splash as one, &
again, & again, until leaping & splashing
from every bucket & stool in concert,
one, none, many. I knew not what
it meant but I leaped like splashing,
splashed like leaping, & cackled my joy!

They join me, too, these disparate
passengers on this strange boat.
Some more clumsy, others deft, but
all of them cry & leap & splash
& know this each his own way but
under that great imp's moon
we leap & splash & laugh as one.
Even the hatless dreaming man appears.

Come morning, the planks & buckets & stools
stowed, the deck glistening for
departure, the Captain her smiling
but quiet kind again. Prompted by
a sudden notion, I hold out my hand
to her as before, let her board &
gnaw a time or two. *Thank you.*

My two bags in hand, down to land
again, missing this boat already,
when who at my side but the dreaming
man. A smile, an offer to take my heavier bag.
Speaks, explains as much as he ever will.

“Dreamwalker.”
“Asoyadonna,” I explain in reply.
He wears a long coat, but again no hat.
I wonder if they slow his velocity
in dreaming. Nearly ask.

The port we arrived is our boat’s
terminus, & had not Dreamwalker
approached me, I don’t know what
I would have done. Maybe, looking back now,
trying to remember that wondering thing I was,
I knew we would meet.

Yet the expected advance at dinner,
at my inn’s room door, didn’t come.
I would not bind this man to me between
my legs.

A tropical clime, its beach long, white
with singing sands. I walked it, little
clothed, sniffed at by bachelors, husbands,
maidens, wives. Dreamwalker not
among them. How? What approach?
A man’s aggression? A woman’s smiling
elusiveness?

Finally, I knocked. He answered, smiling,
expecting. His room like what he had
on our ship. Writing table, books, &
his bed.

Succumbing to honesty, I told him
who & what I was.

“I don’t know how we are connected,
what we owe each other, if aught,
but my friend led me to you.”
“Do you trust him?”
“Yes. With all I am.”
Pause. “I do too. And your Aunt.”

I start. “You know her?”
He grimaces. “In dreams alone I have
met her & your beautiful beast friend.”
Says no more. “Tell me, sir.”
Still. “Tell me! *Please.*”

He reveals from the long sleeve of
his coat a letter. “This she dictated
to me in several dreams. It is for
you.” He looks sad.

“Read!”
“Would you not rather have its contents
in your solitude?”
“No. Read.”

He unfolds the letter, pauses, again,
& then reads in low slow voice:

*“Asoyadonna—It cripples my heart
to tell you that your father has died.
I don’t know many details but that
he loved & thought of you to the last,
& caused word to travel to me.*

*“The man who delivers you this sad
news you can trust with your all.
Together you will find others on your
path. Love him as brother by my wish,
& let him keep you from your worst
doubts & nights. Love always, Aunt.”*



Dreamwalker held me that night, &
many sad others, as I learned again &
again my father the tinker was gone.
Did love come upon us, by our embraces,
our walks, the stories I told of how
I arrived to him, the beach singing,
the moon again so full?

Something. Something else. Sleeping together,
dreaming together, trusting, trusting down
deep, we together walked the White Woods
hand in hand, sometimes leaping & laughing
like our old Captain. My heart shared
open with him. Call it whatever. Call it love.

Till the dream we came to the clearing
I'd come before with Aunt & my beloved
White Tiger. The whitest of trees, as then.

"'Tis the White Birch, my dear heart,
my Asoyadonna," said he, smiling.
"It betokens renewal, tolerance.
Initiation. Our next journey together."

Points up, to the six remaining leaves.
"We've others to find." Points then
to the edge of the clearing. A dark man,
there, I start. Standing at an easel.
Intent upon us, intent upon his canvas.
Intent most, I think, upon this tree.

xxxv. Self-Portrait: Despair

*"I drift into the great unknown
I really don't know where I'm going."
—Lord Huron, "Fool for Love," 2015.*

They approach. A tall, thin man in a
long coat, walking with a strange, thick
staff. A girl, I think. Her layers of
clothing show me little, make me wonder
much. But who are these?

The tall man smiles slightly at me, looks toward my canvas. "My, my, my. You paint an elegant loving picture of what you see here."

"And it . . . moves?" says the girl. Just one quiet sniff & I decide: girl enough.

The canvas's White Birch bears faces, human & otherwise, that shift in position, expression. The clearing & Woods beyond also move slightly, the light shifts with the sky's slight movements. Still, central is the girl's face, smiling at me. For me?

I begin to breathe hard, too hard, stagger & would fall but they catch me, lead me to the tree I rendered, sit me by its several close trunks, the big one & its smaller mates. I sit heavily, dizzily.

"Have you eaten, drunk today?"
"I . . . don't know."
They feed me nuts, small bits of fruit, have me chew slowly. Sip water. Her eyes are warm, kind, I worry less about what her clothes shroud. His face is intelligent, knowing. Yet presumes nothing but to tender me. I calm. I feel how far from calm I was as I do.

"Are you from the city too?"
They shake their heads. "We came by boat."
"Boat? But we aren't near the sea."
"We've walked awhile since we landed," she says softly. They can't help but trade a glance between them.

I smile, hand them back their water bottle, sack of food. Want to take my canvas & go.

But . . . go where? However I got myself out to these Woods, I can't go back. These strangers, & my painting, are all I've got. I sigh, & release.

"My city was overrun. I teach painting by trade. My students were conscripted. Maybe I knocked my head, since I don't remember how I got out here."

They listen intensely.

"I can't go back. Would you let me travel with you awhile?" I stop, smile, *try*.
"I'm Francisco."

They don't seem surprised by my request. Each stands up, and offers me a hand up. Something settled among us.

We leave the White Birch & its clearing, & proceed single file through these pathless White Woods. Dreamwalker, he calls himself, first, then me, then Asoyadonna is her strange name. Me in the middle, as though protected, or the weak one. I can't say they're wrong. My gaped memory, me in the Woods with a canvas & paints to bide me.

"Where were you bound when you found me?"
I ask him. Unsure their intimacy, but careful of it.

She answers anyway. "It's not a place. It's more like we're looking for others."
"Others?"
"Others like us?" She smiles at me, like the word hasn't been contrived for her meaning. "Brothers," Dreamwalker says, briefly, keeping his pace. But continues: "We found each other, & now we've found you."

I stop. Look at them. “I’m essentially a homeless man with a single canvas for my possessions. What kind of brother can I make to you but a needful one?”

Dreamwalker bids me unstrap my canvas for a look. We lean it against a less imposing white tree.

“Regard its six leaves.”

“Yes.”

“Is that all the tree bore?”

“Um?”

Dreamwalker grimaces at me. “Francisco, we are three of these leaves.”

“Three?”

Asoyadonna smiles her witching smile at me. “By your painting’s count, we have three to find.”

They wait quietly for me to shoulder my canvas again, & we move on. Dreamwalker, I notice, is *hmmming* softly but with purpose.

I go with them because I have no home to return to. I feel weakened by my memory’s holes, as though my body itself weakened. But they feed me, we sleep close together & they *hmmm* me into my dreams. Waiting there, too, for me, but when I’m ready.

xlvi. Rain

“There’s too much beauty to quit.”

—David Benioff, *Stay (film)*, 2005.

The rain is hard. It hurts. *It burns*. I can’t *hmmm* my way to one of my shacks, or for help from Creatures or anyone else. It won’t happen in me.

I’ve emerged from the White Woods & ahead a path to shelter. Through raw grey fields, to that distant village.

I see houses, church, a water tower. How long has it been? What are men like now? How do they live when mine own city suffers so much dead?

It looks prosperous, green, lively. Nothing burnt, no ominous smoke above. What year is this? I can’t easily count the winters I’ve endure in these White Woods, the springs I’ve celebrated. I’ve grown older, but not old, leather hat still comfortable on my head, boots trusted skin to my feet. Cane to balance, cane a friend like Creatures.

Are those crows up ahead, weaving above those grey fields? Or ancient flying reptiles? Is this deeper in the White Woods, in truth, where old years return, or freeze, or slow like the dry drops from that wave above my head?

No. Yes. I am on the edge of the White Woods, leaving them as they will never leave me. That seems a village of men & women as I once knew. Mortal, stupid men.

I didn't have to go. I could have begged
return to the White Woods. Died there,
if need be. But this rain won't kill me,
which is worse. It is White Woods' kiss,
its nudge me return to the world of men.

What are those smoky apparitions on
the brown hills beyond that village?
Are those giantess women in long black
gowns & twisted striped hats? Has magic
returned to the daylight world of grab & get?

Are the old myths real? When every last
bloom falls, there will be long silence,
then a *hmmming*, & deeper, & all will rise?

No. That is no myth of this village or any
other. Cosmic Early described it in
Aftermath. It's a wish. Sugar in a
sad man's heart.

I didn't want to go. Even after the
red-whiskered man told me so.
I continued to live in my White Woods,
to travel between my shacks, learning
to *hmmm* the right path from one to
the next. Used my chalk rocks
for pictures I drew, not path markings
I no longer needed.

I drew pictures for the Creatures,
because books spooked them, &
yet I felt they could help me
with the myths I encountered.

I gather flat stones together in an
open clearing, line them together
into a kind of schoolroom chalkboard,
& there I draw figures, one after another.

