

*Dreams they complicate my life  
(Dreams they complement my life)  
--R.E.M.*

## Editor's Introduction

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

It's a very overdue volume, with contents published during a year that, for many, ended in the total disaster of the US presidential election. Once again, humankind is most adept at creating its best roadblocks. This so, even as endless worlds of possibility ever beckon us.

Tend toward those who dream of those endless worlds, like the artists featured in these pages. The roadblock-makers will come & go, no matter the lingering moment when their great furious roars seem endless.

  
Raymond Soulard, Jr.   
2/15/2018

Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
Editor & Publisher  
Scriptor Press New England



# Scriptor Press Sampler

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POETRY	by Judih Haggai	5
DREAM RAPS	by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌐]	7
POETRY	by Colin James	25
HOLD ON LOOSELY [TRAVEL JOURNAL]	by Nathan D. Horowitz	27
MANY MUSICS [TENTH SERIES]	by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌐]	41
THE DEAD CAT INCIDENT [PROSE]	by Charlie Beyer	51
POETRY	by Joe Coleman	61
THE PARADOX OF HUNTER-GATHERER CONSCIOUSNESS [PROSE]	by Jimmy Heffernan	63
POETRY	by Tom Sheehan	69
THE GREAT BUNNY PILLOW REFERENDUM! [A BAGS END TALE]	by Algernon Beagle	71
RALLY OF THE DAMNED [PROSE-POETRY]	by Victor Vanek	85
A PLAN [PROSE]	by David Hartley	87
POETRY	by Martina Newberry	88
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FICTION]	by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌐]	91
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS		110

orange grove  
the birds and I  
share the glory

\* \* \*

morning reminder  
we all appear, linger, die  
no reason to cling

\* \* \*

wordless history  
between tractor trails  
old coins and seashells

\* \* \*

singing bowl  
some resonate with peace  
some cover their ears

\* \* \*

one stolen guava  
impossible to resist  
the child within

\* \* \*

a dream so real  
imaginary house  
room for us all

\* \* \*

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SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2017

here's a thought  
love and accept myself  
as i am right now

\* \* \*

orange sunrise  
slow ascent over ploughed fields  
six-twenty bus ride

\* \* \*

dainty paws  
dog poses proudly  
on stolen blanket

\* \* \*

in sight of front door  
navigation through darkness  
foot meets hedgehog

\* \* \*

something to smile at  
the cool tile floor  
crickets in the dark

\* \* \*

each time  
a chance to start again  
with more attention

\* \* \* \* \*

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



## *Dream Raps*

*Dreams they complicate my life (Dreams they  
complement my life)*

—R.E.M. “Get Up.”

*I return home to the hospital, arrive OK this time, & there are all my roommates in our  
shared room, & they're having a hard discussion about how there's too many of us, & too  
little room, & the acid is beginning to come on, the acid is beginning to come on, the acid*

...

\*\*\*\*\*

## I'm a Small Young Man

I'm a small young man, I'd tell ya 5'2" but I'd have to be wearing taller heels on my shoes at the time. But then I meet a woman named Evelyn, & she doesn't notice how not tall I am. She notices my smile, notices it in a way it's not been noticed before.

Evelyn is brown-haired, turquoise eyes, long & luscious, as I am short, short, *short*. Somehow me, & my sack of things, & I'm moving in with Evelyn into her two-room house.

Sometimes when I'm at home all day, waiting for her to return, I forget her name. It's something that happens to me, & I go hunting through her mail, looking through her things, trying to remember what her name is. *Evelyn, it's Evelyn.*

At one point, we're in her back yard, on chaise lounges next to one another, we're naked, lookin' up at the stars, takin' turns cryin' out "*hellllloooooo*," until there is a noise, & in comes to the two-room house, bigger than the house, bigger than both of us, & certainly bigger than me, even on platform shoes, Evelyn's big, bruising, bald ex-boyfriend.

Evelyn throws a sheet on me as I lie there naked on the chaise lounge—she covers up with one too—we pretend to be asleep—but he calls & calls & calls, “Ev'lyn, where's my be'ah, where's my dinna', where's my suppa'?” *Things like that.*

Evelyn stands, puts on her robe, goes inside. I wait, cowering under my sheet. There's a gunshot, lots of shooting. Evelyn comes back. She climbs on top of me in my chaise

lounge, still under my sheet, but I find myself fucking her anyway. It is strange—it is shocking—but somehow wonderful—because it is Evelyn, & she wants sex now—but I want to know how she feels about me—because I’m small, & my heart’s big, & can be broken *so easily*.

I spend a lot of time looking at her picture postcards, & the photos on her wall, trying to understand my Evelyn.

\*\*\*\*\*

### You Leap! Across Time & Space

Leaping! Across time & space . . . I am back in high school, yes indeed, *oh ho ho ho ho*. But I am taking classes now, doing quite well. Getting good grades. *Nothing keeps me down this time around*. I walk into an empty classroom, a’swaggering, thinking nothing can stop me this time. But there’s a message on the chalkboard. CLASS IS CANCELLED TODAY.

**Hm.** Feeling slowed, a little off now, uncertain, but then I notice a book on the teacher’s otherwise empty desk. The book is called Nazi Jailbait Bitch.

Kind of a porn novel, seems the title charactress seduces & kills Nazis. It’s an old cheap paperback. I wonder how it ended up in this empty classroom. Well, I sit on the teacher’s desk, my short legs swinging below me, page through it, reading about the various adventures of the **NJB**. She’s quite a clever **NJB**, & she kills in a variety of colorful ways.

*They hold a world between them, balanced. His hands above, hers below. They speak rarely. He wonders about her kiss, she wonders about his touch. This is something important they do. When it ends, as it has to, & he is bleeding out from a thousand small skin pricks, each a star’s deadly jab, she stays right there, so close, loving him, hating him, making sure his last view of the world are her eyes, what he once called “the opposite of turquoise,” to his last breath, watching her eyes.*

But then I decide whoever owns the book will value it enough such that I should leave it where it is, on the teacher’s empty desk in the empty classroom. And I leave, having gained a little bit of the literary experience for myself from that volume, & ready to move on.

I walk home, each step again leaping me back across time & space. Arrive to a not-quite-then-nor-a-quite-now. It’s the little gas station convenience store I worked in, when much younger, the one built right on top of the spaceship buried in the earth. Down a flight of stairs found at the back of the store’s walk-in refrigerator, but a locked door below kept me from exploring it too deeply.

I find myself back behind the cash register, watching the security video monitor of my friends, my dear brothers back at that old brown-paneled barroom we used’ta haunt like a pack of grimy ghosts, all now long lost to me in time & space. They’re laughing, they’re shaggy-haired, they’re grabbing each other’s shoulders & hands. *They’re funny as fuck.*

And sometimes I just feel like I’m walking blind through the world, wishing I could make a valley for all my loved ones to live together & maybe, *oh you know*, open up the valley to others. Random guy walks in & says, *I love your writing, man*, & I say to him, *I love your writing, man*, & we hug each other affectionately, & it seems as though I’m left wondering what does it mean to be bound by space & time, by finitudes of memories, by the affections that wax & wane in the human heart, & the miracle of the greener world, & the miracle of music, & the miracle of *breathing in, breathing out*, & keeping somehow, some way, by years & miles & years & miles, your heart open to all.

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*. . . so I stretch out on my bed, long legs dangling far over the edge, curtains closed so I cannot see the many other beds in the room . . . & so I put on my headphones, turn on my cassette player because that very day I’d recorded off the radio a new album by my favorite band . . . sink into my music, sink into my hospital bed, deep into my hospital bed . . . listening to those songs I recorded off my radio, holding the tape player near to the speaker, & they’re all wonderful songs, deep, tragic in ways I don’t know, they’re beautiful, beautiful songs . . . they make me happy . . . & then the DJ, Commander Q, says the name of the album is Wish You Were Here, & I think that too, tonight, thinking back, thinking forward, thinking across those miles, turquoise eyes, turquoise eyes, wish you were here . . .*

\*\*\*\*\*

### I’m Going to School

I’m going to school again, now, Evelyn smiles me each time I leave for class, my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box in hand, trying to make myself something after all these sad nothing years.

At my school, there’s a woman who keeps following me around. Oh, it’s not romantic or nothin’ like that. She’s an automaton, & she wants me to kill her, & she hands me two guns for the task. She pleads & begs & says *just finish me & you’ll be a better man for it*.

Well, we walk out to a empty park with lots of trees, & find a particularly nice tree where I promise I’ll bury her under, give her some dignity, being she doesn’t feel any.

And I shoot right at her, & they don't work right, these guns, they seem to go off wrong, & yet one bullet does seem to pierce her head, & she dies—or she seems to die—falls heavy to the ground—and I realize I don't have a shovel—so I use these guns to dig a hole.

It's not a very good hole, & so I have to disassemble her into much smaller pieces by hand, & some of her screws don't come out right so I have to snap them off—but eventually I get her all into pieces, & I sort of line them up in the hole with a little bit of dignity to the whole thing—and I don't exactly say a prayer over the whole thing but I do say, *I hope you rest in peace.*

I find myself wandering the campus trying to dispose of the guns, & that seems to be a harder thing to do than I thought. At one point I end up in the dorm room, maybe it's my old dorm room, maybe it's a friend's, from the month I tried the local college. I'm smoking something good on the TV, maybe to take my mind off the whole thing—it's important & not important at the same time.

—& there are no lights on in the dorm room—though it's nearly noon—and there are people sleeping in it too, maybe sleeping off a party, I really don't know—and I turn on the lights from a bank of switches, & the people sleeping complain—though it's nearly noon—and I can't get them off again—and I think to myself, *goddamn*, & I go over to the wall, & it's a brick wall—there's a brick loose in it, nobody's looking because they're all asleep—and I pull the loose brick out, it's tough but it comes out.

Behind the brick there's empty space, & so I shove the guns in there, put the brick back in place, & realize the deed is done, so go back to smoking my TV program. There are others watching me now, but *they just don't know.*

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*It was a movie, or a dream I had that night, listening to that cassette of my favorite band on my headphones in my hospital bed, or maybe it happened to me, why I ended up in this hospital bed, in this too-crowded room, with the quarreling roommates, the acid coming on, the acid coming on . . .*

*Their village was gone, destroyed? We find a group of people traveling together. They embody their lost culture. They carry its trinkets, its memories, its seeds, & they travel on & on. They become adaptable to many situations, to the dryness, the parched heat of the desert, metallic chill of the mountains, the strange magick of certain Woods &, on occasions when everyone seems to feel it, & they do a lot, a sad collective feeling, they will brew a trinket tea together that will allow them to cluster dream & live anew in their lost home, to walk around, to touch its details, its smells, tastes, the faces that are not among them anymore, what the air was like, important sounds & not important sounds. It helps them greatly, these rare nights, to keep going . . .*

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## There Was This Woman I Knew, Older Woman

There was this other woman I meet at school, older woman, sixty, eighty, a thousand, it was hard to say. Plain-looking woman but somewhat strange. We near each other, sometimes get along. Both back at school, trying to turn our nothing selves into something at last.

There was one time in the cafeteria where she's sitting with someone else, & I was sitting nearby. I had my favoritest peanut butter jelly & cottage cheese sandwich. *Favoritest.* I would make it up in Evelyn's tiny kitchen, & I'd wrap it in tin foil, & then I'd put it in a plastic baggy, & then I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box, & I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

But then he left, & now we're sitting together, chairs facing each other, & I want to take her hand, talk about a man's feeling of possession, but I don't quite, & anyway she'd probably misunderstand & think I meant me & her, when I didn't at all. I was just practicing for later that night with someone entirely different. *Evelyn, of course, you know that.*

But she has to go. I can tell she has to go because she's putting her screwdrivers, wrenches, & various colored nails back into her 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 looks like it had been through fire a couple times. There are scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It's a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas.

I collect my spoons & stuff them into my bag, but it's too light & I panic. *Where is my sandwich? Oh, there you are, sandwich. Still in the sandwich container.* I was very worried but now I feel reassured, & then I depart too, & I'm back working in my office.

The school gave me a job to help me pay for my classes—which is located at the part of the building that's not yet built, so it's actually a worksite—but I have a cubicle in the middle of the worksite. **CLICK-CLICK NOISE-NOISE** all day long. The crazy sounds of work around me as I'm trying to type on my typewriter, fill out forms, answer the telephone. Most of the questions are about the live feed from 1968, it's glitchy today, & seems to only show war riots, nothing pretty, nothing hippie. People call and complain. *They want hippie.*

Late afternoon, as often happens, all the workers in their hard hats gather in a certain corner of the worksite to watch a sort of live cartoon that appears there every day to entertain them. Some kind of pretty girl dancing merrily, her face grows older, younger,

she's shy, she's bold, she clearly delights in dancing for the workers until their break is up, & then she departs, & I go home but, again, *no one touches my lunch box.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*You wonder what kind of project could this be & if I tell you it is a film, you would not believe me & say, oh no, strange sir, film was conceived only recently, & I will say to you in response, you have not seen Remoteland, you have not seen **Remoteland**. You have not seen **Remoteland** . . .*

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### There Are Numbers Crawling Along Every Surface

We finish together & we smile & I am ready to tell Evelyn why I am so short now, 5'2", if that, this is an important part of why, she listens, & I watch her listening, & she smiling prompts me to continue when I am too long silent watching her listen—

There were numbers crawling along every surface that I could see, & there were letters & symbols & formulators & someone said, *read 'em, what do they say?* I peered closer & I couldn't see because they kept changing, I couldn't focus on one number or letter or symbol long enough to see what it said, because it changed the moment I focused on it to something else, *something else, something else, something else.*

& they crawled on my hands & they crawled on the ceiling & they crawled on the walls & they crawled on the pictures in the picture frames & they crawled on the windows & they crawled on the floor & they seemed to adhere to the kind of surface that they crawled through. Sometimes they were more old-school computer style numbers, sometimes they were more curvy, sometimes they were pixely. They took on the form of what they crawled on.

& there was nothing to say about them. There was no explanation really, there was no *this is what it means*, & yet it wasn't meaningless, but it had no meaning. It was somewhere in between, maybe somewhere off that narrow scale. *Wow. Fucking wow.*

Went on all night, went into the next day. I climbed the stairs &, instead of on the floor there being numbers, there were patterns, strange craquelure patterns, but everywhere else numbers, & I'm still looking for them even now.

*"Even now,"* I say, not quite meeting her turquoise eyes.

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*What I keep mind of is your turquoise eyes. That's what I keep mind of. For you see, what happens over time is that it seems like first you are you & then I am you & then you are me & then I am me again. Sometimes I am the raggedy fellow & you are the long-haired girl with the turquoise eyes & sometimes I am the raggedy girl & you're the boy with the turquoise eyes, but you see it's the turquoise eyes that always keeps me knowing what is what. They remain your constant, girl or boy, whichever is whichever, however things sort between us, & it's a good thing too for, in this new place we've come to, things look perilous.*

*We have to learn how to adapt & adjust, we may have to stand in different lines, we may have to sleep on different floors, we may have to speak in different tongues. I think to myself, this is only temporary, I think to myself, as long as I can pick out your turquoise eyes in any situation, any profile, any raid, any examination, any time there's raising waters or drought, any time under any star, amongst any kind of soil, in & among & through, however it may be, words words words words words words words, ahhh, turquoise eyes. It's OK. . .*

\*\*\*\*\*

### Tiny Little . . . Individdle

*You see, Evelyn, it's like also this.* Once upon a long time ago, might have been a Tuesday, I was looking to make the acquaintance of a tiny little individdle. A tiny little individdle. & this individdle has been an individdle part of my days & nights ever since. A tiny little individdle.

One time I was in a situation where I could not believe that she was multiple sizes at once, & it was a dangerous situation in which all the circumstances surrounding it were uncertain. There were strange faces, there were swaying hands, there was skipping music, there was some kind of dark & eerie, as it were, & I worried the fate of this tiny little individdle.

I swept her into my hand, I hustled her along, sometimes she was too entirely big for me to move much, except by sort of a nudging gesture of my shoulder to her ankle that towered above me, & sometimes she was many at once, a horde of her, crazy-eyed & cackling merrily, but I worked to find every single one of her, & *oh!* I made sure that I found them all, even as their numbers shifted higher & lower & stranger still.

—& I can tell you now that, as of this telling, this tiny little individdle is as safe as I can possibly cause such a being to be, with her love of the game, the shenanigan, the cackling trouble or, as she likes to say, *click-click noise-noise.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## His Name, I Say, Is Daniel

His name, I say, is Daniel. He is a man who has been washed over time by event, person, world, his own body, washed, washed, & washed again. In the last year of his long career as a local sports hero, beloved, best of all players, playing aching always, or just plain injured, playing for a team the shell of its old championship days, his heart still the hero's even though his body is slower & battered, he persuades all his teammates, except for two, as the season is winding down, the end is near, he says, *why are we earning all this money? We're terrible. Let's donate the rest of our paychecks for the remainder of the season to the good charity. Let's just do it.*

Oh, there's a big event, he doesn't want it, he just wants them to do it quietly but someone gets a hold of the story, & this last good act of his as a professional ball player is pronounced far & wide. Someone later on, years later, long past his time, wants to do a documentary on the man, remember him on film, & the only sequence of this unfinished film that is ever recovered from the fire is a scene where there's a crash & we arrive suddenly above ground on the subway train as we come out to near his home where he grew up, sparse green, many strange houses, some seemingly built from the bottom up rather than the top-down.

Half-filmed is the story a childhood friend of his told about the time when they were mere tykes in the sweet store—and they'd gathered all their money from paper routes, shaking down littler kids, stealing off their parents' bureaus, finding coins in sewers—they were in this sweet shop, & they knew they could have bought the same sweets somewhere else cheaper, but it was finer doing it this way.

He said, *it's finer doing it this way because they'll put it in a fancy-looking bag with a ribbon, & we'll look like we're just sittin' pretty, bag full of this sweet candy to share between only us.*

He remembers his last morning as a ball player, the last game he was going to play, probably was not going to play more than two or three minutes of it, maybe throw a basket or two, everybody was going to clap too loud, call it good.

He was lying that morning in his bunk, thinkin' *what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast am I going to have this morning, is it going to be a big one or a small one?* If it was the last day of your professional basketball career, & you'd already donated all your money for most of the season, so you were kind of on a low budget now, what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast would you go for? Where would you scrape up the nickels & quarters?—& as you did, would you be thinking to yourself, *wow, this is like way-back-when all over again?*

"You were the friend from his childhood?" Evelyn asks.  
He nods.

"You were taller then?"  
"So damned tall, Evelyn."

\*\*\*\*\*

## I'm Listening to My AM-FM Transistor

She says: *What were you like when you were a teenager? Tell me a good story.* I can't think of any, so I tell this:

I'm listening to my AM-FM transistor radio late into the night, I listen to song after song, it's like medicine as they say, & I find this singer, his name is James McGunn, & they play a lot of songs by him on this late night radio show hosted by this strange gent called Commander Q, & James McGunn has this album out, it's called **Sco'u'tland**, sort of a strangely punctuated version of *Scotland*.

It's a 90-minute long album. I save up my money & I buy it on LP, double LP, perhaps even cassette tape as well. I look him up in the music review books, & he has other albums too, some they like & some they don't, & I wonder who he is, who is this James McGunn?

When I'm not listening to his double LP **Sco'u'tland**, I'm walking down the street with my transistor radio poked right at my ear, hopin' he'll come on. Maybe Commander Q will have an interview with him. Maybe I'll find out more. It's hard to say.

Later on, I'm just sittin' somewhere with my favorite com-puter & we're having ourselves a good ole time, not doing much of anything, but just sitting with my com-puter, & it starts raining, & my com-puter fills with rain, all her ports, & I panic, try to shake them out. I look around for shelter, & I find this college bookstore, & I bring her inside, & just try to shake her out.

It's just very strange, it's like water that goes sideways & vertical & sticks—it's some kind of gravity-defying water—and I remember this song by James McGunn, it said,—& it was very reassuring though I didn't understand it at the time as now I do—it said, when the water starts to fall up, forget the king, bring your cup.

(She laughs merrily. My strange years before her delight her & turn her on. Every time.)

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*NJB likes to say to me: these are the kinds of things you hear when you're riding the local bus & people get to talkin' about their lives & their times & they sometimes tell you lurid details of their escapades, because you see these people are desperately lonely & sad, & they don't understand how the world has tromped on them, year by year by year by year, & the only thing I can say in response to all of this is that some of those strange things really happen to some of those strange people, & so I say to you tonight, one & all, most sincerely: CHOMP THE ORANGE, DO YA?*

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### Then I Traveled to a Place Called Oorous

*Sexxy, placing the tab on your lover's tongue, watching her chew, swallow, watching him watch you as you chew, swallow. Telling the next story, as the acid is coming on, oh, luva, the acid is coming on . . .*

Then I travel to a place called Oorous. Seems at first to look like a town, a nice, small town. But I find out eventually that it's a sort of slave camp run by the aliens whose ships have always been overhead.

I arrive in the guise of a reporter, taking a break from his big city newspaper life to write his novel, take the room above the coffee shop, & I come down every morning for my coffee, my raisin toast, light butter, & sometimes a hard-boiled egg.

I set up shop at one of the tables under the elongated awning that the coffee shop features to keep its patrons safe from rain & shine, as they enjoy their beverages & their conversations.

I set up at my table my notebooks, my pens & pencils, a couple of novels I'd like to try (including the new one by Darling Darlene Danger, & my umpteenth read of Cosmic Early's *Aftermath*), & I'm ready to roll. I get to know people though over the course of my days. Oh, there are some times when you'll see me hunched down low, scribbling away, blind to all but my page.

—but then there'll be other times I'll be looking pensively off into the sky, tapping the pencil against my front teeth—and that'll be a good moment to stop & say hi, & chatter a little, & so I get to know people this way. I get to know that paperboy & teach him that the proper way to eat a Danish, *son, is to keep it wrapped in its plastic & nibble away. That way you do not get sticky, nor do your newspapers when you deliver them.*

He gets roughed up later by a couple of toughs, who I believe are in cahoots with the aliens. They drag him into an alley to beat him up, 'cuz he was seen with me too much, pallin' around.

I go to that alley & fists start to fly, & they are cowards, these two toughs, & they admit that it wasn't their idea, & I said *you're not going to do this again. You're going to tell those alien motherfuckers this boy is OK. Got me?* They bleed, shiver, nod.

Eventually, the aliens turn on me too, warn people to stay away from my writin' table—and I start to get kind of lonely, as people shy their eyes away from me as they pass by—ones who used to smile upon me—until one morning a black man shows up, tall, handsome, well-spoken. I've heard he's the town minister.

He says, *I understand your problem, & I appreciate you stayin' around—and I say, are you really the minister?—& he says, no, they got him in hidin', we didn't know what those alien bastards were gonna do to the town leaders when they first arrived, so they think I'm the minister, & they steer clear. They aren't sure what this God thing is about, & they aren't ready to find out yet.*

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*There were missing pages near the end of NJB, & the very last page was a mangled fragment. But I read it & memorized it & liked to speak it breathlessly into your turquoise eyes: "Wars in the future will be fought in the mind by drugs, dreams, televisions, internet, sex, persuasion, the manipulation of loyalties, needs, desires, to the point where to obey is to receive pleasure & endorsement & to disobey not punishment but simply nothing. Physical war, impoverishment, suffering, disease, prejudice have all been eradicated at the cost of freedom & self created identity. This epoch is not sustainable because the world is too badly damaged."*

*Where are you, Turquoise Eyes? Where are you? Why am I in this hospital bed? Who am I, Turquoise Eyes?*

\*\*\*\*\*

### I Was Trying to Find Someone

Evelyn finally replies. She likes us to sleep with the bedroom shade open, the moonlight, the stars, the obscure green-&-gold neon sign glare from the S&G Pizza place next door.

*I was a very young woman at the time, & I was trying to find someone. We're far from each other. I try sending her a note, use a pen that writes on her paper where she's sitting in that ratty old armchair she likes, & I tell her where in the city to go.*

*She gets up slowly, & gets ready to go slowly, & she floats along, following the course of the river, sometimes floating above the river. She holds the pen & pad in both hands, & I'm writing her instructions on what to do next. Her replies on my pad are short & illegible.,*

*Sometimes I see from her point of view, as she's floating along to meet me, & we're approaching each other, & I sometimes see from my point of view & her point of view both. We arrive at the same moment through the same cave-like entrance of the bookstore, same aisle, same bookcase, holding between us a book entitled *Labyrinthine*, & it's falling apart. We look at the back cover, & read that *Labyrinthine* describes six stories of imprisonment, each a different kind. **Hm.***

*I begin to sing to her, holding her small soft hands, to reassure her that her long lost soldier boy will come home. I look into her face with all the love I can offer, & reassurance, & I start to sing, **love is a battlefield, love is a battlefield, love is a battlefield.***

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### He Was the Boy . . . Who Knew Two Sisters

“He wasn’t supposed to be a basketball player. I knew that. He knew that. For years, I would see him playing ball on my black-&-white TV with its Antennar 2000, the kind that gets you in 3 channels, not just 2, & I would watch him score & score, pass, block, lay up, push his teammates to be the best possible, hand them round the championship trophies as they came, every spring for six straight seasons, held each one up for just a moment, then hand them ’round to each of his teammates for them to hold, them to feel that shiny, buzzing pride of *winning well*.”

“But, Evelyn, I knew the true story. He’d told me. We had a night back in high school, years before, a reunion night, first since our candy-buying days, we were in the same store in town, the gas station convenience store I would work at in a few years, the only one the alien slavers let us run without interference, & we came face to face, him much taller than back when, me growing shorter as I continued to do, & he nodded, & I nodded, & we went back to where we would go in those candy-glorious days, down a long, dingy road, down a hill alongside it, through swamp & reeds, come to a dirty river that ran under a noisy bridge, & sat on the hill under that bridge, & he brought out a big-ass craggy pipe for us to smoke, & he said, *this baggy has the last of my Turkish black hashish, & you & I are going to smoke it all, & I am going to tell you why I am joining the basketball team tomorrow.*” And we smoked ourselves blind, silly, silent after a long while, after he’d told all, & then I knew what nobody else did, forever.

“He was the boy who knew two sisters. The younger one prettier, of course. They’re friendly to him. They’re performers & started talking to him between sets, & then they step back inside the roughly constructed performance building, & they are among many performers taking their turn, sort of a calliope of talent & freakishness.

“—& these two sisters are performing with their father on one of the stages, singing as he plays guitar, & their singing moves him, moves him deeply. For a moment, he

forgets his wants & his desires, his frustrations, whatever brought him here, there’s just this music. *This beautiful music.*

“Later on, there’s the fires the performers like, they light them in the field near the performance building, so many dancers, so many drummers, & he finds himself in shadows with the younger one, feeling her up, saying *my god, you sing so beautifully with your sister, your father playing, & you have such beautiful tits too.*

“—& she laughs, blushes, says *thank you*, but looks somewhere else, toward the many dancers, the many drummers, & he slowly lets her go & thinks *that’s it*—he goes back to where he’s staying—he’s not staying with the performers—no, he has a crappy tent, a few possessions, just another refugee.

“But he begins to gather things, he begins to go to places where he can find paper, he digs himself up a pencil. He finds different colored paper. He finds different colored pencils. *It’s amazing what you can find when a passion grabs your Art, inflicts your mind.*

“—& he begins assembling a colored book filled with colored penciled poems, for the younger sister. He puts it together, ties it with bark & twine, assembles it roughly but sincerely. It’s finally done & he brings it back, he stands in the shadows, watching their performance.

“He has his book in his hands, of all these words he’s written, he’s found in himself poetry, praise, longing, desire, put into words. If only some of it, & he’s holding this book & the singing so moves him again, so deeply & so dearly, that all he can do is leave his book on a seat in the very last row, & depart before they finish their last song.”

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*Down in the hospital basement something’s going on that I’m connected to. Something such ordinary folk as my roommates don’t know about. Something to do with the machinery, the blood & the marrow & the bones & the muscles & the tentacles that undergird this world & all its beauties & terrors.*

*That’s what’s down in the basement behind a thick door with massive lock that I only have the single key to, & I keep the key hidden on the third floor, the floor my roommates don’t know about. All the walls have been knocked out on this floor, so it’s one big room. You may also notice all the broken glass on the floor, every last instrument, every last drinking glass has been smashed, & I won’t tell you what or how or why right now.*

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## I'm Working at an Office, but the End of the World Has Come

I'm still working in the office, the construction around me has finished, but the end of the world has come. I find myself in the file room with crayons, drawing a map to the Place of Art where we plan to go. Before leaving, I walk down the hall, to see my boss, & she's not in, & I realize I'm just going to have to go—and I leave the office, & I leave the building, & walk down the street.

Things are collapsing around me. There are colors missing, certain words in the language are gone, & things begin to rumble below me, above me, along my arms. *Rumble rumble.* I walk, then run, to her two-room house, fetch her, we bring one knapsack each, follow her map far out of the town, follow it loyally until we find the Place of Art, deep in the White Woods, & here we are in the Place of Art, & we walk in, there's a clearing, she tells me to close my eyes, & we begin.

—& it's a visual book I see with my eyes closed & I'm reading my way along, a long apartment, narrow, living room one end, kitchen & bathroom on the other, & I'm reading in long straight swathes along it, a very crowded party is around me.

I read back & forth across the apartment but I am in the apartment now. I'm *in it*, not just reading it. I live there with my beloved Evelyn, this is my home, & it's the night before leaving, & I want to make something of this. I want to read one of my longest poems to everyone. I want to give out copies to everyone so they can read along too, but my beloved Evelyn says *we only have fifteen copies* & there are way more people there.

They are crowded from one end of the apartment to the other. Finally I have a microphone & I call out, *does anyone have a drum to play while I read my poem?* But nobody seems to know me or pay attention. I begin to think, I begin to wonder, I begin to get curious as to what's really happening here.

I open up my eyes for a moment, & see the quiet Woods around me, see Evelyn as a sort of buzzing glow nearby, & realize I'm in two places at once, & I can come back here anytime.

I close my eyes again, & I walk through the crowds, & I come to the back door, & there's a girl returning through the back door, & she's just pissed on the back porch.

She looks at me & says, *sorry.*  
*No, you're not,* I answer.

—& I still want to read something long, poetical, with grace, whimsy, dark hope in these dark times, but I can't do it. I can't do it now, & I keep walking until I find that I am now at the other end of the apartment, but I see that people are leaving. Crowds

of people leaving, going out the door, & they're going onto the landing, & they're getting on their bikes, & I just want them to stop, want them to *stop leaving*, want them to *stop staying*, *I want the end of the world to stop.* Stop, I say. Stop.

I hear her voice in my head, & she says, *just open your eyes & wake up, & I do.*

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*I wake up, & I am again in the strange metallic chair in a spaceship high high **high** above the earth. Trying to explain to them something that we had all come up with, all of us, men & women, the best of those remaining, the ones who hadn't panicked & given up.*

*We'd decided to call it United Earth because it was a simple phrase that covered everything that needed to be covered. If we couldn't be united, that'd be about it, & I was trying to tell them about it. But I kept drifting back into dreaming, & each time the dream was different, there was no connection between them, there was no link.*

*I wake with some strength & I try to tell them that we meant it this time. We meant it. Please help. Please help, we need it, & then I drift away, & find myself in my school again.*

*It's a long, long building, & I walk to my classroom on the far end, having missed class again. Find out it's cancelled, & I don't know where to go because I have missed so many classes that I thought today, when I woke up so full of energy & life, I was going to catch up on all my classes.*

*I was going to do what I had to do, talk to the teachers, even Mrs. Wordsley with her spooky box, talk to others & say, **this is the day I put my foot down & get it together,** & just as I'm getting it together the class is cancelled, & just as that happens, & I'm sort of wandering away vaguely, well, this man comes up to me & says, **hey, big man, you have a big hole in your pants, on the back,** & I sort of lean back, twist my neck around & sure enough, there's a big hole in my pants that I hadn't even noticed.*

*I thought, I've got to go back to the hospital room where I keep my other two pairs of pants & change, & get this pair of pants fixed, & it's getting all so muddled, it's not perfect, what of those vows, & I drift & drift & drift toward those pants, & eventually I find myself awake in the metallic chair, talking to them again about United Earth, & it seems like they're saying, **we want to believe, we want to believe you this time, but we don't know if we can, & we don't know if there's time, & we don't know if this isn't for the best.***

*& I'm nodding & I'm thinking, I'm thinking that if I don't say something useful here I'm going to just drift away into another dream, & it's just going to be pointless because eventually I'm going to wake up back down there & I'll have accomplished nothing but*

*caused myself a lot of pain & so I say to them, with what's left of me, there is a future in which we all live together, & there is a big library that we go to, to remind us of our sordid & bloody past, & some of us will stay there for weeks, if not months, to study it, & to try to figure out what not to do wrong again, & we need your help to build that world & that library, & that library will be our promise to you, please help, & then I drift back again into dream.*

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### There is a Town, Far from All Else

We breathe slowly, deeply, in, out, in, out, & close our eyes again, & travel deeper into the Island's magical White Woods, until we find a clearing.

The clearing becomes a temple, shaped by the full moonlight—

We enter the temple, & arrive to the deep desert—

We pass along, far along, deeper into the desert, & come to a little shack with an exotic nearly toothless little man who gnatters high & low at us, & Evelyn laughs & gnatters high & low back at him, & I try to, & I'm not so good at it, but I try again & again—

—& he whispers in her ear, then mine, the words we need to send us on our way to the town deep & far from anywhere else—

—& we will travel & travel & eventually though we come again to the Woods, & there is a road—

The road brings us to the Village he whispered about, & the Village doesn't have many buildings in it, it's hardly a Village at all, & we have to pick the right one, but there are so few. Evelyn points, *there*. The one with no main entrance.

It's huge. It's like a mountain of a building, like it's cut from rock itself, shaped into doors & windows, floors & entrances, unknown number—

—& we enter through a door, a guess, a hope it's right, & come to a room, lined on three sides with books, floor to ceiling, on the floor, there's a fireplace crackling & snapping, & before us a small chair, & an armchair turned away, & there is someone in that armchair that you cannot see that motions us in our minds to each sit in one of the little chairs, to be comfortable, to be ready to learn.

*Are you ready to learn the secrets of this strange town called Wytner?*

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### I Heard This Story at a Bus Station

*This someone then speaks:* “I heard this story at a bus station. I was traveling somewhere far, I'm not sure where I was going, but I had my ticket. I sat next to this old man with a long beard, ragged kind of Army-looking clothes, & he told me that his blood was sick, & that he was dying, & he said that he was doing his best to comfort those around him who did not know how to handle these things as he had learned to.