Always curious, liking me well enough,
they begin to gather around & sniff.
Usually the White Bunny first, not because
a leader but because my Tender.
A trusted position among them for
recking peoplefolk.

I drew figures I'd culled from *Aftermath*,
from the quilts, from the strange book
in the farmhouse. Learned quickly
they shied away from any written words.
Sniffed wrong. So just pictures.
The ones they liked they'd gather round.

I drew a Hummingbird they liked,
the hedgehog came, the giraffes, gnattering
little imp, others. Much sniffing.

I tried images I had seen too. A decrepit
shack in the desert. *Sniff; sniff*. A spaceship
against a starry night sky. *Sniff; sniff*.
Stairs into the earth. Small ivory hairbrush.
Sniff; sniff. A castle high up on an Island
hill. *Sniff; sniff*.

Then I tried Iris as best I could. Long hair.
Sweet, intelligent face, very. A dress neither
royalty nor pauper's. Her they gathered to
closely. The White Bunny said in my mind: "yes."

I would never know the rest, the story
I sought was the world's & here only
some of it. Effects, results. I sought
cause, I sought whys. My doubts
understood the red-whiskered man's
admonition to go. My doubts understood
that the desperate men of the world
would by black machine or black magic
find these Woods, find these Creatures,
harness them to better ride into darkness.

I'd come here to be healed, &
then to help. For how could I
not be healed? By the Creatures who
napped in my lap & tended me.
By the waterfall I would iterate
before, full moon, three nights on end,
more, iterate to dozens, echoing &
re-echoing each other, what we felt,
how to share, *how to share?*

But not yet, *not yet*. Would argue
with Fyodor as we drank ladle after
ladle of good clean water. Noticed
that my White Bunny friend would
not come near these arguments.
Sniff twice, keep a distance.

“Why must I leave?”
“It's not me you're pestering.”
“Who?”
“Stay, Roddy.”
“I can't.”
“You can't.”
“No. I want to.”
“And can't.”
“The world's no better, Roddy. It's worse.”

Hours in my narrow shack, silent or
moaning on my knees in the beam.
She appears to me. I don't know which one.

“I love you, Roddy.”
“I love you. Are you waiting for me?”
“No. I'm not the reason you'll leave
the White Woods.”

Even the long-awaited letter from Iris.
The full moonlight. Burnt toast
envelope & letter within. Shaking
as I read it.

“Beloved,
*Our man, the conduit between us
these many years, is leaving these
beautiful Woods, returning to the world.*

*He doesn't know why he has to go.
He's bound for doing what I long ago
parted you to do. What I cannot do alone.
He will meet others who together will
far travel to save the world.*

*When you meet him, know he bears
my touch, my kiss with him, for you.
A new way for us to be together,
close again, a last time. Wait for him,
my love.*

Iris.”

I suppose I began to retreat more
to the other shacks. But #1 House
lured me one pre-dawn out to visit
my waterfall & it was dry, not
a drop. “The water's still here, Roddy,
but it won't be. Be brave on your way,
my love, travel brave always.”

Retreat further, to the Iris House,
upstairs, curtains shut, lamp off.
Silence. Sleep was a rare friend but
took me.

By my side sat the red-whiskered
spectre. He touched my face gentle,
smiled his beautiful ugly smile.

“Stranger strengths bide this world,
Roddy.”
“And we are just lovely notes among
their long, long tunes.”
“We share what we have.”
“What we are.”
“Or the world lessens.”
“As it has.”

Finally, the farmhouse. Through
the cluttered kitchen. The mirrors room,
which only showed me now, every
last one. The library. The armchair.
The green & gold book. Its pictures.
I sniffed to understand. I *hmmm'd*.
Croaked.

“Are you going, Roddy?” My brothers.
“Let me tell you a story first.”
They gather close in my mind.

“It was the championship. For the
trophy. The rookie goes 6 for 6,
catches everything thrown his way.
Big celebration after.”
“Great!”
“Cheers!”

“But the rookie hesitates to linger in
a certain area of the dugout.
Uncertain. Foolish. Then the star
of the team shoves him against
a wall & says, ‘you didn’t
read the goddamned rulebook!’
& he leaps down the stairwell
into the darkness.”
“Wow.”
“What then?”
“Nothing.”
“Nothing?”
“Come on.”

I turn to the last page of the book,
one I had not seen before, &
its simple lines: “What we feel
is what we do. What we feel is,
nearly, what we are.”

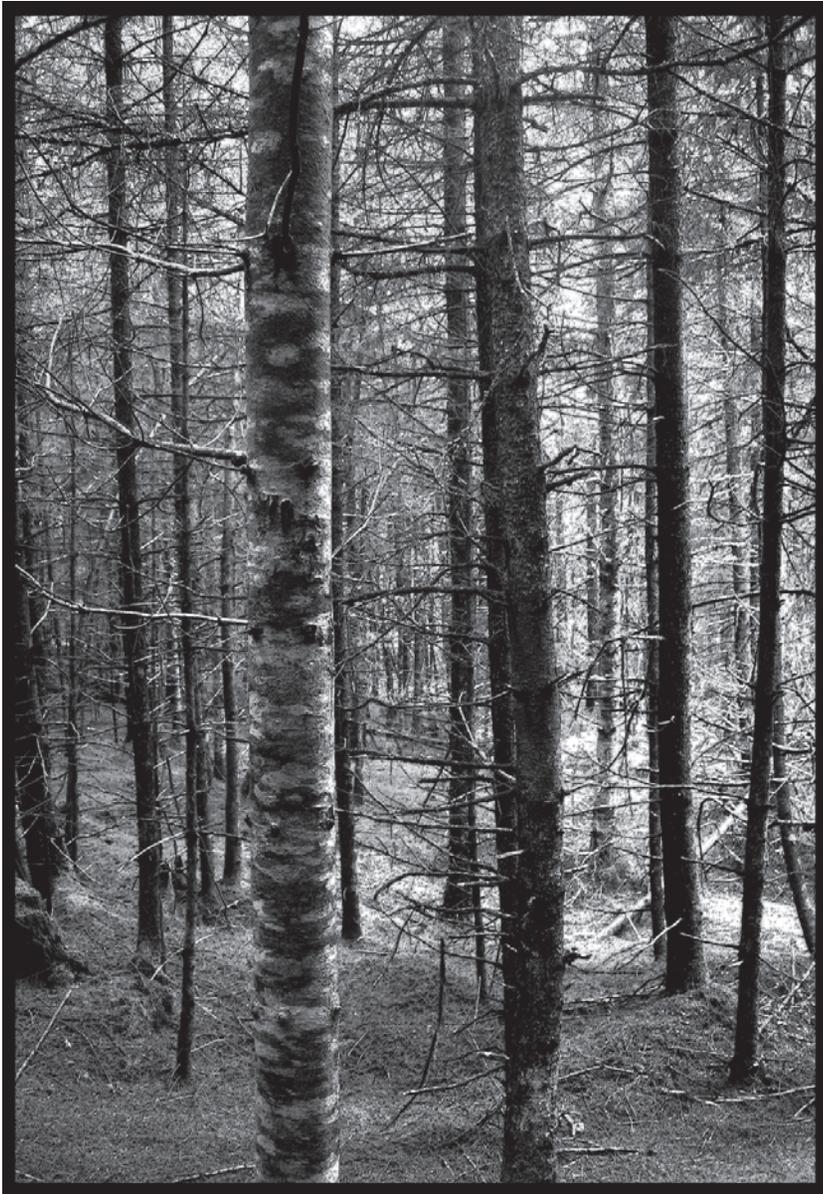
The rain on the farmhouse is harder &
harder. I hear its old shingles snap &
break, the attic above me, the same one
of my dreams, crackle & suffer. When
the hot rain breaks through the ceiling &
strikes me, I go. *I have to go.*

It drives me along a sure way,
& falls hardly ten feet away. I see
the whiskers, & noses, & flashes of fur,
& know the Creatures are following
me as they can. I stop, the rain
fierces on me, but I stop. Pull out
my leather hat from my knapsack.
Pull out *Aftermath*, drop, & let it burn
wetly to pulp, to earth. Pull out
my compass. No longer spinning,
I follow its course now. The rain
lessens a bit at this choice.

I arrive to where I am standing now,
able to see the shadows of Creatures
back among the trees, to feel all
I’ve known & loved back there,
all I am taking with me into the
world of men. All I serve, all I will
protect. All I may never see again.

I throw them all a kiss, the one
my heart has grown all these years,
& I turn away. Following the one path
toward that village. Laugh when I
see the Beast of walking sheaves,
paused looking at me steadily,
noticing me, first & last time.

As I arrive to the edge of the village,
the rain is nearly gone. The White Woods
looks vague & distant to mine eye
even as I see it clearly in my heart.
A part of me has iterated back there,
has not left. Smiling, stubborn,
I walk on.



This village is empty, it seems.
Not burned, not poisoned, just
nobody. I walk its few streets.
Its markets deserted, its church
door open, but unmolested.
Its homes not ransacked but
not peopled.

I'm not sure what to do, whether
to stay or dare those brown hills
beyond before nightfall when I
hear a soft voice from among the
shadows near the church.
"Have you come to kill me too then?"

I look. Nod him come out. Take a look.
A young man, like I was when first
I entered the White Woods. Scared,
like I had been. "Put down your
hands, son. Tell me who you are."