“—& he said there was this particular moment when he found himself with a group of friends, some of them new, some of them old, & they were in a monastery museum, looking at the blood canvases on the wall, the red bulbs along the staircase, the fake eyeballs hanging in profusion by wires from the attic door.

“—& he finally led them out onto the roof, oh you couldn't go out on the roof of this monastery museum, but he found them an open window, & they all climbed out, & all these new & old friends of his, & he showed them the sky from this peculiar perspective.

“It was a beautiful night. Sunset was strange, sort of golden & green, but beautiful, lovely, soft. If anybody had a hand in making this sunset, they were both artistic & skilled, enormously inspired, & he touched each of his friends on the shoulder, tall & short, long-known & new, & he said *just look at that sunset!*

“He said: *Every time you see a sunset like that hereon, long after I'm gone, think of me, & then one day, when your time has come, you bring your group of friends up on a rooftop that doesn't expect you to be up on top of it, & you say the same thing to them. You say, look at this sunset! Feel it, don't worry about its details & words. Feel it, & tell them to think of you, & pass it on to others.*

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### It Doesn't Begin Well

*Someone then cackles a bit & speaks the other version:* “It doesn't begin well, on this Island. I'm scared, I'm running. Some kind of dead or deaths behind me. I didn't cause them, I saw them, heard them, & I'm running, running, & eventually I find that I get to as far on this Island as I can, & away from the scary thing I was running from. *Was it a Beast? What was it?*

“Hours pass, then a few days, then longer, & nothing happens. I begin to assess my situation more calmly. Oh, I'm still scared, look in every direction often, but here I am. *On this Island.*

“I study my camera that I brought. It seemed so important before all those tragic scary things that happened after I arrived. But the camera was meant to take pictures of the strange things that they say occur on this Island, the strange thing this Island is. This Island with the mythical timeless portal, that will not be found on any map, & I brought a camera, & I was gonna document it all.

“Just as an experiment, I take a few exploratory pictures. Just around my camp, just to document. But then when I go to pull the roll of film out to develop it, I’d brought all the chemicals & tools, it just pours, *it pours* out the back of the camera. *It’s like there’s nothing but liquid inside this camera, & I just don’t know what to think.*

“I came here to find out the truth of the Island, & to document it, I meant no harm, but it seems that, since I’ve arrived, things have gone wrong—& then I remember this peculiar bit of advice I was given along the way, as I told various people of my plans to find this Island.

“One of them was a strange old man with a long beard, I don’t even know why he was in my office. He kind of came in with others that I was discussing the matter with, then suddenly he was looking at me. They’d all left, & he was looking at me, & he was saying, *if you’re gonna survive there, you better learn how to hmmmmmm*

“& until now I hadn’t even thought of this advice, but now I sit down, right where I am, right in the clearing where I am, I just sit right down, knowing it’s all too much for me, too bigger than I am, except that this one piece of advice, & I sit right down here, & I close my eyes, & I *hmmmmmm*

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*And for just a moment, you are back with me, close, closer than anyone or anything I have ever known, Turquoise Eyes, my Evelyn, Turquoise Eyes, & I hmmmmmm till my breath runs out, and you are gone again, oh my lost heart, you are gone again . . . . .*



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### The Moral Ambiguities of a Tall Person

An empty room.

The cave-like space  
beneath the sink is covered  
by a ludicrously dirty cloth.  
A fold-up chair and tiny table  
have been stored here.

When these are moved  
to the center of the room,  
things don’t improve.

At least there was hope before,  
now there is only sadness.

\* \* \*

### The Home Invasion Enthusiast

A cordon of papers prevents  
the typical short-legged hop entrance.  
Instead, a bent-over attitude prevails.  
Ungrateful sighs are administered  
during this telepathy of tact.

Spotless calm, as in nearly jammed.

Please direct me to the master bedroom,  
I have a collection of curios to administer.  
Your bedside table machine exemplifies a love-maker’s whimsy.  
See, everywhere, an army of offspring trackers,  
or just smelly socks.

Needlessly, so much more of everything.

\* \* \*

## Fat Shame

The obese  
trick you into  
thinking they  
are your friends  
waiting while you  
become more fragile  
toss you down  
some stairs into  
a damp cellar  
where you survive  
eating spider eyes  
until you are rescued  
by tall thin people.

\* \* \*

## An Old Friend Found Wandering Incognizant Near the Drake-Mars Experiment

Your god at the height of her powers  
had just placed an imitation carnation  
on the sculptured rocket.

I wasn't thinking of penises nor  
ballerinas as I helped you to your car.

The back seat was full of rubbish,  
and you smelled like burning hair.

The crumbling chain-link fence  
was not hard to see beyond,  
so I drove you home through  
and past deliberating loiterers.

You thanked them all personally with  
all the adjectives you could still find.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nathan D. Horowitz



## *Hold On Loosely*

[Travel Journal]

The next morning, the patient went back home across the river, but he returned in the early afternoon because the pain was so bad. His family stayed at his place, warily harvesting coffee beans, so he was alone and had little to do. I gave him the Spanish-language *New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs* that Greg the missionary had given me up in San Luis Potosí. Dave and I went back out to boil down the *yagé* from three gallons to one.

Once the fire was going with the pot of *yagé* suspended above it, we sat crosslegged on broad banana leaves and relaxed. Some branches of a tree reminded me of Hebrew letters. I said, "There's this idea in Jewish mysticism that everything that exists is God's language. The mystics looked at that one passage in Genesis where it's like, 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.' And the mystics were like, 'Aha! Everything that exists is made of God's language.'"

Dave said, "Wicked! Check this out." He flipped through a dog-eared copy of Terence McKenna's *Archaic Revival* and read aloud, "I don't believe the world is made up of quarks or electromagnetic waves, or stars, or planets, or any of those things. I believe the world is made of language."

"Belief is powerful," I said. "I believe I'm going to try a cup of this brew."  
I dipped a cup into the steaming brown liquid, let it cool, said,

*Blessed art thou,  
O Lord our God,  
King of the Universe,  
Who has created the vine, amen.*

—and drank the divine language, rich and bitter like the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge itself. I stood up with a grimace. I observed the linguistic surroundings, the landscape. Beneath a tree made of language, I found a twig bearing dried leaves that in their drying had curled up like withered brown hands. I sat down with the twig for further study. I noticed that the leaves were teeming with a miniscule language of black ants. In a little nook, a cave-like fold of leaf, was a hunting spider like a tiny gray monkey with too many legs and eyes. We stared at each other until we lost our fear. When I turned my head to say, "Dave, look at this," the spider jumped onto the hair on my chest, explored for a moment, jumped on the ground, and was gone.

I picked up Dave's paperback *Field Guide to Tropical Rainforest Mammals* and opened it at random to a page on which were drawn the heads of many species of bats. I wondered about the bats' role in the local shamanism, and whether, as spirits,

they were friendly or unfriendly, good or evil. Some looked wise and kind—others, less so. The vampire bat looked malicious, diabolical. Why? And what are animal spirits, anyway, if they exist? What relation do they have to the physical animals, and to evolution?

Rain started falling. From trees, Dave and I hung two overlapping sheets of plastic and sat beneath them, trading myths, breathing smoke, keeping the fire alive.

He said, “Do you know the Secoyas’ origin myth?”

“No.”

“Check it out. At first, humans lived underground, and they had tails. They ate nothing but various kinds of clay. One day God lured them up to the surface with some palm fruit, and as they came out of a cave, one by one, he ripped their tails off and tossed them away, and the tails turned into monkeys! Each tribe’s tails turned into a different species of monkey. Secoyas’ tails turned into woolly monkeys. Waorani’s tails turned into spider monkeys. White people’s tails turned into chimpanzees, and black people’s turned into gorillas. See, when the Secoyas met white and black people, they integrated them into their myth! The cave was in Peru near the Santa María River. There’s a particular place where it supposedly happened. Rufino showed me on a map.”

“That’s cool,” I said. “Do you know the origin of the Norse runes?”

“Uh-uh. What is it?”

“The gods were really messed up—they were going hungry, they needed some power, some magic. So Odin goes out to Yggdrasil, this giant ash tree, the biggest tree around, and he hangs himself upside down in it, and cuts himself with his spear. He stays there, fasting, for nine days and nights until he suddenly sees the runes surging up out of the earth to him. He’s like, ‘Aha!’ He cuts himself down. That’s how runes came to people, through Odin’s vision quest. People used them for spells and for writing. It was basically a shamanic initiation to get them. A controlled near-death experience that led to a vision. I read in a different book that Inuit shamans initiate students by holding them underwater until they nearly drown, then bringing them back up.”

“*Yagé* can be a kind of near-death experience too,” said Dave.

“Right on,” I said. “So that tree Yggdrasil plays another role in the Norse myths, as the axis of the world. Its roots reach down into the underworld, and its branches touch the sky. This dragon called Nauthig gnaws on the roots. When he kills the tree, the universe will die.”

“Long may the tree live,” Dave said. Out of his bag, he took a pouch of American Spirit tobacco and, using a half-dry banana leaf, he rolled himself a cigar. Humming, he pulled a stick out of the fire and lit the cigar off its ember. *Puff, puff*. . . his thoughts were elsewhere. . . the smoke glided away and was lost in the rain.

For two hours, the rain drummed on the plastic sheets over our heads. Then the clouds cleared.

At sunset we strolled back to the cabin, bringing the warm jug of *yagé*, and we gathered what we’d need for the ceremony. We made mamecócós by cutting the

plants and bundling their stems with twine, leaving the tongue-like leaves free to rustle. In the cabin I hung up hammocks for Dave and Joaquín and me. As I was making mine fast to a roof beam, a bat flew by, brushing my hand. I thought: *That’s funny. I’ll have to ask Joaquín what that means.* I felt a mild sting: the animal had touched me with a claw.

As if on cue, the black dog, Cuacuillo, jumped up onto the floor of the hut, where he knew he wasn’t supposed to go, and trotted around, wagging his tail, daring me to try something. I chased him off twice, then smudged the area with a bundle of sage I’d brought from the States. Wafting the smoke around, blowing it, marking a sacred space. Keeping demons away. A game of Let’s Pretend for grown-ups. Cuacuui kept his distance.

Dave came back from the family hut with the news that Joaquín would join us around midnight. Dave and I painted red designs on our faces with achiote. He added Waorani zigzag designs representing lightning to his arms. I added Norse runes to the backs of my hands, Algiz for protection and Ansuz for vision. We were ready to go. As night fell, we lit a kerosene lamp and poured our first cups of *yagé*.

I intoned, “Great Spirit, please bless this ceremony. Show us good, strong visions. Grant us the power to heal ourselves and others.” I choked down the lukewarm brew.

Dave proclaimed, “Eyes of the divine immortals, gaze upon my heart and reflect my devotion to the truth. With this drink I seek to connect myself with the highest, bravest, and most virtuous powers in the universe. I dedicate this drink and this ceremony to their greatness!” He blew on the surface of his *yagé* and then, without pausing, drank the liquid to the dregs.

Whether a short time or long time passed, no one knows, but then Dave was murmuring a melody and my visionary capacity clicks on like a TV set. Thin white lines fan out in the darkness—eldritch gossamer, psychic spider-silk, faerie axons linking the world into a macro-mind. I’m listening to Dave and watching the lines, when *Bam!* the face of a giant bat appears right in front of mine, very detailed, extremely real—bared fangs in its open maw, a leaf-shaped nose, huge ears, glossy eyes staring into my soul.

Dave told me Ignacio Chimbo told him, “If something scary appears, sing and it’ll disappear.” So I sing,

*Hee-ye-hey, hey, ya-ha-ha,  
hey, hee-ye-hey, hey, ya-ha-ha.*

The vision doesn’t disappear. The face doesn’t move a muscle. But the terrifying snarl is now a broad grin. I grin back. I begin to have a bat trip. The bat spirit transmits bat thoughts to me, bat ideas, bat language.

“There’s no need to be afraid of the dark,” he advises. “Fear of the dark is a weakness you humans have.”

“All right.”

“It’s OK to be upside-down. We bats sussed it out long ago. It’s no big

deal.”

“Cool.”

“We get a kick out of scaring humans for the fun of it. We just have to fly around, and you scream. You-all are easy to scare. Especially women.”

“Good to know.”

“And, finally, we experience many different kinds of love.”

With that, the face vanishes. For a moment, I’m flying in the body of a bat in a cave filled with many others. Then I’m back in the hammock.

Earlier, I wondered whether bats were good or evil omens. Now it’s obvious it depends on the species, the community, the individual. Bats have their own myths, traditions, politics. At least, those are the human words that come closest to what they have.

A song comes to me:

*Bat love is so wild,*

*Cloud love is so mild.*

*Cloud love is so wild,*

*Bat love is so mild.*

*The clouds are so high. The valley’s so low.*

*The birds are so high. The mice are so low.*

*Mice love is so low, hey, hey, hey, hey.*

*Bird love is so high, hey, hey, hey, hey.*

*What do you know? You coming to see the show?*

*What’s under the snow? What’s under the snow.*

*If you wanna see the show, it’s under the snow.*

*Purple flowers appearing,*

*green, green grass is appearing.*

*Purple flowers appearing,*

*green, green grass is appearing.*

I tell Dave about the visions and wonder whether what I saw was “a bat spirit,” or “the bat spirit,” or the spirit of that particular species. Dave’s not sure either.

Outside the hut, the patch of night sky fills with black, shiny eyes, a visitation of bodiless beings from outer space come to take a look at us, curious about a pair of humans beginning to learn to see with their minds.

Looking around with my mind at what humans call the spirit world, I see an infinite ecosystem populated by infinite species of beings. The place is so huge you might never see members of the same species twice. Unencumbered by matter, they shape-shift and move fast. Simultaneously, amid that chaos, particular spirits and groups of spirits associate with certain groups of humans over time. Like the gods, like Thor who visited the first time I drank. And the spirits of the aná, the plumed-and-cascabelled magic wands of the Cora shamans in Mexico, which are, at the same time, doctors, hawks, and rattlesnakes, and which bring energetic medicines

of the earth and air.

My vision drills into the ground beside the hut. Warped, fanged, spiky humanoids are walking around down there. One, pale and muscular, is sucking energy out of Aguilar with a gray magnetic beam that comes out of its hands, face, and chest, and rises up through the ground to connect with the man sleeping in the other hut. It used the snake as a mouth to strike our neighbor and begin to feed off him. I watch this predator. It can’t see me. I analyze it, assess its strength. I want to attack it, drive it away. But it’s underground: I can’t reach it.

*Of course those things have to eat just as we do. To counteract them would be to disrupt the cosmic balance. But we work on behalf of the humans. And there’s no cosmic balance or imbalance, only flux, only change, only whirling energies.* That’s how it looks from here, as I stare into the swirling air.

What the shamans believe is true: disease is attack by invisible predators. The breast cancer that strikes women in my family, for instance. What we call disease is the perceptible dimension of the strike. Behind it is a hungry demon, gnawing, feeding—a lamprey that bears the sun in its gut, so that, in dying, we’re sucked into fire and light. A terrible gateway to infinity.

A “demon” is whatever preys on *us*.

Dave interrupts my thoughts. “Did I tell you about Wepe? No, right?”

“No, please do.”

“He’s a Waorani elder. Lives in the village of Quehueri’ono, where I was three years ago. His name, Wepe, means blood. He told me about this thing that went down twenty-five years earlier. A missionary from the United States persuaded some Waoranis in another village to convert to Christianity. One of the converts, a guy named Humberto, showed up in Quehueri’ono with short hair, really fine city clothes, and a fat gold watch on his wrist, and started tryin’ to convert people. Wepe got in his face and yelled, ‘You’re not a Waorani! Where’s your long hair! Where’re your ears?’ All Waorani guys back then used to pierce their ears and stretch the lobes way out and put balsa-wood disks in them. ‘Where’re your ears?’

“Humberto said not all Waoranis pierced their ears or wore their hair long anymore. Something new was goin’ on! There was a new way of living in the world, and God had come to earth and died so all people everywhere could be saved from Hell!

“Wepe looks at him and goes, ‘You’re talkin’ shit! You’re not one of us! You’re a demon!’

“Humberto’s like, ‘No, I’m a Waorani like you. And I’m here to tell you God loves you.’

“Wepe goes, ‘Well, if you’re a Waorani, you’ll know how to make a good spear.’

“Humberto’s like, ‘I know how to make a good spear.’

“So they took machetes and an axe and went into the forest. They came to a chonta palm tree. That’s what the Waorani use for their spears. It’s a food plant—it has fruits—and it’s also the hardest wood in the forest! So Humberto cut the tree down with Wepe watchin’ him. Humberto started makin’ a spear, but Wepe didn’t



and I dance and sing:

*One love is high! One love is high! One love is high!*

Stepping barefoot up the wooden stairs of the hut, I observe drily that strong religious feeling has two related forms. In the first, we feel that everything is beauty, truth, goodness. God is love and the universe breathes in concert. Predator and prey evolve together; dreadful enmities mask joyful conspiracies of compassion. In the second form of strong religious feeling, we identify with this great harmony, and if someone else acts against us, they're acting against it, and we're capable of responding with extreme fury.

Back in my hammock, I mutter to Dave, "That wasn't me dancing, it was the universe dancing through me. I remember a Sanskrit word, *lila*, divine playfulness. The cosmos is a carnival and a game of matter-and-energy tag. We're all enjoying ourselves amazingly! Within *lila* is lawfulness: we strive toward good, away from evil; our souls yearn for good like green plants yearn for the sun."

Dave says, "When you were roaring out there, you reminded me of this wicked stone carving I saw in the Museum of Natural History in New York. It's called 'Krishna killing the horse demon,' and it's got Krishna just *whaling* on this evil monster, kicking it in the belly whilst jamming his elbow in its mouth."

"I'd like to see that. We're all Krishna, right?"

"Yeah. Speaking of evil monsters, check *this* out. This happened a few months ago. Five Argentine businessmen bought this friggin' oil company called Maxus that's taking over and polluting Waorani lands. The businessmen were flying to Ecuador to take control of the company when their light plane mysteriously fell out of the sky and they all died!"

"Wow, crazy."

At that moment, we hear movement from the direction of the family hut. A patch of light glides, bouncing, across the ground. Joaquín climbs the steps, greets us, sits in a hammock, clicks off his flashlight. He jokes with us, prays over a cup of *yagé*, drinks it, wraps himself in a blanket and goes to sleep.

Dave and I each have another cup too and explore the esoteric dimensions of the Maxus executives' crash. We suspect that somewhere a Waorani shaman might be laughing up his nonexistent sleeve. Or maybe it was just a mechanical failure. As humans, we're not smart enough to figure it out, so we sing. Dave picks up the musical bow he made the day before. He puts one end up against the corner of his open mouth, a resonating chamber, and he twangs the string. Then he shows me how to do it. Changing the volume of space inside the mouth changes the overtones.

*What are you going to know?  
When are you going to know it?  
We sing and play the bow,  
ho, ho, ho, ho.*

Dave says, "Joaquín said something really intense when we were in Lagarto Cocha. He said last time he was there, he drank *yagé* by himself, and *the ghost of his grandfather* came to him and said he should go and live there, where he can lead a proper, traditional life, hunting and fishing, without any interference from the outside world. So he wants to move to Lagarto Cocha, and maybe found a village!

"He was talking about it, and Carlitos was like, 'What'll you do if the Peruvians invade?' And Joaquín was like, 'I'll go up a stream and brew *yagé* and summon demons, and the demons'll finish off the Peruvians. No problem!'"

"I hope his plan to move there works out. It'd be great to drink deeper in the forest. The deeper the better, you know?"

"For real. And, bro, I'm so sorry you didn't get to come along to Lagarto Cocha. So check this out. A few years ago I took a journey with some Quichua friends deep into their territory to a tiny settlement of six huts high up off the ground on stilts. It was twilight when we got there, and the guys there were just about to drink *yagé*!" They invited us to join the ceremony. We said, 'Sure!' We hadn't eaten that day anyway.

"A couple hours into the ceremony, I was doing great, but one of my Quichua friends, this guy I've known since we were both eleven, started to go *crazy* with pain, *insisting* that the shaman had driven an *iron spike* into the top of his head! He was *yelling* at the shaman to pull the spike out. The shaman totally ignored him and went on singing! The guy climbed down off the hut, and these other Quichuas tried to calm him down, but he kept on sobbing and falling down and screaming. He climbed back up on the hut and *pleaded* with the shaman to pull out the spike. The shaman was like, 'Be quiet, you're just making it worse,' and went on singing. He never admitted or even denied spiking my friend's head. People suffer *hard* sometimes when they drink *yagé*!"

Crickets and cicadas wrap us in their intricate music. A bird flutes, a frog peeps. I flash back to my ceremony with Joaquín and Lázaro, and the pain that brought me so close to death. I flash forward to my upcoming trip back to the States. I imagine telling someone there the story of the shaman who may or may not have spiked a guy's head. I think about this journey of mine, my latest adventure in the southern lands, and about my goal of becoming a shaman and writing about it. I can put all this in my book. Every story's made up of other stories, each full of idiosyncratic details, exquisitely complex. Stories within stories within stories and songs. I sing,

*What are you trying to do?  
Where have you been?  
Who did you meet while you were there?  
What did they talk about?  
Hey, hey, hey.*

Dave says, "Hey, hey, hey, what do you say we pray for Aguilar?"  
"Sure, let's do it."

Singing hard, shaking our leaf fans like trees in a storm, we raise a healing

prayer for Aguilar. I ask Jesus to help. Waves of force flow to the patient, supporting him in fighting the poison.

Later we fall silent.

A stick cracks.

Another.

“*¡Vaca!*” hisses Dave. Rufino’s three cows are back. Evil or good, they’re hell on Joaquín and Maribel’s crops. Silently, we spring to our feet, cross the floor, ease ourselves to the ground. We whisper to the two dogs, black Cuaucuillo and his pale, skinny brother Potente, to come with us. We arm ourselves with heavy sticks and creep toward the invaders. When we get close, they see us and we shout “*¡Vaca!*” and throw the sticks at them. The bovids turn around with a thumping of hooves and begin to exit the scene. The dogs zoom in, barking and snapping, driving them back along the trail they came on.

We primates lope back to the hut with our upright stances, our opposable thumbs, our big brains lit up by *yagé*.

Dave says, “I’m gonna write an article on how cows are destroying Amazonian shamanism.” He sings in Spanish, “I’m going back to the Waoranis . . . Waoranis don’t have cows.”

“Do Waoranis drink *yagé*?”

“Not usually. Nenke just gets possessed by the jaguar spirit. When I was recording their songs, I recorded some of his trances. When Nenke wants to know something that’s happening far away, or is gonna happen in the future, he goes into a trance. First thing is, he gets cranky in the morning. He doesn’t eat all day. In the nighttime he lies down and starts friggin’ singing and roaring! He’s got a special connection with the jaguar, ’cause when he was ten or eleven, he got separated from his family and lived with jaguars for a year and a half. They accepted him ’cause he could already hunt and everything.”

I remember what Rufino told me about the jaguars roaring at me from across the river, saying they wanted to be with me. I wonder again if I can join them someday. I consider telling the story, but I don’t want to one-up Dave. Anyway, I like his Waorani talk.

“One time when I was there,” Dave goes on, “Nenke channeled a song the wild Waoranis have. There are one or two groups of wild Waoranis that have no contact with anyone else. Through the jaguar spirit, Nenke picked up on one of their songs. The words go like this:

*When we are happy, we sing like birds.*

*When we are angry, we kill like jaguars.*

*Whoever thinks about coming to look for us feels weak and sad,*

*because he knows if he meets us,*

*he’ll never see his family again.*

*Tiriviriviriviri, terererererererererere.*

“Whoa.”

“Check this out. Two years ago some guy hired by the oil company killed a young Waorani who was organizing resistance to oil exploitation. The Waorani was riding on top of a ranchera bus and the thug went up there and shot him. The police said he’d fallen off and hit his head when the ranchera hit a hole in the road, but they wouldn’t let anybody do an autopsy.

“A while after that, I was working with another Waorani to translate a tape of one of Nenke’s jaguar trances. It was from six months before the killing. As this guy was helping me translate it, he suddenly bursts out crying, *super* hard. I’m like, ‘What’s wrong?’ He goes, ‘It’s what Nenke says on the tape! Nenke says, “Young Waoranis shouldn’t travel alone. I see a white man on top of a ranchera. He’s got a gun. It’s not a long gun, it’s a short gun. Watch out!”’”

“That’s fuckin’ intense.”

“It is, right?” Dave rolls an American Spirit cigar for himself in a half-dry banana leaf and lights it. “Nenke. He told me once, if I ever have trouble with the Devil, I should think of him, and he’ll be there. A while after that, I had this dream I was in a house with some kids, and they were showing me some technology they had. Then we found out the Devil was coming. I went out to face him, but as soon as I walked out the door, I realized he was already in the house behind me! I turned around and saw the Devil! And I was like, ‘Nenke!!!’ And Nenke appeared! And the Devil *blew apart* into all these fragments!”

“Cool!”

“One time I was hanging out in Nenke’s hut. He wasn’t around. Some Waorani guys wanted to dress me as a traditional Waorani, naked with a chambira string tying up my foreskin. But I don’t have a foreskin, ’cause I’m circumcised. So I was just lying there naked, being real cool, hanging out with these guys in a hammock, when this *sizzling hot* Waorani girl walks in and looks at me, and I got a hard-on! These guys cracked up so bad, one of ’em fell out of the hammock!” Dave rocks with laughter, then goes on. “Waorani guys have this crazy game they play before they go to sleep at night. They all try to grab each other’s dicks. They’re not gay or anything. It’s just the funniest thing to them.”

“I noticed that. I had my dick grabbed twice. Freaked me out.”

“That game makes them practice dodging—and that’s a skill that can save their lives! Think about it. If you can’t dodge some guy trying to grab your dick, what’ll happen when somebody throws a spear at you?”

“Far out.” I nod. The dick-grabbing makes more sense now. I wonder how long I’d last in a spear fight. Probably a second and a half. Unless I was possessed by the jaguar spirit.

“Waoranis are totally self-reliant,” Dave goes on. “One time we were walking through the forest, and this one Waorani guy started *screaming and rolling on the ground*. The other guys laughed at him like crazy and kept on walking. I said, ‘What happened to that dude? Aren’t you going to stop and help him?’ And they said, ‘Naw, he just got bit by a snake.’ I saw the guy a couple days later in the village. He looked all right. Frickin’ Waoranis will basically take your idea of what you think people are capable of, and *completely fuck with it*, with good reason.”

"I can see that. It's like I was thinking—humans can have any kind of customs. Just like, we can believe anything at all. And everyone's belief system is equally accurate for the particular world they live in, right? And there are infinitely many types of human society possible. We haven't seen even a fraction of them yet!"

"And everything we do and say now, Nate, is going to subtly influence everything that comes later—the entire future of the human race, the world, the universe!"

"So we'd better do it well, right?"

"We'd better do it impeccably!" Dave proclaims. "Like our sublime ancestors did! Their thoughts are still with us, their voices, and their auspicious, brave deeds." He breaks into wordless song, rich and ancient. I close my eyes and I'm sprinting through a vast, semitransparent labyrinth in the form of a maple tree, smashing through its walls.

More stories and more songs. In what McKenna calls "the cool night of the mind," the world tells itself to itself through us. I quote my phrases from last year: *There's only one story. How well do you know the story?* We weave wavy webs of weird words and whirled worlds; drunk on dreams, we warp and woof the interminable story. And the dawn breaks.

In the middle of one of Dave's Waorani tales, I recall someone's affliction with nightmarish images of sex and violence. Too high to fully identify with that person, I feel compassion for him. I'm a little concerned I might become him again, but either way, I'm not too worried. Right now, I just want to dance. So when Dave finishes the story, I go out and whirl like a dervish.

Above me, bats are breakfasting on crunchy bugs. I look up at them. One zooms close to me. I take it as a sign and stare straight up in the middle of the sky. Dizziness clobbers me with the dizzy club—it doesn't hurt, but it scrambles me. I stagger-dance off on an erratic, bat-flight-like course before plowing into the soft ground with my knees and hands. Embarrassed to fall in front of Dave, I jump up and do it all again, but trying not to fall. Same spin, same look at the same sky, maybe same bat, same look straight up, but more careful now; same dizziness—being careful didn't work—; same vespertilian stagger-dash, same plow into the ground, same embarrassment.

I struggle to my feet and mentally flip the script, intending to do the whole thing deliberately this time—spin-sky-bat-stare-dizzy-fall. But accidentally falling on purpose proves impossible, and I jerk to a standstill, knees bent, bare feet far apart in the damp grass, the green in my tunic visible in the dawn light, the world swirling around me with echoing birdcalls, the hum of insects, the chittering of bats.

I straighten up. Dave remarks, "Bro, it looked like those bats were pulling you down!"

I parse the sentence. I think there's some disconnect between his thought and mine. "No, they were just up there eating bugs. They were cool."

"I mean those bats that were flying in front of your face." Under his black curls, his dark eyes are earnest.

"Flying *in front of my face?*" That doesn't sound right.

"Yeah. One flew down about a foot in front of your nose each time you fell, and both times it looked like it was pulling you down."

"I had no idea."

I frown-smile at the bats that zip through the blue air, knowing they can read my expression, wondering what else they could tell me.

As Dave and I stroll back toward the cabin, I remark, "Speaking of bats, right after I saw that bat spirit vision I told you about, I saw the sky outside all filled with shiny black eyes like bat eyes."

"Yeah?" Dave says. "Man, I saw those eyes too. It looked like they were checkin' us out."

We pile into our hammocks to rest. We sway back and forth, drifting, listening, watching the layered palm-frond ceiling swing back and forth. People in the other hut are stirring.

Toucans yelp in the forest. A male oropendola down by the river squawk-chimes like weeping liquid bells. Every time you turn your ears to listen, there's a new set of sounds. The nighttime frogs have fallen silent, it being dawn.

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Nathan D. Horowitz



*Many Musics, Eleventh Series  
The Tangled Gate (Continued)*

*x. Creature Carnival, Part 1*

Some nights I would wonder my  
half-dreaming way deep into the stars  
so high above my small, prone form,  
& I would think: do they too expect  
suffering more, & marvels less, as they  
mature to whatever they best become?

I traveled these weird, wonderful  
White Woods for years. Sent as a  
bony, crooked youth into a world  
I didn't know how strange twas, to *save*  
it from I knew not what, nor little how.  
Carried in my very jaw the world's  
token & reminder how it is a laughing game  
with rules no man contrived, or controls.

Yet I would wonder into those million  
speckled lights if they had been revealed  
an easier path for love to be shared,  
& received. What potion, from which  
alien leaves & berries; what soft, strong  
god suckling; what fine dreams did  
fill them, wake with them, flow  
among them, build better their worlds?

My time among the Creatures had  
hinted something to me, caused me  
to feel beyond my own eyes & bones,  
compelled me to grasp of new marvels  
in this world, & their fragility, & what  
half-known powers in me could do  
to protect, to teach, to perpetuate.



The strange dark-haired girl had let me  
find strength to protect one closer  
to myself, even if not that close,  
even if my protecting may have been  
more an obscure lesson than reality.

But I still wasn't sure, still didn't know,  
still looked to those colorful tents  
in the distance that cool morning &  
did not imagine marvels waiting there.  
Only men to be avoided as ever.

Until I saw someone approaching me  
from there, coming down the road  
*hmmmming* what my ears had slowed,  
as always, to detect in the air,  
all around me. But then there it  
was, this ancient wordless song,  
like an open hand if I could grasp it,  
if I could keep mine own in it.

A bear walking upright, no higher  
than partway to my knee, *hmmmming* &  
smiling right to me. Wearing a vague  
sort of warm black hat, & a neat  
little black bowtie. Black eyes but  
otherwise snow's first white.

I did not stand, as I had learned  
I was too tall for Creatures to behold  
calmly. But I pulled up into a crouch, &  
opened my hands as gesture he  
would understand. Yet he came right  
up to me, & I heard a pleased titter  
in my jaw. He offered me a handbill,  
& then a wave of his paw, & then was  
returning whence he came.

A sheet of thick, rough paper, &  
figures upon it made by a coal or  
charred stick. Yet the image of  
those tents, clear upon it, &  
the words "X's Carnival of  
Mysteries & Wonders" in legible,  
simple form. Much smaller below,  
these were the words writ:  
*"For those lost."*

I stood. I stretched. I drank  
plentifully from my water sack, as  
though my usual rationing was for a time  
now past. Dusted myself off,  
swung my knapsack on my shoulder,  
& set off at a good walk to those  
tents. Unhesitant, unslowed. Unsure  
why yet unsure this uncertainty.

There was a wide entrance to this  
Carnival, as though all welcomed, rich  
or poor. The sign that greeted me,  
that I passed under, said the same  
as my handbill. I slowed to a walk,  
since I did not know if men trucked  
here among these wonderful Creatures.

Yet no man met me, or was nearby to  
be seen. Instead, twas a curly furred  
pink pup & her lovely white pony  
companion—each spangled quietly  
in shiny baubles, each no taller than  
that bear had been—that met  
me next. No words but what smiles  
do in their stead. A wish to welcome,  
to lead me further in.

I hesitated. Too tall. Too much a man  
in this small magick.  
*Too much of me.*

They stopped, gazed me kindly,  
remembered in my mind how I had  
held & comforted so many of them  
in the cold, how I had found  
them the Path of General Warmth.  
How the tiny one in my jaw had  
been taken bravely by me away  
from cruel captors.  
*This all mattered.*

I relaxed, a little, standing there, closed  
my eyes, tried to be something good,  
generous, something a part of me was,  
& the rest looming large over it. A cackle  
sounded deep in my mind, far deeper  
than my jaw, there was a nudge,  
& I opened my eyes, wide, wider.

The white pony & pink poodle were  
looking at me face to face. Willing me  
climb on the pony, & *come along.*

I climbed on. Now them six feet  
high, or me barely twelve inches,  
I climbed on & rode along.

There were many tents & booths  
along the way, mysteries & wonders  
I was not bound for then. They  
were eager to bring me to past where  
a blue & pink piglet was making  
strange tricks with a pack of cards,  
catching my eye. Nodding me touch  
my head, where I discovered a tall  
hat of her strange cards, arrived & formed.