* * * * *

lx. The Bridge [for R. Carson]

*"What we feel is what we do.
What we feel is, nearly, what we are."*

My back began to ache one morning, not long
after we returned from the Cave of the Beast.
A low ache, wrenching, seeming near malevolent.
Came & went as I sat, stood, walked.
Caused my dreams dash together & crumple,
drag me awake to whimper in the tent's
darkness. *I was delaying.*

More of us were pulled from our boats
to work on our new home. Our fishing
lives somehow treated like past tense.
How else were we to make our living,
provide our meals?

It was more. These conquerors, as I'd begun to call them in my mind, did not cherish the natural world, as the King had warned me. All over the half-built town were wasted materials, piles of wood let to molder & rot. *I was delaying.*

Others thought as I did. Though still a boy in years, & despite my cruel back, I worked as hard as any of the men, in the boats & in the town. Worked hard, & listened. They were discontent, yet not organized, 'twas no more.

My father & our King worked among them, with cheer, no complaints.

"Can you talk to them? Tell them we're fishers, our lives to the sea?"

"They know."

"Then what about this town we waste weeks to build, my King?"

"I'm not your King. You know that. To them, I am another man. Not the strongest among us anymore, either."

I was delaying. My back grew worse. My father made me rest much of the days, & Cordel'a would tend me.

"Where is Iris?"

"Odom, you're too feeble for her kisses," ocean blue eyes mocking me, trying to rouse up our old rows.

"She's in the White Woods."

I sit up, screeching my back.

"Where?"

She pushes me firmly back on my matt. With a sudden smirk, she reaches under my matt & pulls out my blue-green little purse.

Gestures me open my hand. Pours her little self onto my palm. Big eyes, pleased as ever just to be.

"Ask her, Odom."

I say nothing, just stare.

"*Go on.*"

I look at the tiny Creature & say, "Where is Iris?"

"Eh?" she caws, lazily.

I hold her up closer to me. "*Where is she?*"

She cackles softly, no more.

Frustrated, I place her back

in the purse. She gnatters agreeably.

Roddy pokes the fire between us a little higher. "You were delaying."

I nod.

"So why did you go to the Beast to say you weren't going?"

"I heard talk that the new king was planning to assault the White Woods. Burn it to the ground. And our encampment too. Move us forcibly into the town."

"But why?"

"It's simple. He would extract from the White Woods its strange magicks & then use them & our tribe's men as part of an army. The Peace-Keeper's treaty had united a great population under one king. But he wanted more."

"So you went to the Beast & told him you couldn't leave?"

"Our King & my father had finally had enough. We would simply leave. Bring little, pack our boats, go."

"What of the White Woods?"

I laugh. "I asked him. My King smiled at me like I had never seen, a sort of sweet wonder in his eyes. 'Odom, *the White Woods don't burn.*'"

“So you were leaving with them?”
“Yes.”
“And you went to see the Beast?”
“I pulled her out of my little purse & begged her to bring me. She would cackle & gnatter & gnaw my palm, but nothing.”
Roddy nods.
“Finally, she did lead me into the White Woods. To the Tower my father had shown me.”
“The Woods’ promise of your tribe’s safety.”
“Yes.”
“And his message to you to do as you’d agreed.”
“Save the world, not just who I love.”
Nod.
“And Iris?”
I shake my head.
Roddy stares at the fire a long time.
I wonder his story even as he stands to put out the fire, to sleep.

We travel open roads for a long time,
to no apparent end. Villages where life
is stable, dull, safe. We sometimes hear talk of
a distant war, wonder if the Peace-Keeper’s
king had gone forth without White Woods
magicks, or my own tribe’s men.

At night I often hold my blue-green little purse
in my hand, not studying its designs,
nor inviting its contents, her, out.
I feel far from the delights of Creatures,
the love of my kin. Iris’s turquoise eyes.

Roddy can tell my quiet despair as we
trudge along, saving the world one reluctant
step after the next.

He stops us by a pretty grove of trees
along yet another otherwise empty road.
Not yet night yet he halts us, & sets about
gathering fire kindling. I sit, waiting,
willing to cook our stew as shared task.

But he pulls out a teapot, battered silver
thing. Queer smile at me, fetches water
from a nearby stream. Sets it to boiling.

“Do you like tea, Odom?”
“Never drank it much.”
“Have you had mushroom tea before?”
I shake my head but, strangely, hear
her cackle in my mind.

Bitter, bitter taste. But Roddy nods me on,
strange smile, & I drink again.
Nothing to it special, but I keep sipping as the
sun’s burnt orange light rims the distant
trees I’d not noticed.

I begin to smile, not knowing why. My near-
constant backache feels gone, quite gone.

“Show me your little purse, Odom?”
This seems like a good idea, a really good
one, so I pull it out from my traveling pack.
I sit next to Roddy, as I hadn’t previously,
& show him up close. The Island,
the Castle. The Tangled Gate. He nods,
not unknowing these, though I don’t ask how.

“Would you like to see the contents?”
He nods. His smile glowing as mine.
One by one, I take out the coins, the dice,
the connecting tool. All seem more kinetic
to mine eye than usual.

I place the coin purse in my hand for
her to come out. After a time, she does,
ambling, curious to see where in this
delightful world she is.

Roddy ... she stare at each other with
equal delight.
“You know about her . . . about Creatures?”
He nods, almost sadly.
“You knew them in the White Woods?”
Nods.
“And you had to leave them like I did?”
“And I had to leave my brothers before that,
as you have left your kin.”

The fire is now our light but our faces
are shining to each other.
“We can't return to what we knew of
them, but we have to return?”
“Yes, Odom.”
“And I think she will show us?”
“I think so too.”
“Tonight? Now?”
He laughs. We have our fired doused &
packs ready in minutes. Herself
waits agreeably, cackling softly.

A full moon has come up now &
reveals that our little grove of trees
is indeed within distance of woods.

“White Woods?”
“Ask her.”
Roddy kneels his tall, muscular self
down as low as he can to address
my, our, friend.

“We're ready to find our brothers.
Will you bring us?”

Cackling wild with delight, she speeds
away toward the White Woods.
Laughing, shouting, we follow, running
flat out & only keeping up by
the cackles she fills our minds with.

No paths. No signs of men. But we
continue to run along, minutes or hours
pass, the moon seeming unmoved high
above us.

Then, suddenly, a clearing, & *oh my!*
In its center, a White Birch, its three trunks
twined close. Glowing in the moonlight,
glowing in our eyes. But nobody around.

To take a breath before the chase
resumes, we sit beneath her
branches. Looking up at the full moon.

Roddy begins to count. “Six,” he whispers.
“Six what?”
“Six leaves. Look!”

I look at the leaves, each shining distinctly
on its branch. Look closer & closer to each.

One a tall, thin man, seated at a table in
a courtyard, studying the carvings of
his walking stick.

One a pretty girl, brushing her long hair,
quietly singing, again & again, “all flesh
is lorn, all flesh needs love.”

One a dark man, strange hat on his head,
standing before a canvas, tis a painting
of a White Birch, *this White Birch*.

One is Roddy, shows him wandering
another part of these White Woods,
living in various strange little houses.

One shows me, standing with Iris &
Cordel'a, talking to the Beast, each
making an arrangement.

The last is a man, crouching by a stream,
above him a great bridge crossing
the water. He looks at me, at Roddy,
kindly, but waiting. *He's waiting us.*

*My little friend bursts out with
more wild cackles, leading us,
but also calling, calling, calling,
to all the wondrous Creatures of
the Woods, Creatures of the Dream,
& as we resume our run, we can
see flashing among the trees nearby
the White Bunny, grey hedgehog,
many giraffes, many bears, bloo-eyed
Kittees, purple furry Creature with
ribbons & bow, shiny-eyed Creatures, &
many others, running, running,
running, & we somehow keeping up, &
along the way one joins us, the tall
thin man, & then the running girl too,
& the dark man, with canvases
strapped to his back, & we are running
in a happy, shouting group, &
when the thorns & bushes get thick, thicker,
we push through, laugh, shout, push through,
& tis of a wondrous sudden when we
emerge from them along a stream,
& there the bridge, & there, crouching,
waiting, smiling, at last, & at last,
the man we newly gathered brothers
will alone now kneel to call our King.*

12/24/2015
4



If I Had a Cloak of Feathers

[Prose-Poetry]

Ya'know, the world is full of goddamn shit poetry about birds.

It's easy to see how this has happened over the last 50,000 years or so, with all the "not bird" that the human body is. Those little fuckers with their weird ancient grace stun suckers like me every day. I'm a jaded middle-aged man, not easily impressed—but find myself standing by the windows at least an hour a day wondering about the conversations that occur between the blue scrub jays. I find myself rooting for the common sparrow and even became taken by the starlings that live in the old woodpecker hole.

The starlings. Starling are a rampant invasive species, and considered to be a nuisance bird to orchardists, and thief of cavity-nesting native birds. I at first sighed at the arrival of the starling couple. They claimed the flicker cavity the red-winged woodpeckers carved the year previous. One of the starlings that live in the two-year-old flicker hole has now impressed me so much with its songs that I now wonder why I ever bitched about it.