Past a pink & white elephant tending  
a forest of beautiful pine cones &  
lovely blooming plants. Past a  
candle of every color, taller than I  
was now, flame swirling around me  
in sweet, sharp, soft scents.

Past a black striped White Tiger  
with blue eyes like the furthest  
unvisited seas. And so many others.  
*Hmming* me along, welcoming me,  
*hurry, go & see!*

A tent taller than the rest, much taller,  
a beautiful white like the bow-tied bear,  
its entrance strangely shaped, almost like  
the ancient Gate I sought on the  
timeless Island. And yet we passed  
freely through & I was arrived where  
they all wished me, a glare & a darkness  
confusing my eyes a long moment. Yet  
no longer afraid. I touched my tall playing  
card hat, still atop my head, smiled, &  
trusted whatever good was to come.

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#### *xi. Creature Carnival, Part 2*

There is scent before I open my eyes.  
Many things in it. Feces, sex play,  
things moldering. These Woods consume  
to create. The blood society of living,  
mortal things, perishing soon or sooner  
by claw & tooth. But no men. Not yet.  
Not here the Beast that out-thinks  
his prey, & smiling to it. Kills for practice.  
Kills for trophy. Men will come & awake  
something in these Woods. The fear  
*of casual possession.*

Open my eyes. I'm on the ground. There  
is no great tent before or around me.  
Tis a great clearing, tallest Woods on  
all sides. But. There is, at the far  
edge, a . . . platform? On it, a stage?  
I stand, gingerly, remembering I am  
likely inches tall. Walk toward it.

Looks anciently wooden. The stage  
is at my eyes' height. I stroke its  
edge, warm, *hmming*. This is  
living wood still, when at rest.

The clearing is empty, even of my  
former companions. Something here  
they wish to show me. No men  
here but me. Yet they are compelled.  
The Creatures? The Woods themselves?  
I try to *feel* something deeper here.  
Listen for the cackle in my jaw.  
She is quiet but, I feel, not absent.  
Cares me as friend. Would have me  
uncertain, alert for the telling of it all.

I veer toward the center of the clearing,  
walk its grassy way. Test each step,  
then less so. How does a man teach  
himself to learn from his blood & bones?

It begins thus: *I am a man*. I come  
here as no other. I am welcomed.  
I am . . . needed? I look all around  
this clearing, breathe slower, a beat,  
& speak.

“Show me. Let me see why I am brought  
here to your special place.”

A pause. It lingers. I wait. Slow  
my impatient breath & wait.

I'm not sure how the clearing fills  
so full, or so sudden, nor quite  
what kind of furry little beings  
it fills with. Long antennae & tails.  
Oversized beautiful eyes. Wearing  
patched together clothes like they  
are not sure for why.

I am tall among them but not  
overly so. They don't fear me.  
*They don't know fear*. Just the novel  
look of my bare face & longer torso.  
Close to me all around & wanting  
me to see what's come.

I look toward the stage platform,  
but now tis a cluster of Islands.  
I count. Six of them, close, dreaming?  
These lands are living, like Creatures,  
how wondrously so? Dreaming close  
in a wide, wide sea. At peace.

What falls from the sky strikes  
the shallows of one of them. A sound,  
a splash. They wake, these Creature Islands,  
they wake to it & are terrified.  
They terror & fly from each other.

I watch all but one flee far,  
& this one seems to grasp me,  
& my strange fellows, *to come along*,  
*come in, come with me, something's*  
*begun*.

We are pulled, lifted, & carried,  
through ancient Woods just like these,  
deeper & deeper on this Island,  
until we come to something, a structure  
so massive it fills the skies above  
entirely. A Gate. *The Tangled Gate*.

Now lifted through & swept within like  
this ever our dance, past a  
fountain ancient, yet clear water,  
down paths whose walls rise high  
above us, made of vines & stones.

Come, & less so all of these  
furry smiling strangers & me, &  
more so my partner the Island  
is compelling just *my* torso,  
holding just *my hands*.

Come of a sudden to a cave &  
into its blackness, & for a moment  
I see & feel the violent bloodbath  
for gods, cunts, & lands that is  
ever & all of human history, & I  
am now screaming & cursing,  
pushed through & past it, & come  
of a sudden to a very quiet place.

Stop. I look around. Tis a Great Cavern.  
A tree its center blindingly tall.  
And everywhere, *everywhere*, all the  
Creatures I have known. Awake.  
Aware. Waiting. That splash in the  
waters above had done this.  
They wait for . . .

Me? No. *Her*. A girl's face, pretty,  
kind, sad. I watch this face mature  
from round & pudgy to slenderer,  
her body matures around her,  
the Creatures have awaited her  
take her place among them, at  
their head, & they flow in & around  
her like sea foam, like happy melody.

She lives in this cavern with them,  
though somewhere else too. She visits  
& they receive her happy, unsure why  
she departs. How this is her dreaming,  
from a remote place, staying as she can.

She *hmmms* with all of them, keening  
for hours, days at a time, & slowly  
they know whence she comes.  
Where men struggle, explain cruelty  
when they cannot sing together.

It darkens her, that world, saddens  
her, & they wish to help. Help this  
loved friend amongst them.

They learn she likes when they dance,  
when they tumble. She likes their  
casual acrobatics. Uncertain what  
any of it means, they try out  
tricks & stunts to delight her.

It becomes something, in men's tongue  
she calls it *Carnival*. They sort  
through themselves for the highest  
jumpers, nimblest dancers, touches  
of something new & novel, not in form,  
but *intent*.

Throughout this place, a happiness  
builds up, spangles out. This becomes  
something they do together, to please  
her. Then to please each other.  
Orchestrate how they entertain her,  
how one marvel reveals the next.

A night the moon so full above,  
the Great Cavern lit every speck.  
Creatures dancing, tumbling, riding  
one another for novel sport, singing  
songs in her tongue, whatever they mean.  
She laughs. She loves them.  
*She must share this.*

Over the course of many, many  
dreams, many frolicks & songs,  
many slow teachings, she gives them  
to learn her tongue, many full &  
dark moon nights.

She will let them go. She will keep them.  
She will send them into the cruel  
bloodsport world of men, its lonely  
villainy, iterate them into this world  
to sing & dance & entertain.  
*Find who will heed. Find who will learn.*

I feel now lifted & carried through  
miles & years, like a speck, like a  
precious speck, to arrive back  
here, in this clearing, & reckon  
that all I had just seen & been  
has not yet happened. The Islands  
have not yet spooked & fled.

I sit, hard, on the grassy ground,  
& wonder what am I to do,  
with all this. How to make it come  
to pass. *How to make this world.*

Close my eyes. Hold myself in a  
crouch in this wonderful place.  
*Please. Tell me. Please.*

Open my eyes. Pink poodle. White pony.  
Many many Creatures now around  
me. Loving me, that's what. *That's all  
ever what.* I stand up. A little  
taller than them now, but OK still.

Want to say. *So want to say.* What?

I *hmmm*, as so often before.  
I *hmmm*, for all they've shown me.  
I *hmmm*, for what I have to do.  
I *hmmm*, for how much I love them.  
I *hmmm*, for how much I love this world.  
I *hmmm*, for how I will find a way to save it.



\* \* \* \* \*



## *The Dead Cat Incident*

[Prose]

*November 27, 2000  
David Van Thorn, Attorney-at-Law  
No. 1 Elm Street, Suite 201  
Astoria, OR 97103*

Dear Mr. Van Thorn,

Thank you for your offer to discuss the “cat incident” with me, Police Report #20001781. I am writing to you instead of visiting, in the expediency of time, and so that you have a record of my statement.

I feel that I have been wrongfully caught up in somebody else's business, and put under great hardship for an issue in which I was only trying to act as a Good Samaritan. I was unaware of the surrounding situation. I request that you throw this ticket out of the books, and release me from this legal entanglement. At worst, I would ask that the ticket be reduced to a minor misdemeanor, with a small fine in the \$100 range, in contrast to the exorbitant fine of \$3,672, which has been levied.

I apologize for having this issue a reality at all, and for wasting the valuable resources of yourself, and the court system. If you can waive or reduce the violation, I would greatly appreciate it, and request that you do so before Nov. 30, 2000 at 5:30 PM. At that time I will be appearing before the judge and entering a plea of not guilty, as you have previously advised. I will also enter my statement at that time, if allowed.

As I may have told you already, I also work with the government. I am an engineer for the Roads Dept. in Thurston Co., WA., and supervise a crew of inspectors working county-wide. I am familiar with process and violations. We deal with each situation with some measure of individuality, particularly when the issues are minor, and there is no threat to public or private safety, or a threat to property.

In Astoria, Oregon here, I own a house, am putting two teenagers through the high school, my wife is employed with a respected organization, and I run a business manufacturing hovercrafts for government use. I have had this business for about five years here, and spend considerable money in town both for parts and labor, frequently employing two area craftsmen.

As the owner of a small business, I am constantly on the red line—currently forced to move out to a higher rent shop—and, as such, would be completely devastated by the fine as it stands. I would be forced to close up shop, put my tools in storage, and fire two employees. Please prevent this one puny incident from having a

deep and lasting effect on myself, and on the community. I am hoping to turn Astoria into a manufacturing, training, and touring center for hovercrafts. I have had considerable difficulty to date, and am unable to handle one more blow.

Thank you for your consideration of the facts in this matter. I can be reached anytime between now and the arraignment date at (360) 555-0100. Please call and let me know what you think can be done, or how I should proceed.

The following is the sequence of events as they took place the morning of Nov.13, 2000:

1) When I pulled into the yard area of the Bumble Bee Shipyard (my shop being in the building over the river), I saw Officer Brian Sloty alongside the entryway, and slowed to 2 MPH, attempting to make eye contact, and see if he wished to discuss anything with me. As I received no acknowledgment, I proceeded.

2) I pulled into the building and observed a dead cat in the entryway.

3) At this point, my employee John Overholuse did not come out of my shop to discuss any issue with me, as he was wearing hearing protection, and was unaware of my return.

4) Then I acted impulsively and moved the dead animal to clean up the public entryway, and hastened back to the needs of the fellow working for me. By “moved,” I mean that the corpse was thrown into the river at the end of the building. I believed that this “trash” would remain in place indefinitely, as is the case with all other trash dropped by other locals about the facility. I frequently have customers coming by who do not need to see a rotting dead cat.

5) After the “incident,” the Officer came down to my shop and inquired as to the whereabouts of the dead animal—*for evidence*, he said. He wanted to know if I’d buried it and where. I had to confess that I had hurled the body into the river and the outgoing tide. I then took about a half hour assisting the Officer in attempting to retrieve the thing, and even offered the use of a rowboat for the retrieval, which was refused. The Officer then asked for my driver’s license, and took additional information. I resumed work.

6) The Officer then returned in approximately another hour, and cited me with the \$3,672 ticket. I was surprised beyond belief.

7) After the Officer left the premises, the dead cat was retrieved by its owner from the end of the building. The animal was taken to the Animal Control department. They would not issue a receipt for the carcass.

8) The Officer was informed by the cat owner that the animal had been dispatched to Animal Control. The Officer would give no written acknowledgment of the animal retrieval, nor would he retract the ticket, even though the little body had been recovered. He was noted to be chuckling and giggling over the fact that I had been issued this ticket. How professional is that?

9) Since then, it has been noted that the Officer wrongfully imagines that I had, and have, an “attitude” in spite of my citizen’s efforts to assist the Officer. He expressed this to the building’s owner, Johnny Terribocia. The Officer: *This guy doesn’t like me*. I have never given any indication to that effect, and am confused as to the

origin of the comment. I would hope that the Officer’s personal self-image is not an influence in this issue, which is more of a life-or-death issue to me, rather than one for humor.

Thank you for your attention to this situation. Again, I request that this matter be kept out of the court system, and dealt with as a minor misdemeanor at most, or not at all. Please contact me with your conclusions with all haste. Thank you.

*Sincerely,*

*C.B.*

*Best Coast Hovercraft Inc.*

*69 Main Street*

*Astoria, OR 97103*

*Cell Phone: (360) 555-0100*

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My pen has been slathering words designed to politely confute the asinine local municipal bureaucrats, in an attempt to save my ass from digging my grave deeper. I have taken up groveling obsequiously for mercy to these pricks. The “cat incident” fell upon me from the cosmos at a time of intense other complications. Life was cruel and dark. To say the following is a bad whine is rather understated. This is a whole rotten vineyard.

I borrowed 12,000 dollars to start a hovercraft charter business, consisting of a 6-passenger hover and my large balls. At the modest speed of 45 MPH, just a half an hour into its maiden voyage, the boat exploded, nearly killing my two passengers.

I was being evicted from my shop so the building could be torn down. This, after spending over a thousand dollars to bring the place into a habitual state. I had a hovercraft hull half-built, and two employees of dubious character.

My seediest employee, a welder, was suddenly extradited to a small county jail in the sagebrush territories of Washington State, after a routine traffic check had found numerous warrants out for his arrest. His parole violations stemmed from a grand larceny charge. I must have missed that on the resume.

My current client proved to be a flaming alcoholic who wanted his boat finished two months early. That means that any profit had to go into additional labor, who would then no doubt work proportionately slower. First though, I had to pay \$500 ransom to the county judge to spring my welder, as “hunt’n season” was on, and His Honor was “look’n forward” to that new gas grill for the “elk camp.”

My other job decided to make me temporary boss of the department. A fellow employee, in an apoplectic fit of seething jealousy over this promotion, took a laundry list of my crimes to the Director, in an attempt to have me fired.

I was called to the carpet to explain complete disorganization of all paperwork and staff (maybe true), using county computer resources to run my own business (only half true), and sodomizing the janitor (no, not true).

When I went downtown, I received multiple \$20 tickets for illegal parking. Every time I moved the car to another illegal spot, I got another ticket. The Meter Maid had a wanted poster of me in her scooter.

At my lovely home, my manic daughter decided to take 19 credits in college. That landed her in the loony bin for the resulting suicidal/depressive stage of her bipolar syndrome cycle. My son signed up for an Advanced Marijuana Consumption class, hosted by the local gang at the 7-11, and went into a state of mood swings he must have learned from OJ Simpson. My wife of 24 years got two jobs. To celebrate her newfound independence, she piled all my clothes in the front yard and said she's keeping the dog. *Don't come back. Don't call.* This was an unexpected reward for years of artistic encouragement and financial support.

If the sun shown, I was in a shadow. If a bird sung on a branch to passer-bys, it defecated on me as I walked underneath. If I bought a scratch lottery ticket, it said I owed them \$2. My skin had broken out in hives that I scratched as vigorously as any fresh mosquito bite. I was chain smoking so hard I could barely breathe, and my teeth were permanently clenched in an 880 PSI bite. I thought I had the later stages of tetanus. The jaw muscles on the side of my face were so tight, they caused me to go deaf in one ear.

So I went to the emergency room. Filled out three hours of paperwork and got a plastic wristband. Ugly people with scabs scented the waiting room with sneezed viral spray. Dressed in a butt-wagging robe and laid on a stretcher, I was wheeled into a blue ceramic room.

*Now, Miss Underhill, the scrub surgeon said to me, We'll finally explore here, and find out if it really is your appendix that's causing this discomfort that you feel.* The scalpel glinted menacing in the light beam. As the gas mask closed on my face, the nurse got suspicious of the beard and checked my wristband. Miss Underhill was clutching her side in the other wing of the hospital, getting checked for an ear infection.

The tooth pressure of my dead man's grin had shattered a few of the back molars. My tongue thought it was on glass clean-up detail after a WrestleMania tailgate party. Emergency charged me \$400, and told me not to stress so much. Go see a dentist.

I went to the dentist. He was in a flat rush, working four chairs. Finally he pries my jaw open, knee on my chest, hands dripping with some other guy's shredded gums. He calls in everybody to look and have a laugh. UPS man wants to know where he can get those Halloween vampire teeth. Doc gives me a script for Valium, says, *No refills, don't come back.*

I eat a handful, then wander out into the traffic of the arterial, screeching cars swerving all around, billowing smoke from braking tires, flailing arms flipping me off. *Isn't this nice, I think, all the pretty cars. I am Jesus walking through traffic. I love everybody.*

In two more hours, near the noisy chip bags in the grocery store, I become

purple with irrational rage. Sweat beads on my face. *I NEED to KILL them ALL!!! Behead them, gut them, must wallow in gore and death! Hate, kill, dismember!*

I limp my brain out to the parking lot, and lock myself in the car. I just narrowly escaped grabbing the steak knife display and going berserk. Kinda yin/yang, these little yellow pills. I went from drooling idiot, to an ax murderer, in 120 minutes. Maybe I should have read the dose on the bottle.

Then this "cat incident" happened. My cries for justice in the letter to the Prosecutor went unanswered. As the last of my back teeth were fracturing, I appeared for the court date and took a seat in a pew. The pig Officer Snotty sat in a back row, grinning over his attempt to destroy what little remained of my life. Murder plans circulated through my mind like prime-time TV shows. Not something one should ruminate on when in a courtroom, but the Thought Police and their brain scanners are not fully on the job yet (except in airports).

The Judge is a huge man with a dog's face. His Honorable Judge Limerick. My turn on the docket comes up, alphabetically. *If you request an abatement, please make a statement,* said His Honor.

I mumble through my teeth, reasonably coherent. *It's all a hideous misunderstanding, I whimper. I meant no trouble, only cleaning up, not my cat. I offered my rowboat, am a respectable businessman, have pictures to prove it, the Prosecutor said he would plead my case . . .* Whimper, snivel.