Starling are a mimic and regularly steal songs from other birds the way the faerie steal human babies. My starling neighbors' seeming favorite song is that of meadowlark, which happens to be number one on my Top 40 playlist of birdsong week after week. To my surprise, starling works up quail chuckle on a regular basis too. I never knew how impossibly happy a nest-stealing lot of Keystone Cops could make me.

Now I'm not Catholic—humanist actually—but St. Francis of the beasts has come into my mind again and again in this last year. The relationships I hold with those I love is mostly long distance. It's rare that I have a visitor, but I have had to salve and occupy my mind still, for want of human contact.

It's been an unintentional thing, my love for all the creatures that visit my recently bought house. I wait and watch. I throw down sunflower seed for the western squirrels, and wonder about their territorial struggles. My grand dame squirrel that sits on the fallen wooden fence is at least two or three now, and is obviously much more slow than she was last year. Her pups from this year now stand in the very same spot she has stood every single day for the two years I have been watching her tribe. Water is precious around here, the soil where I live sand, but I find myself watering not my walkway, but the hidden front bit of struggling grass where the burrows are. Terra



cotta dishes are filled every day, with my plastic watering pot, in the two territories of my handsome and destructive neighbors. I'd pay fucking money.

When I come home from work: first I fill crows' bath and throw down a cup of whatever cat or dog kibble has been on sale the week before; then scatter sunflower seed and cracked corn for the baby sparrows and squirrels. I water whatever is left in my pots that hasn't been in a cage match with those little fuckers, and make mental note of the things they don't like—and daily swear to God I will never buy the kind of soil that I refilled my planter boxes with this year.

Crow and her last year's runt are my favorite company. I watch for them in a way that I have never watched for a human friend.

Momma Crow I first became aware of last spring when I started finding weird shit in the bird-bath. Bones from somebody's picnic one time. One day I found three tiny corn tortillas afloat in it. I laughed out loud with that one. I started to watch.

She's a rather sizable thing. I want to call her a raven but am pretty sure she's just Crow. Up until last year she was always solitary. I know her uniquely because of a rather severe limp she has. I realized last summer that she was really casting around for seed and cracked corn and looking a bit overworked and desperate. That's when my ear picked up the cry of babies out in the back lot. I read a little and then started to leave out the dog kibble.

Her manner noticeably changed over the next few days and, in the following weeks, one at a time, the black birds fledged. One followed her, then two. Good and obviously strong birds kept her company for a short while, and then divorced themselves from her. A couple weeks after all that—came the runt. I remember being delighted with the arrival of this new bird. These birds are so intelligent, and aware to the watching eye, that it would be difficult to not have some degree of attachment for these sleek underdogs. The way they look at things is not like other birds that I've observed. Where the small birds seem to run on pure unquestioning instinct, Crow is watching and making judgments about what's going on in her immediate surroundings. One of the crow behaviors that I've been impressed with is their patience.

Crow's runt has continued to keep her company for what would be a whole calendar year now. Reading about it, I guess some will keep their parents company for up to five years, and live as long as twenty. I started calling the runt yearling "Bonehead" for some of his silly behaviors. I goddamn well love those moochers. Never in my life did I think my head would be filled with worry and concern for crows. They are my black beauties.

In the evening, as a testament to just how smart Bonehead is, I will watch him out in

the shade of the dwarf crab-apple, wandering around and taking in his surroundings. I realized one day—he's bored! He will pick up sticks and tiny fallen crabs and float them in the bath. When I water in the yard by dragging my hundred feet of shit hose around—cursing kinks and asking God to please let my jostaberry live—, Bonehead will sometimes come close to me, wondering what in the world I'm doing. I'll water a certain spot in the yard, and sometimes he will perch in the mostly dead tree above my head, and start talking to me. When that happens, I gotta tell you—the loneliness that I often feel evaporates, and I feel I'm with my real kin.

One of the most beautiful things that I've observed of these two crows is that, on rare occasions, when the two are close to each other, Bonehead will bring food to his ma, drop it at her feet, and humbly ask to be fed. Sometimes Crow will do it. Sometimes she shines him on. The few times I've seen it, though, it fills me in a way that I haven't really known before, and I'm glad for it.

It's been so unexpected, all of it. The way my relationship with all the critters has climbed in an ever-peaking crescendo is an unexpected gift that I didn't even know existed two years ago when I got my own house. I'm surprised, too, with the level of attachment that I feel, and the easy release that happens, when a beast is taken back to the source. I'm proud of myself for being able to let go of those fallen creatures, via respecting their complex relationships, short lives, and need to eat.

I've got a few feeders out under the apple trees, and ground feed the thirty or more western quail in the winter. In doing that, I attract the attention of some of the raptor birds. I've had a rather large red tail hawk hunt and kill other tweets on several occasions. I had a sharp-shinned hawk hide in the blue spruce daily this last winter and take gold finches and black caps that dared to feed. I flushed the black caps and finches out of the rose bramble, while they were feeding one day, and was front row to hawk taking a black cap almost right in front of my eyes. It was so elegant and fast that I came to respect the raptors that I used to curse regularly. Every creature eats.

These tiny beasts of air just do it for me. The little moochers soak up everything I leave out for them and never say: "Thanks, Victor!" They never hold still long enough for me to get a look that satisfies me, and they never let me any closer.

Crow, she is my siren. All black and dressed in feathers, she is my flapper girl. She does come close to me sometimes, but only when she wants. Her mind is as impossible to penetrate as any flesh-and-blood woman that I've ever known, and she's ten times more beautiful.

I just wish I had a cloak of feathers to woo her properly.

* * * * *



Jimmy Heffernan

Time Asymmetric

The dogma goes thus
Effect after cause
(It would be a fuss
To break such firm laws

But time is symmetric
Or so they have told us
Mathematics eclectic
Would therefore not scold us

Were we to presume
That effect could precede
Cause—can we assume
That Nature would concede?

The future could reach
Back into the past
Would this be a breach
Of a universe vast?

Perhaps multiversal
Principles inhere thusly
A stark role-reversal
What about causes must be?

If indeed the whole concept
Is rough and provisional
Then perhaps such a precept
Is at most conditional

Cloudburst

Thunderclouds enshroud the mountain
Tall pines barely seen
Raining high but dry below
The gray envelops the green

Lightning strikes, a flash, a peal
The canine jumps at the crack
A misting vapor one commences to feel
And the sky goes from graying to black

Heavysset drops begin to pour down
The city all set to get drenched
Away up above, an anvil, a crown
Down here the dry dirt being quenched

Cyclical music, playing out on all Earth
The melody cool and moist
A beautiful symphony, without which a dearth
Of Earth's living creatures to hoist

Out there on the plain, away from the hype
One can see light strikes forever
It's almost as if the magic grows ripe
While I lie in my nest in the heather

* * * * *

Charlie Beyer



Homeless in Hawaii

[Travel Journal]

Directions

I asked the Hawaiian for directions to the auto parts store. This was no small or idle question, and the Hawaiian took great pride in answering. "Gat hoonooo left be at Konokoe, da right Kamakama, no choke be hoo kine."

Thanking him, I proceeded down the street I was on, confirming to myself why men don't ask directions of other men. 99.8% chance you'll get a bullshit answer. I lay around at night dreaming up my own set of directions I'll give someone who is idiot enough to ask for them. He will treat me like the expert in geography that I am, soaking up every word, while his wife leans across his lap from the passenger side, making tiny noises of understanding, nodding and encouraging me.

I note that all the streets start with a "K," the male delineation of right, power, and place. I pass Kaumula, Kamleeham, Kanckamulm, but I don't see what I think he said. I double back and pass Kappaa Avenue, then Kokoni Street, followed by Kahuakona and Kawaihee. How in the hell is a body to find any fucking thing when every name is the same and has five syllables? These Hawaiians have their lineage so far up their asses they really need only one street name: Kolonoscopy Drive! If I Google the parts store, I'll likely wind up in some shitty part of the island, a Krappa slum.

Architecture

There only seems to be two kinds of architecture here. For a place where all the money of the mainland comes to be squandered, and the median income is \$150K a year, how is it that there is so little variation of design? Where are the Victorians, the Frank Lloyd Wrights, the stucco Spanish villas? Where, indeed, is any building bigger than two bedrooms and an attached tool shed to stuff Grandma in?

Both styles are based on historical constructions of pedestrian imagination. One is the native Hawaiian rock construct. At its best, this amounts to little more than a crappy pyramid, too lazy to build to a point, and made of puny one-man volcanic rocks. Their greatest achievement, King Kamehameha's palace, could be confused with a state highway road cut.

At one time, these uninspired piles of rubble were topped with maliciously made grass huts and breezy stick buildings that would seasonally rot. At great intervals, the huts would be lethargically replaced for torpid 400-pound palm weaving Hawaiian princesses.

Currently, the best bet for locating this much maternal mass is not in the Sandwich Isles, but the aisles of Walmart. Here they shop for woven wicker from the Philippines. The grass hut seems to be out of fashion with the howlie, as is the modesty of the modern water closet winning out over crapping into a pile of banana leaves. The last remnant of this architectural style is found in parking lot retaining walls for continental franchises such as Barnes and Noble and McDonald's.

Searching the landscape, then, for some design delight that would represent the whims of eccentric millionaires, I am sorely disappointed. Lot after lot is bedecked with only single-story, metal-covered, hip-roof stick bungalows. Instead of Las Vegas display delirium, I'm surrounded by sharecroppers' shacks. Each metal roof is in some state of rust-induced infectious tetanus. This oxidation experiment typically overhangs the boring wood box by three to four feet. The impression is that it rains like a son-of-a-bitch here, although no evidenced erosion or queried locals supports this fact. The roof is ready for the fire hose rain, but instead only dismantles in the wind and flaps thunderously to get a lazy native's attention.

House paint is non-existent here. There appear not to be "blocks" here like in most towns, but only rural streets heading off in one direction or another from some misplaced intersection. The bunker houses line these avenues in various stages of sagging into the verdant ground.

This building style has me feeling like I'm in some South Seas Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. I can imagine I see a black-booted enemy general waving his stick from the crummy porch. Us soggy Americans stand hang-dogged in ankle mud, barbed wire strung between the banana trees on the perimeter. As I drive through a "neighborhood," I expect to see Chuck Norris dashing between the buildings with an M-16 and necktie headband. His protruding ape lips and swollen beady eyes are furtively peeking around every rotting plank wall.

There evidently has never been any municipal code prohibition about burying the dead on your property here. Just muck out a hole next to the septic tank there and plant Mom.

*There she lies
forever dreaming
that her little life
done had some meaning
now upon her
the gravestone leaning.*

Each home has a family plot. Some granite and marble from the mainland, but often primitive sculptures made of local volcanic stones. Some piled in mounds in the shape of mini-Kamehameha temples. This either easier than digging into the lava rock, or some good reason to weight the ghost down for all time.

*There he lies
beneath these rocks
to prevent his ass
from midnight walks.*

Some are right in the front yard, verdant grass growing on the dynasty past, mowed on Saturday, picnicked upon on Sunday.

*Who-so-ever knows so sweet
The soil where the dead and the dirt do meet
A finer tombstone I never saw than
The rock a-top my mother-in-law*

*This plot with all the relatives near
Under the front yard whence they leer*

*Here I plant and weed and mow
Between the flowers the banana trees grow*

*And now the fruit is ripe and neat
The ghoulish vitamins have made it sweet*

The 'Aina

Pau! Done. Though the water rises and falls in a hundred shades of emerald green, though the sunlight of the morn illuminates the wispy crown of the twisted Kiawe thorn tree, the lava boulders sit proud and black on the coastline. This beautiful land—it is not me.

To live in love with the deep green of the strawberry guava tree, the majestic elephant ear plants, the foliage so varied in its verdant valleys, there is one green that makes it all possible. Without this one color, all is but a gentle dream from which one wakes, dirty and hungry, isolated from society in this land, an outcast in paradise, shunned, a paradise paved by the green.

Money! Money buys the car or rental to travel between the beaches, the snorkel to see the fish, the dinner to dine on the sand. No seventy thousand dollar BMW will pick up the hitchhiker any more, and that's the only kind of car on the island—all of them white. Money buys the bed where the ants don't crawl on you all night, where the elephantiasis mosquitoes don't drill you relentlessly, where dengue fever on a molten sweat-soaked cot is something you read about in a bad adventure story. Money buys the dinner of ginger-basted Ahi with proper vegetables all around. The beach bum digs peanut butter out of a jar with a stick snapped from the nearby tree—if he is prosperous.

The white sand beach where the hippie crashed, with an empty six-pack and a salt-encrusted blanket, is populated with cushy shaded lawn chairs attended to

by grumpy Hawaiians, wearing false smiles, carrying fruity alcoholic drinks with tiny umbrellas to the indolent rich.

The trail along the coast now goes behind the mansions, gentrified in places with flowers as an obsequiation to their blatant property rights, but mostly it scrambles through the shadeless lava. A trail for the impoverished traveler, no longer a king's trail, now a pauper's path. As one strolls in the searing sun, glimpses over the walls of the cool and air conditioned palace walls within greet the locked out. The kapu signs—meaning “Fuck You—Keep Out”—line the trail, lest a homeless dare to dip in the million dollar natural seep pools of cool fresh water.

So where does the traveler go? Now that their usual haunts are infested with the monied, sealing the poor out? The hotels cost in diamonds. There are no Mom-and-Pop cozy cottages. Only mega-corporate palaces with valets and a vast sucking vacuum for the dollars. There is no camping. On any beach. Kapu. *Pay or stay away.*

The locals, the kama'aina as they are called (people of the land), all have houses. If they are Hawaiian, the government has given them a house. Also, healthcare and Food Stamps. They can stuff themselves to 400 pounds on a potato chip/soda pop diet. They can avail themselves of the diabetes clinic without any sort of employment or even flashing a dime. It is for them a symbol of status to be grossly overweight, as it was in the day of the historic Hawaiian kings and queens.

But now it so much easier to be royalty. Open the mailbox, pull out the government checks, and the glory of civilization is yours to glut on. The Hawaiian is on par with the millionaire howlies, the white umbrella-drink drinkers. The Hawaiians have lost the battle for their land, but won the war with welfare.

So what does a hippie do? The ones without Hawaiian family, houses to live in, beer, and Spam? The ones who are not plugged into the cyber-connected castles? The ones who can only scrape together the plane fare to paradise, planning to eat the papaya off the public tree? The tree that is now behind the wealthy wall.

We are these homeless in Hawaii. Beach gypsies. Excluded from the luxuries of paradise, chased out of glory from dusk to dawn, slipping in the shadows between one beach and the next. Hiding in the bushes as the sun falls, stealing fruit from the elite-owned trees, living on gas station coffee, blending in with bourgeoisie beach bastards during the day.

But we transits have our secrets. We have found the last places with no rules. We have the Aloha. They have the bills. Aloha-ha-ha. For us, the sun sets in a thousand crimsons and oranges. For us, a few more stick scrapings out of the peanut butter jar for dinner. For the rich, a gagging teriyaki steak choked down to the insistently whiny Hawaiian music. We find coconuts and spend a half hour getting them open, rewarded with the cool liquid inside, the hidden fresh white meat. The rich pay twenty dollars for a sugary cocktail whose coconut water was processed and pasteurized in Pennsylvania.

We have found the beaches and ragged coast lines where property is still just land. Where there are no fences, no walls, no “Keep Out” signs. We share these places with each other, with mice, with tree rats, with eight-inch centipedes, with jabbering wild birds, with the thorn trees, with the fish, with the stars, with the

emerald water, and with the ghosts of a hundred thousand dead Hawaiians.

Here in the wilds is abundant archeology of which we alone notice. House walls, temples overgrown and crumbling, boulder burial mounds, vast middens of cooked shells. Here the spirits invite us to stay, to eat the fish that glitter before us in the blue crystal sea, to contemplate, to fornicate, to breathe in freedom, to live in the spirit of Aloha, “in the presence of the breath of life.”

So let the walled-in fuckers choke on their pastries, let their skin burn raw under the chemicals they slather themselves with. We brown to coconut color, skinny down to movie star shapes, our eyes are clear and our hair bleached. We have the last laugh living in nature, living homeless in Hawaii. Wild Hawaii.

But still, this is all a hippie's dream. Still the peanut butter must be bought. Still the bedding from Coleman camping gear must be packed in from Walmart. Still Scott toilet paper holds our ass hostage in its grip. We are still slaves to the green dollar. We cannot get here or get away without it. We do not have a canoe loaded with pigs to float a 6000-mile journey—we have a jet that demands high-octane fuel from Saudi Arabia.

So this land cannot be ours, as much as we'd like it to be. We cannot pay the mortgage on this shit. We will never be paid by the government to wallow in our indigenous rights, our self-imposed squalor and potato chips. The hippie howlie will never be the kama'aina. Nor will we ever be given two weeks' vacation by Intel, Microsoft, or Google to go find Aloha in a \$2000-a-night hotel room. We can only search it in the overlooked corners. We can only trespass. We can only enjoy the crumbs the enclaved leave behind. We can only habituate the places they don't want, the places they don't know about, the ones not on the tourist agenda. We hide in plain sight, but out of reach, our mentors being the Indian mongoose and the feral cats.

But we must go back. Hawaii is a Stalin fist of finance that we can never afford. To stay . . . we must pay. So we must call Aunt Gertrude in New Jersey and beg our return plane fare. We must promise to get honest jobs on the mainland. We must return to the responsibilities of a good American, working endlessly for starvation wages, going ever further into debt. We cannot escape our destiny as drudges. We cannot be the nymphs of paradise as nature intended. But . . . we might . . . we might try again.





Martina Newberry

Women Like Me

will not know fame or big money
but we hoard dreams & dare to pray for them

blink into the face of war after war
& plant tomatoes in hanging baskets

& decide on a new skin care plan
& pay our bills & buy new socks

are afraid of becoming our mothers
understand that our real fear is Time

negotiate blessings, patterns, partners
bathe in age's awkwardness

listen to the little confidences
telling themselves to strangers

who stare at us unabashedly and wonder
who we are—who we *think* we are

walk the roads we believe we have coming
learn that Rt. 66 actually goes nowhere

sing "Amazing Grace" over & over again
in tremulous little voices until someone

gives us a dollar to stop. Sometimes that dollar
is all that stands between us & sanity.

Details

After the affair he was not aware of,
and after he took a job up north thinking
she would follow, her friends watched her
take terrible risks in order to pinch herself
back into real life.