His brow furrows at the mention of the Prosecutor. I instantly know I've made a grievous error, mentioning his obvious nemesis. I panic more, fighting off the urge to evacuate myself.

He begins: *Ah ha, the Prosecutor / wee shall see / before wee makes / our judicial decree.*

Then there is a loud noise as the Judge sucks in the rest of the air in the room. He stands to his twelve-foot height, seven feet wide. I am beneath a mountain of municipal magnificence, face to face with his shoelace. He continues:

*The final court date is now delayed,  
The fines incurred are briefly defrayed,  
Into the river did you callously fling,  
The disgusting carcass, dead cat thing,  
Now to this court, your punishment unpaid!*

He deflates. I leave a slug trail out of the room. Two weeks later I'm back in the hallowed Hall of Justice for the sentencing. Court is now in session. The Prosecutor is accidentally there to hang some scum, who bought vodka for children, then played nude musical chairs. The Mayor, I think. Lucky for him it's only a misdemeanor in this town.

The Prosecutor speaks eloquently on my behalf, I know not why. Some kind of lawyer's lapse into public service. The Judge is hard to convince that I won't lapse into recidivism, dump additional corpses into the river, like some cheap Mafia mammal movie. To keep me honest, I am sentenced to \$100 and 10 hours of

community service. Judge Limerick makes his pronouncement:

*Serve the time for the community good,  
Help the people in your neighborhood,  
When you are done, you will feel better,  
Send me the details in a certified letter,  
Do the right thing now, as you should.*

*If you fail in this task I've given,  
For all the good, for which I've striven,  
Then the full fine, oh you must pay,  
Plus 15%, for delinquent days.  
Debt, my boy, ain't much of a living.*

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Hence, my letter to the Judge two months later:

*January 29, 2001  
Judge Limerick  
Municipal Court  
Astoria, OR 97103*

Dear Judge Limerick,

This letter is in response to your request that I notify you of volunteer community service that I have performed prior to February 1<sup>st</sup>.

My name is C.B., a resident of Astoria, and an active community member. I was involved in an unfavorable situation with a dead cat back in November and, after much travail, came before you to discuss the details of said dead cat, a misplacement of the corpse in the river, and a resulting phenomenal ticket presented to me. The last judgment, made in this matter by yourself, awarded me \$100 in court costs and 10 hours of volunteer service in the community. This letter, then, is to report on that community service.

As recommended by your court, I called the Woman's Center and offered my services as clerical worker: phone answering, odd job labor, computer training, or any other needs they may have had. My request to volunteer was treated with suspicion. It was inferred that this was an attempt to further abuse misfortunate women. My age, gender, and imagined criminality supported their suspicion. My phone number was taken, and a statement made that some other person would be contacting me. This was early December; I have never heard from them to date.

Next, I called the Senior Services Center and offered the same services as I had to the Woman's Center, along with driving services, yard work, wood chopping, or any other manner of mental or physical labor. Again, I was answered with suspicion.

Con men, thieves, and perverts had preceded me. A cool statement was made that they would look into it and call me back.

Over the Christmas holiday, I drove out to Warrenton, and wrote down the number for Habitat for Humanity. I then called this number repeated times, leaving my contact numbers and a small verbal resume of my construction experience and carpentry skills. I have heard nothing from them. Despite their large sign inviting volunteers, I must assume they are fully staffed.

Following the advice of my wife, I then contacted a local Mental Counselor of great popularity. He deals with a wide range of clients, from old people to Vietnam vets. Following a half-hour talk with the Receptionist, I was assured that the Mental Counselor would contact me with some small chores in which I might assist. Apparently my confession of operating under the court system caused them to evaluate me as crazy as any straightjacket walk-in. The phone line on this end remains silent to date.

Undaunted by such rejection of my skills, I learn that there is a State Volunteer Agency. To this, then, I go. It is mid-January now, with the clock ticking. I state my request for ten hours, and am given five pages of forms to fill out. There is also a Book of Jobs to volunteer for, and I write many of these down. The Secretary deftly files my paperwork, and informs me that it will be sent to the Capitol in Salem. Once the paperwork is received there, I may or may not be approved to volunteer, in three weeks.

I entreat that I merely need ten hours, and I ask: *is there not something that does not require criminal screening that I can help with?* The secretary says that she'll talk to the Director of the Agency and call me back. Three days later she calls me back and informs me that the Director believes I can be put to immediate use at the Community Action Center or the Food Bank.

I call the Community Action Center, from my job in Olympia. The Volunteer Coordinator is highly suspicious that I am asking for only ten hours of work. I explain that I have had a minor infraction for which I am mitigating. The Volunteer Coordinator then insists that my clearance through the State Criminal Clearing-house be confirmed, including fingerprinting. I must wait the three weeks.

I call the Food Bank. Here is a kindly person who is dedicated to distributing food, on weekdays only. I say that I would be quite happy to come in on a Monday, my day off. But she says that they are very amply staffed on Mondays.

I suggest that I can catalogue all the materials on the computer, and write tracking and record-keeping programs. Well, they have two donated computers, but nobody knows how to use them. *I will train them, I say, even if it takes 50 hours. Well, things have been working pretty well without them, she says, the computers kinda complicates everything.* She continues that maybe I should try some other volunteer leads.

I call the Gray Elementary School. They have listed that they want Reading Helpers and Assistants in the computer room. I ask to talk to the Principal. *She is no longer with us, they tell me. How about the current Principal?* I ask. *Might I speak with that person?* No, but they would be happy to take a message. I state that I can be of

great value in the computer room, or alternately helping kids in reading.

The School Secretary is very hesitant and suspicious. *Do you have state clearance?* she wants to know. *Pending*, I say, *never been a criminal before*. Just a little white lie can't hurt much. *We'll call you*, she says. I can visualize the message on a pink Post-It note: *Jeffery Dahmer called and would like to help the children access pornographic sites on the Internet, and look up recipes for monkey meat. Interested?*

Silence reigns from the elementary school.

I call back the State Volunteer Agency. *What is the status of the paperwork?* I ask. *Oh . . . you again*, they say. *Well, we never actually sent that in, because it was so easy for you to volunteer at the Food Bank or the Community Action Center. Well, could you send in the paperwork now?* I ask. *No, we just threw all the forms out because it will be so easy for you to get ten hours of volunteer work. Everybody needs volunteers.*

At this point, I am feeling a little disillusioned and skeptical of the incessant public cry for volunteers that is blasted through the media. If this many public volunteer agencies cannot use a strong willing male with tutoring, carpentry, computer, and engineering skills, what exactly are they looking for?

I have at this point spent well over five hours and additional long distance phone costs to rustle up some volunteer action. I take a new approach. Calling the Astoria High School, I somehow manage to get through the gatekeepers and am put in touch with the Physics Teacher. I volunteer to give a demonstration of an operating hovercraft, and explain the mathematics of the same to the physics honors class.

Luckily, my name is associated with my children there at the school, who are very good students. The Physics Teacher wholeheartedly accepts my offer, and we arrange a two-hour class for January 29<sup>th</sup>. I do not confess to my criminal infraction which, given past experience, may negate the deal. I then spend an hour preparing the hovercraft; an hour and a half preparing a curriculum; a half hour making copies of relevant equations and handouts; three-quarters of an hour loading and unloading the craft for demonstration; half an hour reloading and re-storing the craft; and the two-hour class itself.

The class is wonderful, the demonstration kinetic, the students are attentive and interested. The lights are on in their eyes. The questions are adept, near the point, and the Physics Teacher is pleased. I tell the students of the many opportunities opening up in this field, and that I will mentor any one of them or their friends wishing to learn more of the business and operation of hovercrafts. I also tell many stories, from the Human Fly to the Great Hovercraft Sinking of '96. This, then, has been a success.

Returning then to our original agreement, Your Honor, of ten hours of community service. I am not sure if I have fulfilled the appropriate hours in the appropriate way, but I surely have attempted to do so through all the normal channels and, ultimately by my own design.

At this time, I have been requested by my job to work five days a week, so henceforth will only have the weekend in which to further volunteer in Astoria. I will continue to encourage the youth, as I do frequently with demonstrations, rides, and explanations regarding hovercrafts. My shop doors are always open for any interested

party, young or old, to learn what I have to teach about this technology. Hopefully my high school demonstration will result in future seniors mentoring with me in the study of hovercraft technology.

In light of these facts, I request to be released from my obligation to the Astoria Municipal Court System. Thank You.

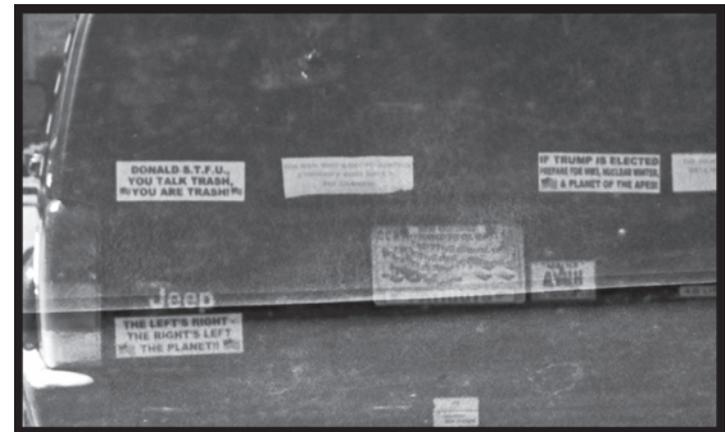
C.B.  
Best Coast Hovercraft Inc.  
69 Main Street  
Astoria, OR 97103  
Cell Phone (360) 555-0100

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By the time the letter was received, Judge Limerick had been fired for alcohol consumption on the bench, and retreated to Lincoln City to do sleaze private eye work in recreational condos. The court had no record of my arrangement with the Judge. I pleaded that I was also picking up trash along the highway, which was another lie. But, on March 23, I received a letter releasing me from all municipal encumbrance.

To date, I struggle to keep clear of the law and, aside from a few minor infractions, like carrying a grocery sack of *psilocybin* mushrooms out of the woods, and into the waiting arms of the State Police, I am a law-abiding citizen and standing member of the community. I avoided the shroom drug dealing charge by telling the pigs I was going to eat the whole bag and see God.

\*\*\*\*\*





Coffee With No Goodbye

Often we stirred our thoughts there  
drank lots of coffee  
poured ourselves out  
spilled feelings  
filled each other's  
cups to the brim there  
conversing sweet and light  
often  
percolating  
sipping slowly  
for so long.

We savored our fine blend there  
so many times  
until that one day  
that one certain strange cup of coffee.

That strange cup seemed too hot  
too bitter  
too dark.  
It tasted like a burning bridge.

I might have given it time to cool  
but I obey my clock without pity.  
So I went outside "for a cigar"  
and left you sitting alone  
coffee barely touched  
bridge burned  
ashes on my tongue.

\* \* \*

Non-Invasive

If this were a lancet  
scalpel  
or knife,  
I'd slice through meat and bone  
to the heart of the matter,  
exposing pains.

This is a pen in my hand.  
It slides on the surface  
of things best left alone.  
Feelings don't splatter.  
There are no stains.

Take the pen to paper sheet,  
ink will make the chaos neat.  
Ink is slower to congeal.  
It is safer to think.  
It hurts to feel.

\* \* \*

Horatio at the Mulvian Dance

Bravely  
he endured  
a lifetime of  
inconsequential catastrophes,  
negligible calamities,  
and trivial disasters,  
until that broken shoelace  
done him in.

\* \* \* \* \*



Jimmy Heffernan

*The Paradox of  
Hunter-Gatherer Consciousness*

[Prose]

Lee and Daly define foraging, which is considered synonymous with the term we will be using—hunting and gathering—as “subsistence based on hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog.” This is, indeed, the most general and succinct way to begin to define hunting and gathering, an approach that surely has some shortcomings (as I discuss below), but that, combined with the following, is quite sufficient despite its simplicity.

As contrasted with their civilized counterparts, hunter-gatherers (HGs) relinquish any notion of control, either over other people or their environment. They do not interfere with the reproduction of crucial species, nor the distribution of food resources, and they famously do not interfere in the affairs of other HGs, respecting individual autonomy as much as any people that has ever existed. Panter-Brick says that, unlike agricultural or pastoralist groups, there is no intentional alteration of the gene pool of any species of animal or plant with which they are in contact.

Clearly, such a definition can be problematic. Lee and Daly note that contemporary HGs have been found to practice a mixed subsistence—for example, gardening in tropical South America, reindeer herding in northern Asia, and trading in southeast Asia and parts of Africa. Furthermore, in practice, Ellen says that things can be ambiguous, such as the notion of “wild” and “cultivated” sago palms in Indonesia or, as Rosman and Rubel note, “wild” and “domestic” pigs in Papua New Guinea. In such cases, “cultivation” or “domestication” does not entail genetic alteration. Such practices may make things more complicated, but they do not detract in any significant way from the working definition I have put forward.

Rowley-Conwy suggest other notable attributes of hunting and gathering that we can consider to add to and refine the definition: little personal property and an egalitarian social system; sporadic gatherings of bands and much mobility of individuals between bands; a fluid organization involving no territorial rights; no food storage; and no group being strongly attached to a particular area.

Along the lines of Morris Berman, I am going to argue here that HGs exhibit a form of awareness that would seem quite counterintuitive to

a modern, civilized individual. They do not experience the sacred (if they can be said to do so at all) in the same way that we do; indeed, awareness for them is what I am going to call “horizontal” as opposed to “vertical” (which would describe hierarchical civilized beliefs), the meanings of which words are subtle and should become clearer in time. This horizontal spirituality is, surprisingly to some, actually a secular perspective; it does not involve deities or any kind of formal religion. Berman has called this particular type of awareness *paradox*, and I shall do the same.

Paradox is a diffuse type of primordial awareness that includes being able to hold in one’s mind a pair of opposites simultaneously, as well as the ability to see a discrete point and the surrounding field in the same act of perception. It is difficult to define, because it is a fundamental awareness, but HGs seem to exhibit it, and in the past probably did all the more so—it could be likened to a kind of animism, an awareness of the immanence in the here and now, an affirmation of the sacredness of what to us is ordinary, day-to-day life.

I would add that this awareness appears to be a relatively heightened one as well. David Peat writes: “The indigenous mind may well be able to tolerate paradox and ambiguity because this order is closer to the inner structure of reality than a more mathematical form of logic.” This dominant mode of consciousness does not involve unitive trance, but a peripheral, diffuse sort of awareness, and is probably a very old genetic memory—in that it seems to be continuous with the kind of alertness animals often display.

Berman writes: “[A]s the word ‘paradox’ suggests, it includes holding contradictory propositions, or emotions, simultaneously; sustaining the tension of this conflict so that a deeper reality can emerge than one would have if one simply opted, for example, for Self or Other.” In vertical (civilized, hierarchical) complexes, no paradox is present; instead, what is often appealed to is “certainty.”

There is a quality here of the universal in the particular (and vice versa) in which the mind is moved “to unfold itself in the space between contradictions.” Paradox involves a moment of suspended animation, a moment of pure “Is-ness” that cannot be circumscribed by any formula or ideology. It is a very different mode of consciousness than the one we are used to. It is not precisely a non-egoic state, although that may approach it, but rather one of, as I mentioned, heightened awareness—there is no boundary loss, bliss, or sacred authority of any kind.

I will say that it is no coincidence that Zen Buddhism has certain definite affinities with the hunter-gatherer psychology. Zen is the practice of discovering one’s true self; before we were tied down by sedentary civilization, and its attendant vertically-oriented psychology, every human experienced the true self of *homo sapiens* all the time. There are enough vestiges of the hunter-gatherer past to enable us to recognize a coherent

psychology, rooted in horizontality, immanence, even animism—and they all directly correspond with what is known of the Zen experience. I would also say, however, that we cannot forget that Zen was a product of vertical civilization, so the correspondences, and certainly the context, have to be seen as inexact by comparison.

Hugh Brody, who spent time with native groups in British Columbia, says of them: “Above all they are still and receptive, prepared for whatever insight or realization might come to them, and ready for whatever stimulus to action might arise. This state of attentive waiting is perhaps as close as people can come to the falcon’s suspended flight, when the bird, seemingly motionless, is ready to plummet in decisive action.” Ortega y Gasset also describes the experience: “It is a ‘universal’ attention, which does not inscribe itself on any point and tries to be on all points. There is a magnificent term for this, [namely] . . . *alertness* . . . Only the hunter, imitating the perpetual alertness of the wild animal . . . sees everything.” Walter Ong describes it as a “world presence” rather than a worldview.

In the paradoxical mindset, one is simultaneously focused and non-focused. It is hovering, or peripheral, rather than intense or ecstatic. In such a moment, one feels individual and unique and universal, at the same time. Deep connections with other human beings are forged because that which is most personal is also felt to be the most general; and that which is fleeting is seen as that which is most enduring. Tony Hiss states that in this form of perception we are “putting at our disposal an evenhanded, instantaneous, and outward-looking flow of attention, [which] acts like a sixth sense.” When we diffuse our attention and relax its intensity, Hiss says we initiate a change “that lets us start to see all the things around us at once and yet also look calmly and steadily at each one of them.”