New lovers, new liabilities, new loneliness
scattered over the sands accumulating
on the floor of the TV room,
where she watched sci-fi movies
and ate microwave popcorn.

When she visited him to see
what was what, he asked her
for a divorce. She agreed.
Her arms and face had been free
of bruises for three months.

His anger had spent itself elsewhere.
Her fugitive sense of love and pain
hovered briefly, then disappeared.
She agreed, and gave him one turgid case
of the flu with the signed paperwork.

In some twisty, peculiar gesture
of politeness, he thanked her.
She became a disciple of
every kind of madness, learned
how to measure loneliness.

She told the story oh-so-many times,
realizing that none of the details really mattered.
She told the story one hundred different ways,
because they were all true, and the
wretched details didn't matter even a little.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixation]

Part Ten

“Try to forget me.

Try to erase me.”

—Pearl Jam, “Jeremy,” 1992.

xxiv.

They stand, the boys zip up, the girl tugs down her short white skirt far as it goes, not much. Shy, suddenly, when moments before she had them wet, twisted, fingers & lips & orifices unsolvable among each other, a sort of three-headed groan monster, she wants them to lead. And each to take one of her hands of course.

The lobby is dark. Door locked from outside before midnight showing of **RemoteLand** begins. ‘Goers learn to prop a rock in it to keep it open. It’s painted orange & everyone is told. So they can get back in.

She hasn’t been outside the theater, is the truth. Didn’t come this way. Doesn’t know what to expect. Sex with these two boys is sweet & easy compared to this.

Behind them, in the now-seemingly empty theater, the next film begins its first run.

The title it doesn’t list anywhere is *More Fun*—is it a sequel? I don’t know. Is it the next day? I don’t know.

I am in a pickup, in the passenger seat. Next to me, two friends, one a heavy blonde man I knew a couple of decades ago, his name is Bill. Between us, another blonde, a girl. Pretty. But we’re not calm.

We’re on the run. Not sure what. The air itself is troubled, visibly ruffled, like it’s damaged.

Driving slow past a shopping mall, imploded, rubble. Smoking.

“Drive.”

“Why? That’s all we’ve found, for a thousand miles.”

“Drive!”

The truck speeds up some, but not enough. I reach by the girl, grab his throat.

“*Fucking-drive-or-get-the-fuck-out*” squeeze harder with each syllable.

He floors it. My hand withdraws, slowly traveling across her tight t-shirt, braless beneath. She holds her breath to keep from reacting aloud.

I was alone, camped in the Woods, a clearing I sometimes dreamt was shaped like a temple, if the moon was full. Every way into my clearing was rigged to snare the intruder.

I heard them before they appeared. They were fighting. She was ahead of him, so tripped first. I disengaged the spiked net so she merely tumbled into my arms. Her sweater still buttoned up back then, him no longer earning a good look.

Her in my grasp, but still one hand free to point my gun at him.

“Don’t hurt her. We mean you no harm, I swear!”

“Sit. On the ground. *Now*. On your hands.” He did. Already, his claim of her was slipping. She shifted in my arms, but only for comfort.

I chose to keep her, & he was part of this choice for the moment. I fed them. Handing him some dried meat, fruits, berries. Fed her myself. She chewed slowly, holding my eyes. Turquoise eyes. Chewing slowly.

Had they really been together? For a little while, it seemed. She lost her people, needed a man’s protection badly.

But he didn’t take it from her & she didn’t find him attractive enough to offer herself. Settled for traveling together.

I could probably have simply left with her, or at worst wounded him enough to leave.

But I didn’t. The rules of this new world weren’t clear. I’d been with girls before, but this one was a thousand times more. So he was a kind of buffer while I sussed & decided. I pretended to acknowledge they were together in a meaningful sense, & to accept this. She wasn’t the kind of girl who begged, or even asked, as I said.

I simply teased her. Kept feeding her by hand, as that first time. Found casual reasons to touch her, mark her mine for later take, if I chose. If *we* chose, really.

By the time we were passing by that imploded mall, she’d chosen.

But I hadn’t. To claim her how I could would de-cock him in a way men don’t survive unchanged.

I’m not telling it well. It was the broken air too. It was the burning landscape. It was whether only one man could protect a girl like this.

She watches me constantly from the side of her face. Won’t look fully at me but won’t look away.

I treat him like the man he isn’t as we make our campfire at night. Show him how I lay my snares & traps. For food, for enemies. She watches but I don’t teach her directly. I’m still choosing.

He knows nothing about survival. Once she withdrew from him, for good, it’s like his light doused & all left was smoke.

I could shoot him dead. Wound him crippled. Toss her over my shoulder & find a starlit clearing to have her. Pretty tits, high ass, tight pussy for my straight razor & long-lonely cock.

But I don’t. Days go by. We find a truck. I’m no mechanic but it’s only got a flat, a donut spare solves that for now, & a bent chassis, so we have to steer a little off center to go straight.

We drive & drive & drive. No hordes of zombies like we were told would ruin the world, or emerge from the ruining hand of men. No, most people were dead in the first month, their bodies disintegrating to dust weeks later. Nobody to bury, or to rise up.

The rest were left with a world of canned goods & enough batteries & portable generators to survive.

Not dead but, for a long time, weaker. Lethargic. Like this companion of mine. Surviving but nothing more.

And most never shook it off. See, that’s the problem. She & I both did.

I tell it slant like this because it’s how I figured it out. In pieces, not enough of them. I still don’t know what killed most of us.

He floors it, briefly present, & we race through broken air. Then there’s a noise from the engine. A crack! pop! & the truck seems to come loose. We slide wildly in our seats &, when the truck rights itself, her sweater sleeve is caught in the steering wheel.

Terrified, she screams, pulls, the truck veers hard to the right, we nearly roll but he presses the brakes easy enough to slow us, & we stop.

That night, another snared & trapped clearing, dimming embers of a fire, she crawls into my sleeping bag, damn near rips it sliding in. Kisses me just once, her tongue down my throat so deep my lungs get a taste, one hand pulling up her dress, the other tugging down my shorts, & more words than I've heard all these days: "put it in me now & screw me hard, or take your gun & broken truck & fucking go." I comply. One look into her turquoise eyes as first she cums, then me, then her again, tells me she's nobody like I thought.

Luckily, he hears our loud sex-noise, takes my gun, & goes.

xxv.

Pack up, drive on. She's calmer now, not happy but at least paying attention, not just blindly furious.

Tank running low, limp to a filling station. Not as simple as they once were. Gasoline, power, food, water, hire a whore, an assassin, try to find others to travel with, campsite, smoking tents. Only rule: check your guns & weapons at the door.

So we're in line for fuel, long line. She talks, still hasn't much, tho I know she has a tongue & a voice from our sex hours.

Wants a soda. "Chervanill," she says, some angle of accent I don't know. I pay one of the boys hanging around to wait with our truck; he leers at her. I don't blame him but he's not getting any.

Hold her hand in the market, a half-fallen-down building attached to several large tents. She likes this, it's a gesture of possession, of safety. Get her her drink, pay more for a clean cup & straw. I listen to conversations, looking for some entry, something useful in all the hate & ignorance—

Meet a man with maps, good ones, rare ones. He wants good money in return, & her in a private room for a little while. She won't look at me, would go with him if I said.

"No."

"No? You're wasting my time. You know someone will take her sooner or later. With me you get some value. And I don't just like to hurt for fun."

"No."

His face softens. He's young, these aren't his maps fairly. More desperate than bad.

"Take me with you."

"No."

He unfolds one of his maps, it's very old. Old words on it even tell how to use it.

"Songs. You have to sing the right songs or the landscape remains cloaked. You pass through unknowing its truths."

She's not looking at me hard. Willing to risk him for these maps.

"You touch her, one of us will have to die because of it. Am I clear?"

Nods. Cock's not that hard up yet.

Her turquoise eyes find mine. There's a vague smile in them.

xxvi.

He says we have to leave the truck. Not sell it, not even give it away. We have to travel by caravan. We stay two days till one passes through.

Travelers are generous & kind but will not take on most who ask. He makes us wait at a distance while he negotiates. They agree.

Travelers don't sell their women or girls, or use them for bait or bargaining. They assess them when they join up, what skills & arts they have, what crafts, & set to teaching them what they don't know. Men are taught but only if they can find a willing teacher.

Our companion is little seen. Won't tell me how he spends his days. I make myself useful & repair things, clean weapons, wash dishes, build morning fires. I finally tell one of the elders when he asks.

"We're bound somewhere. I didn't think she would make it whole."

"You could stay with us instead."

His offer is made with little enthusiasm. He sees my path better than I see my own.

"You'll lose her eventually."

"Even if I stay?"

"I'm sorry."

I try not to believe him. But her smile & confidence grow day by day. The other is rarely around. What do I offer that this secure family of Travelers does not have & better?

Finally, our companion comes back. Holding a leather book filled with pages upon pages of numbers.

"We're close. We need to break off tomorrow morning. Tell her."

"She may not come."

His expression is fury. "Do you want to live this dangerous, dirty life always? Does she? *Tell her.*"

She returns to our bed late, tired, smiling. Rolls naked into my arms to sleep, willing on nights when I am.

"He says we're close. We leave tomorrow."

Her soft body stiffens but no words.