So, is this experience one of the “sacred”? The major problem with describing it that way would be that it is largely a product of modern bias. For HG societies there was no separate category of existence for “the sacred.” As Berman argues, spirit, in their eyes, was no more complicated than “water coming off of a leaf, the smell of the forest after rain, the warm blood of a deer.” Anthropologist Paul Radin, cited by Diamond, says of the Winnebago Indians that reality for them was heightened to such a degree that the details of the environment seemed to “blaze.” And this is not a trance experience; there is no loss of consciousness, or “fusion with the Absolute” here. It is immanence, not transcendence; it “involves heightened awareness, not ‘burning bush’ experiences and boundary loss,” writes Berman. Indeed, for them, the secular *is* the sacred, and it is all around us. This is the primary reason for calling it a “horizontal” reality.

In civilization, with vertical belief structures, and the phenomenon of unitive trance, particular configurations emerge. Erotic energy is re-routed from the environment and channeled into certain experiences that did not formerly have parallel: romantic love, heroism (such as Arthurian legends,

the search for the Grail), and the need to go to war. These did not typically exist at all among HGs. Parenthetically, there is also a close relationship here to death, and its attendant attitudes (but more on that later).

Taking the third example, war is chronically irresistible to civilization because it provides situations of numinous intensity such that one is not provided within a sedentary framework—a way of being one with the universe, truly “alive.” There are clear psychological needs that are not met by civilization; HGs typify the role, sociologically and psychologically, from which humans evolved, and it is not surprising that, when people were taken out of that role, psychological aberration ensued.

Thus we call the latter framework “vertical,” with the mundane world being down here, below, and heaven up above. After 1000 B.C.E., this verticality acquired its own dichotomy, creating a sharp division between the sacred and the secular, with salvation being the promise offered, as Eisenstadt and also Cohn contend, by the sacred sphere. By contrast, the HG “religion” was for the most part nothing more complicated than the magic of everyday life. Perhaps the Paleolithic cave painters were simply depicting the energy and aliveness of life, and not mystical trance or oceanic experience. Berman writes: “One does not have to undergo boundary loss to know the sacredness of life.”

In vertical experience, there is a quest for authority and psychic certainty. This was paralleled by the desire of agricultural civilization to possess certainty on other levels as well. Thus, with the rise of sedentary societies, the human race went from paradox—“a kind of kaleidoscopic consciousness”—to fixed systems of religious “truth.” This may perhaps have something to do with the rigid nature of adherence to ideologies of various kinds. During the last four millennia, civilization has been quite preoccupied with transcendence, leading to a kind of certainty in the way we think, live, and act. We take whatever paradigm we live in as real, and can only conceive of escaping that paradigm by replacing it with another. Worship (which can even be secular) continues to be the norm.

It is important to realize that we, who in the present have religion and sacred authority, cannot successfully extrapolate our views and frameworks (and prejudices) backward onto HG societies of the past. In modern times, we tend to equate religion with experience of the sacred, but this may not be a universal relationship. Some societies are capable of having sacred experiences without any sort of religious worldview at all. Some may argue that there had to be, even among HGs, some cultural hedge against death, but what if this weren't the case?

Perhaps HGs simply regard death as death, not some terribly mysterious and scary event, but rather as one that happens naturally, and does not engender fear. That may be quite difficult for some of us to imagine, but it does appear that contemporary HGs have such an attitude. Balangadhara argues that it is not the case that HGs would have had to

invent a god or transcendent realm simply because we do. Indeed, shamanism is a category that is often quite confused and in reality cannot even be defined. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey write that shamanism “is more of an exotic essence, a romanticized inversion of Western rationalism, than a scholarly category that can stand up to any sustained interrogation.”

Berman says that “classic HG alertness . . . consists mostly in a sense of the awareness of Presence, of the ‘magic’ that exists in Self being differentiated from Other; of the awareness of Self as one is aware of the Other. I put it to you that this *was* HG spirituality, experience of the sacred—a horizontal experience, not a tale of souls ascending to heaven.”

Agriculture and sedentism changed all this. Studies done on HGs versus farmers show that the former are “field independent” and the latter “field dependent.” This reflects the fact that HGs are alert to details, and have the ability to focus narrowly on specific items in the landscape (“field”) even as they are simultaneously fully aware of the composition of the whole. Sedentary farmers, on the other hand, tend to blur on details and see parts of a field of vision as merged with the whole. Domestication was a major modification here, altering the ability of humans to pay attention. HG societies are marked by an emphasis on focus while domesticated societies are distinguished by an emphasis on the boundary. Indeed, as Berland and also Witkin and Berry note, survival for HGs depends on such a thing: one must be able “to distinguish a bird from its surroundings, the dense foliage of a tree, or to spot a snake several hundred yards away.”

One can see that paradox is a counterintuitive sort of schema, and it may be hard to relate to it because our frame of reference is so totally geared toward religion and vertically-oriented spirituality to mediate our experience of the sacred. Nevertheless, the constellation of consciousness I have described seems to be (in light of available ethnography) quite close to the mark, if a bit difficult to sympathize with for some.

I would like to close with an outstanding description of the essence of paradox as written by David Peat: “The essence of this tribal structuring of time is both eternal and moving. For each dawn is both new and yet the same. In the act of waking to the dawn, the mind is alert to new movements and sensations of a subtle and rapid nature, yet this dawn has a deep unity with every other dawn that is experienced by the tribe. So the birth of the day is both fluid in its movement, and yet part of an eternal order of the tribe. That a moment can be both timeful and timeless appears paradoxical to our own conception of what time should be.”

\* \* \*

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Tom Sheehan

## Pick-Up Kid Brother Charlie to Astronaut

This star reconnaissance began on the fourth of July, quick morning soft as a fresh bun, as warm, air floating up stairs and coming across my bed in the smell of burnt cork or punk as smoky as a compost pile rising upwards from lawn debris night had collected, spent rockets askew in gutters throughout the town, wide clutter of half-burnt paper and tail sticks themselves once afire in the nightly sky, signals that gave darkness a newer dimension of lightness and sound, and the explosion of circular flares too bright to look at, as if the sun had delayed departure for the heart of our celebration, as if stars had loosed their final demise amid the spatial junk they might encounter in outer reaches, friction of them in the measure as silent as Indians in the past on these fields and paths of flint and rock, even as children younger than I was went secretly about their ways, and quiet roads and padded lawns collecting expended shafts of excitement, rolling them into fisted quivers of their hands, tightly against their noses smelling the residue of them, dross and dregs of sky-reaching powder that short fires had implanted on their thin shanks as black as the night was, so that when amassed in one child's hand a match was re-applied in secret, and the gut blaze of the celebration began anew for those without money to buy their own pyrotechnics, the red-blue-red and orange-green flames loosed by this competition excelling much I might have seen on the holiday eve, these young scavengers, that young army of excitement seekers like a fresh wind adrift on the dawn, my younger brother Charlie, one of the aimless searchers of ignited celebration goods, marked all the way across a vast lawn, where the flag was left hanging out all night, by his red hair and fiery eyes aglow, even before the false dawn flashes, nimble legs in drive gear and nimble fingers at the bundle sticks awaiting new flame, oh, my younger brother Charlie, long ago appointed to the same bedroom as I, who would decorate the walls with Neil Armstrong's little dance down the ladder of time, and across tempest tide of skies, and blur of our black and white television set, this younger brother of mine who dreamed and reached the stilted aerodynamics of lads, who exaggerated his heart and his agile mind for the unseen, the unknown, that deepened pit of darkness the skies offer to imaginations leaping for the wonder of endless contact, sweet abrasions of the universe and all its parts, the coming global wanderer, aeronaut and astronaut and star traveler now out of the tightest innards of the smallest bedroom Neil Armstrong carried on his back, this fiery-eyed, dreamy, celestial kid brother in endless orbit, and sending me these late signals from far turns of the once-dark universe whose reception began in ample ignition beneath fisted hand, like a wondrous booster for his tell-tale heart, now making no sudden moves.

\* \* \* \* \*



## **The Great Bunny Pillow Referendum!**

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, has 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 1**

It is a strange day indeed when that big fluffy scary Bunny Pillow guy, called Betsy, is voluntarily nice to anyone in Bags End except Miss Chris, who had saved her long ago after she escaped from Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. Farmer Jones is this bad guy who grows Bunny Pillows & sells them to rich people. And Betsy's greatest enemy.

That strange day came when Betsy came bouncing into Sheila Bunny's Throne Room. Me & Sheila were part napping & part talking about catching up Sheila's Mayor's paperwork.

You see, though she claims to be King, & Emperor, &



Monarch of Bags End, in truth Sheila is really just the Mayor, & it involves doing a lot of paperwork. And she has only me for her illiterate secretary to help her out. It's pretty grumpifying for her.

"Excuse me, Sheila," said Betsy in her whispery voice. "I would like to talk to you." She sounded almost polite.

"Take a number & wait in the reception lounge," said Sheila, all grumpy. Paperwork was interfering with her daily afternoon nap.

Well, your old pal Algernon doesn't have to be told twice when there is trouble blazing all around him. So quickly I ranned behind Sheila's Throne & quietly listened.

"What do you want, Pillow?" said a Sheila voice.

"I need the help of all of the Bags End Friends in my crusade to liberate the Bunny Pillows from the evil grasp of Farmer Jones," whispered a Betsy voice.

"Betsy, we've been through all this over & over. And I did help you once. Remember?" said Sheila.

"I want to hold a referendum to get the best idea to defeat Jones," said Betsy.

There was quiet. "This is new," said Sheila.

"I hope someone can think of something I can't," whispered Betsy.

"I will think about it. Now leave me alone," said Sheila.

I thought Betsy was gonna scream, but she didn't. She said, "thank you & goodbye," & left. I was stunned.

"You can crawl out now, Beagle," said Sheila.

"What's a referendum?" I asked.

Sheila slouched down in her Throne. I rested in mah favorite spot near her. "Betsy wants everyone to use their imaginations to come up with some crazy new plan to defeat Farmer Jones."

"So are you gonna let her?"

Sheila stared up at the ceiling with 1 purple eye closed, like she always does when she is thinking. "I suppose. I just don't think it will help."

A couple of days later, I was sitting in the Bunny Family's TV room, watching "The Sheila Show," & saw Sheila hop onto the Bags End Auditorium stage with Betsy Bunny Pillow!

"Today's show will be Betsy asking for your help. Listen good. Well, goodbye," & Sheila left the stage.

Betsy looked into the camera & said, "None of you better turn this show off. My Allies are planted strategically where

they can watch you watching me." I looked around quickly but I didn't see nobody. I wouldn't have turned off the TV anyway.

"Bags End has a historic chance to help me & my people, & find its way into the annals of our struggles for liberty," Betsy whispered. I didn't understand what she said, but it sounded tricky.

"All of you will be receiving a ballot upon which to write your good idea for liberating the Bunny Pillow Farm. You have one week to fill out the ballot, & put it in one of the specially marked Ballot Boxes placed around Bags End. So think hard!" & with that Betsy bounced off the stage & was gone.

Let me tell you that I never thought I would be told to think of a good idea to free the Bunny Pillows. I couldn't think of anything. It drove me crazy.

I mean, what do I know of such things? I just do mah newspaper, & try to stay out of the snaring plans of the big guys in Bags End.

But then I thought: maybe I could write mean things about Jones in mah newspaper. Hm. No, I thought some more, that really isn't mah style.

So I thought harder & harder, & pretty soon I had a headache. I decided to visit Miss Chris in her TV room in Connecticut. She was happy to see me, & gaved me a big hug which did wonders for mah headache.

We watched some TV. There was a people-folks news program all about this big election that had started. They showed something called a poll to tell which guy was the most popular. Then they showed people-folks telling what they thought.

Well, bing! went an idea in mah head. "I know! I know! I will have a poll & ask Bags End guys what they think of Farmer Jones, & then I will write it in mah newspaper!" I yelled.

"That's a good idea, A-wa-wa!" said Miss Chris, & then she hugged me quite nicely.

I ranned back to Bags End, & found mah smart pal & staff member of Bags End News, Lori Bunny, who is also Sheila's older sister. She was in her room she shares with Sheila, reading a real big book. When Lori reads a book, she puts on these round little glasses that make her look even smarter.

"Lori! We have to do a poll! We have to interview Bags End guys & then write our newspaper all about it!" I yelled. I was so excited I jumped up on Lori's bed, & rolled over the other side, & hurt mah nosebone.

"O! Mah nosebone!" I cried in my pains. Well, Lori helped

me up & patted mah nosebone till I felt better. Then we talked about mah idea.

Lori got out this big book & read a long story about taking polls. I gave her a certain look & she smiled & said, “Algernon, what all that stuff means is that we have to be careful that we ask fair questions, & count all of our results twice.”

“OK, OK, I am ready. Let’s go.” I jumped off the bed & pulled Lori’s paw to get her to come too. She pulled me back though.

“Algernon, we have to plan & prepare. We can’t run off half-crazed like this,” she said.

I returned slowly. It sounded more like homework than fun. I wondered if I should come up with an easier plan. But Lori wouldn’t let me change mah mind. She can be as stubborn as Sheila when she wants to be.

So we decided to make up 10 good questions to ask Bags End guys about Farmer Jones & his Bunny Pillow Farm.

I don’t know how Betsy heard about mah plan, but she came bouncing into Lori’s room in the middle of all this.

“Hello, Algernon,” she said in her whispery voice. I quietly looked for a way to escape.

“Betsy, we’re busy. You can’t be here,” Lori said.

“I just wanted to see how my friend Algernon & his poll were doing,” Betsy said. Boy! If a voice could sound nice & thrash you at once, hers would have.

Instead, Lori told Betsy to leave right away. Betsy didn’t want to, but Lori made her.

I would have made a terrible bunny. Not only is mah nosebone too big, but I am not brave enough.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Part 2**

Some people think that when you live in a fantasyland, you have it made. Let me tell you, that may be true in places like Oz & Narnia, but where I live in Bags End you not only have to watch your step, but you have to watch who else is watching your step. Crazed joint.

The week Betsy gave everyone to come up with bright ideas was over, & Betsy gathered up all the Ballot Boxes with ideas in there. I wanted to be there when she read the suggestions, but she told me that had to be done in private with her Allies.

“But that’s censorship, Betsy!” I cried.

“Yes. Yes, it is,” she said in her whispery voice, & she bounced away.

So I waited eagerly with Sheila in her Throne Room for news of the referendum’s results. Sheila was so anxious she fell sound asleep.

I got so bored of being eager that I left. I went to see Lori so we could work on preparing mah newspaper’s poll on Farmer Jones.

Lori told me we should ask some hard questions, “think” questions she called them, & some easier “yes-no” kinds. I guess we worked real hard cuz I fell asleep & Lori helped the sleepy me to bed later.

I guess what Bags End Friends see as the solution & what Betsy thinks aren’t even 3rd cousins cuz Betsy was real mad the next day on the “Betsy Bunny Pillow & Her Allies Televised Broadcast.”

She bounced onto the stage of the Bags End Auditorium & said, “I restrained myself from smothering all of you last night as I read the suggestions you made for conquering the evil Jones!”

She dragged a Ballot Box on stage & began to read ballots from it:

*\*\*\* Play jazz real loud all around Farmer Jones’ Farm until he is so happy he doesn’t care what you do.*

*\*\*\* Discuss with Jones the extraordinary evolution of the planet’s beings, & how the final abolishment of all enslaving institutions shall finally come to pass. If he is ready to evolve to this stage, he will. If not, wait patiently.*

*\*\*\* Dwaft him into the mwilitary & tweach him condwukt bwefitting a dwogfwace. Then order him to welease the Pwillows & he will.*

*\*\*\* Free yourself of the wantonly superficial demands of this physical plane & float away friendly & identity-less into the Universe.*

*\*\*\* Bump! (which means teach Farmer Jones Bump Language & of course he will not enslave the Pillows. He may even teach them Bump too.)*

*\*\*\* Squeak Squeak Squeak (which means tell him a real good Squeak joke & then laugh a lot!)*

*\*\*\* O! Mah aches & pains!*

*\*\*\* O! Jones! Yum! O! Pillows! Yum!*

*\*\*\* Take a good long nap. Then roll over & get some sleep.*

\*\*\* Find out if he has any good comic books.  
\*\*\* Grr nicely.  
\*\*\* Make him convince Betsy that on a symbolic level she needs him as a kind of *raison d'être* as much as he needs her opposition to justify, from a narrative point of view, his occasional appearances in these Bags End stories.  
\*\*\* Hop away fast when the astronomers point their telescopes at you.

As Betsy read these, she was getting madder & madder. I knew cuz her whispery voice was all cracked & screechy.

“And these are the best ones I got! Are you all without brains anywhere? A race languishes in chains & you tell me to grr nicely? To tell squeak jokes? To Bump???”

“Well, let me tell you. I have had it with all of you! You’re all crazy & useless to me. Me & my Allies are leaving Bags End to lay constant siege to Farmer Jones until he or us go down for good! Goodbye!”

Betsy bounced off the stage real mad & I guessed the show was over.

I didn’t think Betsy would really leave Bags End. At worst I guessed she would attack Jones again, & he would defeat her again, & she would come back.

But she didn’t. She wasn’t in school the next day, or the one after that, or after that.

I tried to talk to Sheila about it but she wasn’t interested. “She will be back. Or not. I never did like her racist radical extremism.”

Well, I didn’t bother to ask what all that stuff meant cuz I guessed it was about bothering Sheila & attacking Jones all the time, & so on.

I decided to gather mah senses & go see mah pal Princess Chrisakah in Imagianna.