“I can’t make you. You have a kind of home here.”

Nothing. Then: “Can I make you stay?”

“No.” She rolls away from me but still holding my hand. By when I wake up she has us packed & ready to go.

xxvii.

“He was my postman.”

I wake & it’s still night. Quiet. The camp is guarded all hours so I don’t divide my thoughts to her safety, as I have so long. Almost. Remind myself not to.

“Who?”

“He brought me the letter telling me my father died.”

I listen.

“It was a hot day, you remember. I invited him in for a lemonade. He liked my halter tops, I let him look. Nothing else. No words. But I was feeling weird that day, & the letter he handed me looked disturbingly personal.”

The tent is dark, not a candle, not a crack in the seams. Helps him to sleep & stay alert both all night. When we fuck I want us to cum together, it’s a discipline I want us to have. I listen now with that level of attention. A bad noise, a misspent cum.

“It was from my Aunt. She & my father raised me together. She still lived in that village, ran the big garden of the hotel. She was kind of a witch, tho her practices were her own.”

Takes my hand in hers, twines our fingers. Breathes. Talks on.

“He & I had become separated. There was a war. He made sure I was safe. Years later, I came back to Aunt & her garden.”

Words rushed, trying to explain years in a few seconds, a couple of sentences. I squeeze her hand, tight, once.

“I loved him. I always thought of him. He was a tinker, very smart, very sweet.”

Harder breathing, what comes.

“He’d gotten old, gotten sick. By when he made his way back to her, it was to die in a bed, with a loved face nearby.

“She tried her tricks, tried them all. And it was quick, no time to find & fetch me.

“So she told him she’d make sure I knew. He wished not, but agreed. Had one request

of her.

“Tell her who she is, all of it. It will help her.”

She has something in her hand, makes me feel it too. “Her letter. The rest. I stopped reading at that moment. Put it in my pocket. Why should my postman see me learning what I am?”

I feel it, poke my finger inside the envelope, several pages.

“Then all of this happened. He protected me, the postman. He could have run, over & over, but he didn’t.”

“Then why me?”

“I wanted a man who could read that letter to me & be strong enough to handle it.”

“Why do you think that’s me?”

“You could have had me from that first day. Shot him, forced me. You know all this.”

I’m silent. Measuring futures & possibilities. Honest with myself, & hating it, she’s in all of them.

“Should I read it now?”

“No. Don’t ask. Sometime after now, just pull me somewhere private, & tell me it’s time. I always have it near me.”

Then the letter is gone from my hand, and she is atop me, & I am driving deep & slow inside her, & thinking, as much as I have left, there is no possible future without her.

She makes me cum first, forces it out of me, laughs, holds me close, her turn a slow moaning cum in my ear. Laughs more.

xxxii.

We travel, the three of us now, my man jealous & unsure, & our guide, who’d risk all for half an hour with my bare ass raised high. Twenty minutes. Five.

But he doesn’t get it. I let him close enough for a sniff of the girl, especially when my man has recently well-enjoyed me. But no more. Still, enough of a vague promise to keep us together bound somewhere good.

We’d sit in countryside nights between towns, studying the maps.

Why not an inn? It was me. Most men were no longer like the postman, or my man, or even the weasel guiding us who had a hidden gun on him & could have used it.

I would have let him just to shut him up wanting it. But some men get addicted. Would mistake a pity fuck for love.

They were afraid, because as we got closer to somewhere in those maps, fewer the laws.

That last night before we hit the sea air, I felt them following all day. Feigned fatigue & illness frequently to stall us. A couple of sleeping herbs in their drinks.

I presented at his tent. Didn't trust any building in his region. His predecessor had.

Bearded, long-haired. But furs. A cock in them somewhere but it all was to awe challengers or their women.

He smiled. Not cruelly. We talked before we fucked.

"How do you know I won't kill them & keep you?"

"I know you loved your wife."

He starts.

"I know you didn't have a chance to say goodbye."

He lunges but at himself.

I bid him douse the lights, wait. I undress, sit on his lap, feed him what I had brought. Some drink too.

"I am not her. I would not insult or fool you. But tonight we will say goodbye to her & you will let her go & keep her."

I'm back in his grasp before either groggily wakes. The path to the water remains safe that day, & we arrive.

Where we're bound, the Island, is no sane place. But it's where he wishes to go, what drives him.

And the weasel-faced one? He smells another man's seed on me & wonders darkly. But says nothing. Knows there's prizes & powers to be gained where we're bound. The kind to claim my sweet ass, & my man's too, if his will & whim. And it might be.

I know better than either of them, but say nothing. Choose the power of silence, watching, listening.

Wonder if my long ago dreams of this Island have any truth in them? That I remember

every last detail like the spit in my own mouth?

lxv.

The Heroes had been summoned to the Island again, a surprise. It had happened while they were on a lecture tour, much demanded, in which they described their heroic adventures. One year, climbing the steep & rainy Mt. Cloudy Day. The next traveling far along the Imaginal Hikeway. And last year coming to the Island in very ancient times, traveling to the Great Cavern under the Tangled Gate, long before its big tree was tall, before even Creatures lived there.

They lectured to a packed crowd at the Ancienne Coffeehouse, telling of these travels, & also urging their listeners to become Heroes too.

Coming out of the Ancienne, the two Heroes encountered the Kittys in their Boat Wagon, seeming to be waiting for them. A glance at the dashboard showed there to be a LETTER button waiting to be pressed.

Pressed, & a letter pops out to be read. Unfold & its says:

*You must return to the Island
for a Secret Journey.*

P.S. Gather a good crew to go with you.

P.P.S. When you get to the Island, there will be a second letter.

So the Heroes went back into the Ancienne Coffeehouse & announced to those who'd heard their lecture their plan to take a Secret Journey & need of crew.

Over a dozen volunteered & all traipsed out to the Boat Wagon to start, while many others came outside to wish them well.

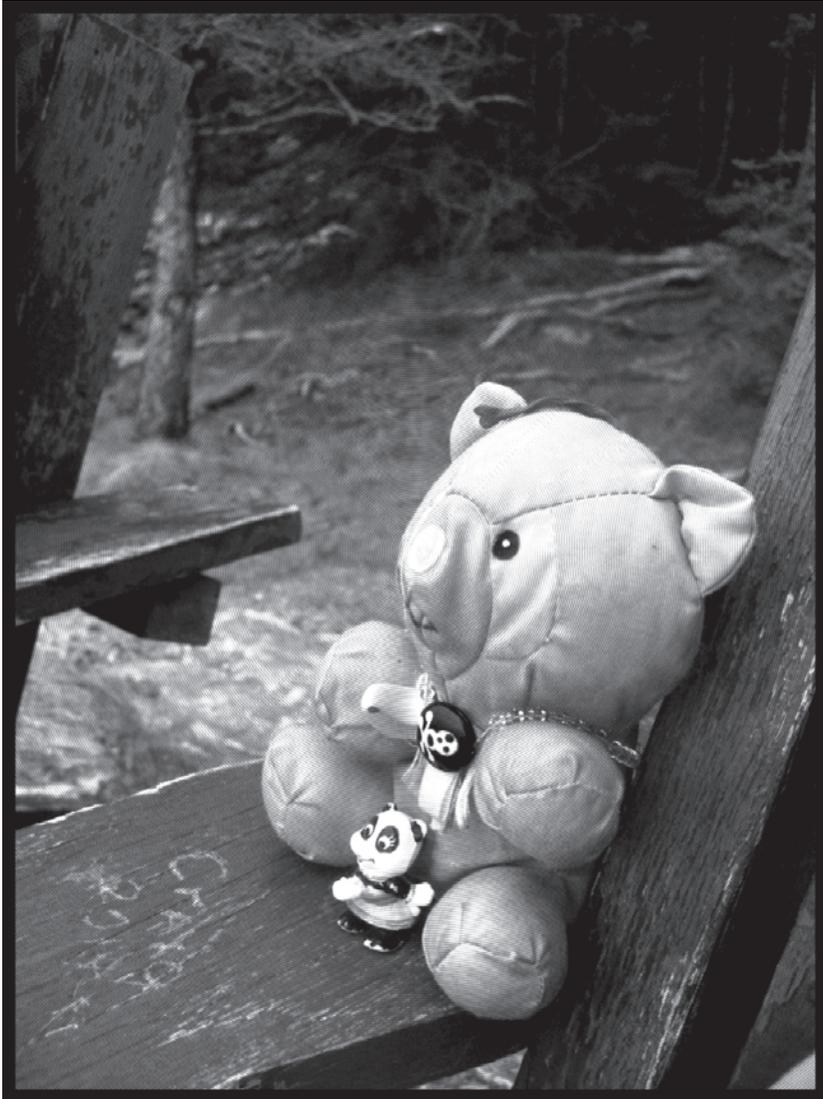
They all buckled up in the back—*Safety First!*—& rolled along till they passed through the White Woods & arrived at the sea. The Boat Wagon rolled on in & the Kittys paddled them the long way to the Island.

This time they arrived in present times, but the Natives had heard they were the ancient Heroes their ancestors had known, & welcomed them, & had them to their village to stay the night.

In the morning, the Heroes checked the Boat Wagon's dashboard & there was a LETTER #2 button. The letter read:

*Take a partial crew & travel with the Natives
on their bicycular vehicles
deep in the Woods to the Long Pond.
Follow the Hmmm there &, when arrived, listen.*

So the Natives got the Heroes & some of their crew to pack up & rolled them, via the *Hmmm*, into the Woods, & to a very quiet place where the Pond was in view. They let them off, & rolled on, saying they'd return in awhile.



Now settled on rocks at the edge of the Pond, the group of Heroes & crew, a dozen or so, gathered close to quiet & listen.

The *Hmmm* here, along the pines-lined water's edge, was so quiet they had to listen way down low. Occasionally, a bird yowl or trill or call erupted, & the wind sometimes roused the trees. The water swayed & created & fractured images of the branches & boulders at the edge.

Eventually, the Natives came riding back & the Heroes & crew returned to the village.

After a pleasant night's sleep, the Heroes checked the Boat Wage dashboard & there was **LETTER #3** button.

Pressed, the letter popped out &, unfolded, read:

*Take the rest of your crew in the Boat Wagon &
follow the Path of Roots & Rocks to the Sea.
There, have a rest & then roll into sea.*

And so the Heroes boarded the Boat Wagon, & the rest of the crew, & were directed by the Natives toward the Path of Roots & Rocks, a difficult path, the Boat Wagon's claws out to climb through thick trees, among fallen trunks, patches of wild mushrooms, over small bridges, & down & down, & through the old apple orchard with its impossibly beautiful & shy deer, & finally arrived to the beautiful, beautiful sea.

Upon a high rock sat two great red wooden seats, & the Boat Wagon climbed claw by claw up to arrive.

Down below the wild, wild sea. The Heroes considered & then nodded to the Kittys to climb on down & roll on in.

The Kittys paddled the Boat Wagon into the sea, & for a long time along. Then in the distance they saw a speck in the air & approaching fast—

& it was Calgary the Sea Dragon! who looked upon them far below & said in his bemused gravelly voice, "Ah, Heroes! & Kittys! & Crew! Hello, my friends!"

Well, everyone waved to Calgary & cheered.

"Say," Calgary said, "Would you like to see a place few ever have?"

It being a secret journey they were on, the Heroes yelled assent.

Sea Dragon tail lowered to surface, Boat Wagon rolled on up & onto Calgary's noggin. *Thwumpp! Thwup! Thwuppp!* He flew them many miles swiftly until they came in sight of what could only be called a Secret Island!

Calgary flew down near to the shore, lowered tail to ground, & Boat Wagon rolled down & off.

“Have fun! I will be back to pick you up in the morning!” & with that, Calgary flew slowly away.

At the Heroes’ signal, the Kittys peddled the Boat Wagon up the beach & into the Woods therein.

Meanwhile, back at the village, the rest of the crew began worrying the absence of the Heroes. They convinced the Natives to select their biggest & most sure-footed numbers to put on carrying apparatuses & travel swiftly the crew to the sea via the Rocky & Rootsy Path, which they did, & arrived, & of course they found no Heroes or crew.

Fortunately, one of their number was a White Bunny who glowed a signal that summoned Calgary the Sea Dragon to come.

“What is it, my friends?” asked he. The Natives crouched fearfully among the rocks, but the crew being Creatures were of course not afraid of their friend, & asked where the Heroes had gone.

“To the Secret Island! Would you like me to bring you too?”

And so Calgary lowered tail & the rest of the Heroes’ crew climbed on, & up to noggin to ride on safely.

The Natives stayed ashore, promising to remain by the two great red seats till they all returned.

Soon Calgary was far out at sea & they approached the Secret Island. Arrive, tail down, crew onto the shore. “I will come get you tomorrow!” cried Calgary & flew *thwup! thwup! thwup!* away.

Meanwhile, the Heroes & their crew in the Boat Wagon had ventured far within these strange Woods, to places more of dream & mirage than solid form, rolling, floating, flying, till maybe stopping in a dreamsome place, felt enclosed like a clearing or cave or cavern, & there were just the basic elements of the world around them, an air current flowing in & around them, the musical chatterings of a stream or river, the crackle snap of low flames, & from the earth itself, if be, a kind of great horn, a sound emitting from it without lips blowing. *Hmmming. Hmmming. Hmmming.*

The Heroes & the crew in the Boat Wagon seemed to evanesce in & out of being, always in tune with the *Hmmm*, always in tune—

& as though a valentine to them all, the *Hmmm* had led the rest of their crew to them & they were all reunited as the fire crackled, air current lifted & held them, water flowed through them calming, & the player-less horn *hmmmd & hmmm'd & hmmm'd* out the world every new moment—

The Heroes & crew fell into a reverie unto dream & lost & found & clustered together OK—

Woke in the morning in a quiet empty clearing, not knowing what of it was real—

Boat Wagon rolled back to the shore & waited for Calgary to come, which he did, & he carried them all safely back to the Island where they had come from. Where many, many Natives were now anxiously waiting their return & “hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” they cheered & cheered & carried the Heroes & Boat Wagon of crew upon their shoulders back to the Village.

There they celebrated their great Secret Journey & eventually said goodbye, the next morning, & Boat Wagon back to their own Island, White Woods, Village, & the Ancienne Coffeehouse.

And of course a fresh lecture about their new adventure, & a paw swept around to indicate the crew of new Heroes present, & much applause for all—

The Heroes came out later & they bid the Boat Wagon & Kittys adieu, having decided to just walk to their next lecture location.

Released from duty, the Kittys peddled their Boat Wagon through the White Woods & finally to the sea shore, & this time let her roll in & far into the sea, guarded surely & lovingly by Calgary the Sea Dragon somewhere high above

Telling done, Maya switches off the Creature-powered pink cat radio, smiling endlessly at the epic tale they have told.

She sleeps, as always, deep among a cluster of them, fingers among the White Bunny, Hedgehog, many giraffes, & bears, a furry little squirrel in a warm orange sock hat, a brown monkey fellow, a black & white Dalmatian, quite a few duckys, so satisfied with their story she is able to sleep without dream or dreams this time—

Wakes up just as into the Great Cavern rolls none other than that Boat Wagon carrying none other than Maya’s loved & long unseen people-folk friends, Christina & Kinley.

Looks once. Twice. Smiles. Frowns.



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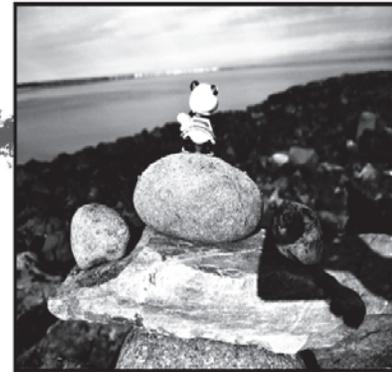
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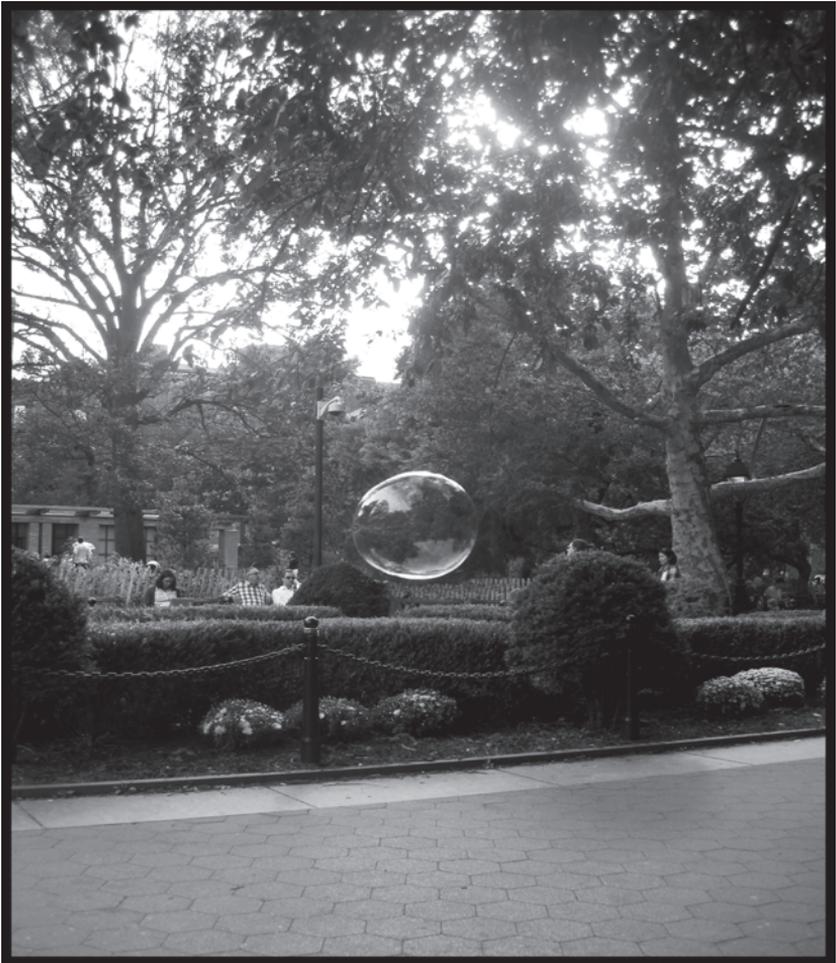
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