I found Crissy in her Palace in her Sleep Pad which is a bedroom. She was dressed all in black like she was going trick-&-treating as midnight. O! Treating! Yuk!

Crissy hugged me well & I sat next to her. She was reading poems by a guy named Octavio Paz who writes in Spanish. Crissy’s book had Paz’s poetry dressed nicely up in English.

She thought for a while about mah problem. Then she looked at me hardish. “Do your poll, Algernon. You promised, after all. Then, if you still hear no word, me & you will go find her & save her if she is in trouble!”

I liked Crissy’s idea a lot cuz it was polite & brave, but polite first. So I hugged her in black & went back to Bags End. I got Lori & told her we were done preparing our poll, & the next day we would start. She smiled OK.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Part 3**

So here finally is mah poll. Sheila told me I had to use her name on it or it wouldn’t be official. When I asked her to help, she said, “of course not.”

#### **The Bags End News & S. R. Bunny Bags End Poll**

Question Number 1: Do you know about the conflict between Farmer Jones & Betsy Bunny Pillow?

\*\*\* Most guys said yes.  
\*\*\* Some guys said yes, but they wish they didn’t.  
\*\*\* One guy said Bump.

Question Number 2: Which side do you agree with, if any?

\*\*\*Most guys said Betsy was probably right, but they didn’t like her enough to be on her side.  
\*\*\* A couple said the stories were entertaining to read.  
\*\*\* One guy said Bump Bump.

Question Number 3: Does Farmer Jones have a right to his Farm & to grow Pillows & sell them to rich people if he wants?

\*\*\* Some guys said yes.  
\*\*\* Some guys said no.  
\*\*\* Some guys said don’t know.  
\*\*\* One guy said Bump.

Question Number 4: If Betsy Bunny Pillow asked you for help to defeat Jones, would you say yes?

- \*\*\* Many guys said they had already helped. Most said they would help again, probably.
- \*\*\* But nobody seemed eager to volunteer.
- \*\*\* I ignored the Bump answerer.

Question Number 5: Is this Betsy Bunny Pillow's problem alone, or is it Bags End's problem cuz she lives here?

- \*\*\* Most guys said Betsy is the problem but she can't be ignored cuz she is mean.
- \*\*\* I told the Bump answerer to learn English.

Question Number 6: Why has Betsy failed to defeat Farmer Jones before?

- \*\*\* Cuz she is mean, cuz she is crazy, too much ego, were the common answers.
- \*\*\* A few said it was cuz Farmer Jones was too smart, but most blamed Betsy's failure on Betsy.
- \*\*\* I told the Bump answerer I had no time for his kind.

Question Number 7: If Betsy was to defeat Farmer Jones today, would you rather have 100s of refugee Pillows come to Bags End, or never see Betsy again?

- \*\*\* Most guys said if the Pillows are nicer than Betsy, then they can come.
- \*\*\* But everyone said no to hundreds of Betsys.
- \*\*\* The Bump answerer was informed that this was not a Bump poll.

Question Number 8: Should Betsy Bunny Pillow be told to stop?

- \*\*\* Everyone said no. Most said she wouldn't listen. Some said: why bother?
- \*\*\* The Bump answerer was told: for help, see your representative.

Question Number 9: Could there be a compromise between Betsy & Jones?

- \*\*\* Almost everyone said no cuz Betsy is too crazy & Jones has no reason to compromise.
- \*\*\* One guy said: "If you won, why settle for a tie?"
- \*\*\* The heretofore Bump answerer left. Good riddance.

Question Number 10: Would Betsy be happy if she defeated Jones?

- \*\*\* Some guys said yes.
- \*\*\* Some guys said no.
- \*\*\* Some said: who knows?
- \*\*\* Some said: who cares?

The poll kind of disappointed me. I learned that almost nobody really likes Betsy, or cares if she defeats Jones. Betsy is not really popular in Bags End, I guess.

I retreated to mah bedroom to think about mah poll for awhile. I hoped it would show that we all care about Betsy, & don't like Jones one bit.

Instead, I learned that Betsy is thought of as a crazy bully who is a big problem in Bags End.

The more I thought, the madder I got. Betsy may have her strange ways, but people should care if she's upset!

Mah bravebone hadn't gotten a good workout for awhile, but it got me to go see Princess Crissy that night & tell her all about the poll. Crissy looked really cute with her hair all tangled & her PJs with R.E.M. pictures all over them.

"I am really upset, Crissy," I said. "I mean, we are really selfish if we don't care about this. But what can I do?"

She gave me a hug. A quality hug, I add. "Stay over with me tonight, Algernon, & tomorrow we will go find Betsy & help her," she said.

Well, I had never slept over Crissy's castle before. She told me she would make sure mah adopted Bunny-mommy Pat would know & so not worry.

Me & Crissy got under the covers. Crissy used her tricky smile magick, & me & her shared a good dream together that had mah pals the Weeds in it, & good music by R.E.M. & Men at Work.

The next morning me & Crissy got up & Crissy told her best friend & servant Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, that she was going on a journey with me. Well, Boop got all

worried & upset, like he does, but Crissy just gaved him a big hug & asked him to get her Traveling Cape. He did & it was long & black & covered her down to her black boots. She even had a hood.

“This is a special cape, Algernon,” she said with a tricky smile. “We will travel as secretly as we need to.”

We gaved Boop lots of hugs & kisses to unworry him some, & then we left through a door in the Castle I had never seen before. It probably disappeared after us.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Grand Finally!**

Maybe your old pal Algernon just wanders through life missing the point. Maybe I don't pay attention. Maybe I can't afford to. I don't know, except that I never dreamed or even nightmared that I would be heading off down the road with mah pal Princess Crissy to try & save that big scary Betsy Bunny Pillow.

Through the door was a long road that I thought would lead us to Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. Crissy & me walked along quietly for a long time. This was strange cuz Crissy & me usually talk a lot.

Finally, Crissy talked. “Algernon, may I ask you something about Betsy?”

“Sure, Crissy,” I said.

Crissy's face was all serious as she said, “We could help her defeat Jones if that's what she wanted. I know how. It's not very hard. Should we just save her if she is in trouble, or should we help her beat him?”

A hard question. I thoughted for a while like Sheila has told me to. “Think your answer to yourself. See if you like it. If you do, then say it out loud.”

“Crissy, I remember the time Betsy thought she won & all the Pillows came with her to Bags End. She stayed a little while, then she left with them to make the Bunny Pillow Free State. It was all a trick but Betsy seemed pleased. I don't think she wants someone to do it for her though. She wants to do it, & be all proud loudly later on.”

Crissy listened to me & nodded. “OK, Algernon,” was all she said.

It got dark after awhile, & I think I remember flying with Crissy in her cape through the air. We were with stars, & we

had good dreams, & we played together while we slept.

Then it was day & we were walking on the same road some more.

I was getting kind of bored with this adventure. Too much walking. “Can we have a little adventure on the way, Crissy?” I asked. “Just a little one, please?”

Crissy smiled at me a little tricky & pretty soon I heard voices. “Long Live Algernon! Long Live the King!”

I looked to the side of the road & there were a whole lot of mah friends the Weeds!

“Hi, Weeds!” I said.

“Yayy, King!” they yelled a lot. They call me their King though I think of mahself as just a good friend & appreciator of Weeds-kind.

“Weeds, this is mah very good pal, Princess Chrisakah. She lives in Imagianna, & is a friend to Weeds too,” I said. Crissy smiled her tricky Crissy smile at the Weeds.

“Yayy, Crissy!” the Weeds yelled.

The Weeds asked me where we were going, so I told them we were going to rescue Betsy Bunny Pillow. A lot of the Weeds booded, cuz Betsy is not a friend to Weeds.

“Now, Weed guys, I want you not to boo. Betsy is in trouble, we think, & so we have to save her,” I said.

That's when being a good friend to the Weeds really helped me. The Weeds told me to take a bucket that was lying on the ground nearby, & transplant into it the pink weeds among them. Then they explained that if we gave these Weeds a hug I would turn into a Beagle Weed & Crissy would turn into a Crissy Weed.

“That way, you can travel through the Bunny Pillow fields quickly & sneakily,” the Weeds said.

So we transplanted the Weeds, called Hallo-Weeds, by the way they disguise you, into the bucket, & Crissy hid it beneath her black cape. It didn't even make a lump that stuck out. Then the Weeds cheered me & Crissy & even Betsy a lot.

Crissy made to leave, but I stopped her. “Say, Weeds,” I said. “How do we un-Weed ourselves?”

The Weeds told me I had to yell in mah mind, “Beagle! Beagle! Beagle!” & Crissy had to yell in her mind, “Crissy! Crissy! Crissy!” That seemed like a good plan that would have to try real hard to fail. Me & Crissy said, “Thanks, Weeds,” & walked on. The Weeds were still cheering us as we passed around a bend in the road.

I felt cheered up by the Weeds cuz they are good friends,

just like Crissy. I asked her how long till Farmer Jones' Farm.

"We're almost there," Crissy said. Her face was serious again. Then she saw a tree at the side of the road & walked over to it. We sat together, her holding me politely in her lap.

"Algernon, I want you to be real brave when we get there," she said, all serious still.

"Are you afraid, Crissy?" I asked, hoping no really a lot.

Crissy thought about it. "No, but I have a feeling we won't have a easy time. I may have to do something drastic at some point, & I don't want you to be afraid."

Boy! This un-cheered me up fast. I was so nervous that I just nodded & didn't say no more.

We went to sleep for a little while, & had a nice shared dream again. Me & Crissy were flying in the silver & orange, & we were laughing a lot. I like our shared dreams a lot.

After waking up, we walked back to the road & Crissy said it was time to be Weeds. So she got out the pot of Hallo-Weeds from her cloak, & we hugged them a lot.

Suddenly, I was a brown & white Beagle Weed & Crissy was a green & gold Crissy Weed. We didn't really have faces no more, but I thought Crissy still had a tricky smile kind of way.

Being a Weed is strange. You feel bold & nervous a lot all at once. You want to grow everywhere, but you know the chances of getting picked is a lot in the funner places. I felt wild like they wouldn't get me, but I wasn't altogether believing this true.

We moved through the soil for quite awhile. We could only tell each other stuff when we touched, & even then it was not really words at all. I liked it, sort of.

We climbed a hill, but it didn't feel like climbing. The sun was bright & the soil was warm & wet. It was real nice.

No time to enjoy it though. On top of the hill we could see Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. *O! What a bad scene!*

Some of the Bunny Pillows were growing in their usual little circular groups, but mainly what I saw was a group of Bunny Pillows, led by Betsy, carrying Farmer Jones around in a mad run. He was helpless even though he waved his arms & legs around. The Pillows were whisper yelling too, & it was a strange kind of screaming. Betsy's blue dress was ripped, & her crazy voice was louder than everybody else's.

They threw Jones down on the ground, & then Betsy fought him 1 on 1. Jones was trying to win, but Betsy had worned him out.

Save Betsy? What a crazed one I was. The one who needed

saving was Farmer Jones!

Me & Crissy felt-talked a bit then. If it had been words, it would have been like this:

"Crissy, we can't let her destroy Jones! She's crazy. We have to stop her!" I said.

"I know, Algernon. Remember what I told you about being brave?"

"Yes. Is it time?"

"It's time, Algernon."

"OK, Crissy."

I waited for a minute to get scared, & then brave at mah scaredness, but nothing happened. Betsy was rassling Jones to the ground.

Then there was a big rumble & the little Crissy Weed grew real real big. BIG. BIG!

The Crissy Weed grewed gianter & gianter until the whole Farm was in her shadow. Then these sort of viney hands reached out toward the fields. The vines took Betsy's crazed friends & planted them firmly in the ground. Another vine grabbed Jones & put him inside his house & slammed the door shut.

Betsy started screaming real loudly.

"I had him beaten! How could you! I won! I won!" she whisper screamed. She bounced toward the Crissy Weed's trunk like she was gonna fight it or something.

I hid as bravely as I could behind a tall clump of grass. I was quiet as bravely as I could.

A Crissy Weed vine picked up the crazed Betsy & then the whole Crissy Weed grewed up & up & up, & then it left the ground & was lost in the sky. I heard Betsy's crazy yells the whole time, till they were gone too.

The Farm looked peaceful like nothing happened. Jones was safe in his house, & I bravely bet he wasn't coming out for awhile.

Suddenly I bravely realized I was still a Beagle Weed. I decided I had no reason to go on being a Weed, so I bravely yelled in mah mind, "Beagle! Beagle! Beagle!"

And there was me again. I decided to go home. I wondered what happened to Crissy & Betsy, but I bravely walked on anyway.

Pretty soon I came to the same tree where Crissy & I had taken our nap. And there was Crissy again, regular girl Crissy, & she was sound asleep!

I crawled into her lap & slept too. I don't think I dreamed.

I don't remember any dreams anyway.

We woked up at the same time, & looked at each other & smiled.

"You were very brave, Algernon," Crissy said.

"I think being a Weed helped. They're pretty brave creatures," I said.

We walked along together on the road for a long time. Crissy didn't have her black cloak on anymore. She was wearing her t-shirt showing Toad of Toad Hall & Sir John Falstaff, with their arms friendly around each other. Her hair was long & tangled & her smile was nice & tricky as before.

"Where's Betsy?" I asked.

Crissy's smile went away again. I got mad at myself for doing that.

"She is gonna stay with me in Imagianna for awhile, Algernon. We have to talk, her & me," she said.

Boy! Personally, I wouldn't invite Betsy to the end of the world if I could help it.

We walked along some more & then we started to sing in the nice sunshine & Crissy looked happy again.

Crissy brought me back to Bags End, gaved me a good hug, & left. She said she would be busy for awhile.

Nobody asked me where I had been or where Betsy was. I didn't care though. I knew where I had been. I knew.



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Victor Vanek

## Rally of the Damned

*My Brothers!* We are the losers.

A conjoined singularity, the collective of the lost souls who, having drank too much malt liquor the night before, stumbled on the train tracks close to home, to be found later dismembered and dew covered. Baptized into their new lives.

We will never be like the pipe smoke and sweet black coffee of our grandparents, as much as we try. Instead we are covered in the scent of our work, burning the insulation from electrical wires for that tiny bit of money it brings. We have the lingering flavor of hemlock and monkshood.

*My Brothers!* Let us gather together and mock the promise of balanced serotonin levels and symmetry of limbs.

Let us come together with our look of a creature from a children's fairy story, twisted in appearance from living under the wood-pile of imagination, wretched from wracking ourselves into the unnatural forms that we might supposedly please our beloved families.

Where others had of the cleansing light of a new morning, for us it was the harsh and blinding radiation of a solar god's judgment. Others had the swallowtails and cicadas, but we were left dead flies and dust trapped between the panes of glass of a window painted shut.

Our world with Bukowski as our High Priest, and Burroughs as our Prophet, we again open our eyes when the pains we suffer let us sleep no more.

Our world where we go hungry, not because of the endless bounty that surrounds us, but that we have no mouths.

*My Brothers!* Let us again gather together much like the wood louse and termite in the crumbling wood-pile of our lives.

We are like doves that, trusting their instincts, fly deliberately into glass.

We are like petrified driftwood that, while retaining its shape and recognizable form, cannot be used as fuel to warm others' lives on cold nights.

*My Brothers!* Let us gather together in the comely marriage of rot and darkness to celebrate the failing meat bodies we wear!

Let us join hands and sing our psalms, though we have no mouths. Let us come together and dance in our writhing awkward fashion.

Let us take comfort in the fact we not alone, unclothed in the Serengeti, any more.

Now we are alone and together.

Let us pray.

\* \* \* \* \*



*A Plan*

You've got to have a plan for disaster survival. Pack a bug-out bag. Weather radio. Crank light. A dozen cans of Sterno. Short-wave receiver. Rifle. And most importantly: Spam, Spam, Spam, and more Spam. I know the shit is gross but it keeps for many years, doesn't need cooking and, when the sun farts in our general direction, you got options. Just saying.

A. and I were discussing if we were part of any larger cultural movement that we could label simply. Well, it seems that although we overlap many, none really take us all in, and labels like environmentalist include aspects that we don't fall under.

So it needs to include aspects of the following movements: local economy, raw milk, natural clothing, hemp, DIY, low-tech, traditionalism, patriotism, simplicity, religious freedom, self-governance, cooperatives, private ownership, environmental, back to earth, nuclear family, elder care, childcare, community, volunteerism, home schooling, family doctor, animal welfare, modesty, craft, practical skills, Etsy.com, barter-n-trade, charity, love, law, and truth movements.

I think have coined the term: *Alt-Amish*.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Martina Newberry

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### *White Road*

*A meno di una goccia di sangue rimane in me che non trema.*

[Less than a drop of blood remains in me that does not tremble.]

*Don't throw me no drag now*, she said.  
I don't. I won't.

While you still hear me, I'll tell  
my tales as candidly as I can.  
These are wretched times—  
times that poems can not fix,  
and we are living them.

We are stricken with lies,  
and food that leaves us hungry,  
and the vivid marks of war,  
like stripes on the backs of our souls.

This is what I ask of you:  
that you stay to the end of this poem—  
at least this one.

While you still hear me,  
there are things you should know—  
they may be bruised,  
but there are still apples, tart and cool from a tree,  
and while the sky is definitely falling, there are,  
now and then,  
patches of beryl, cerulean, and iceberg,  
still haunting it.

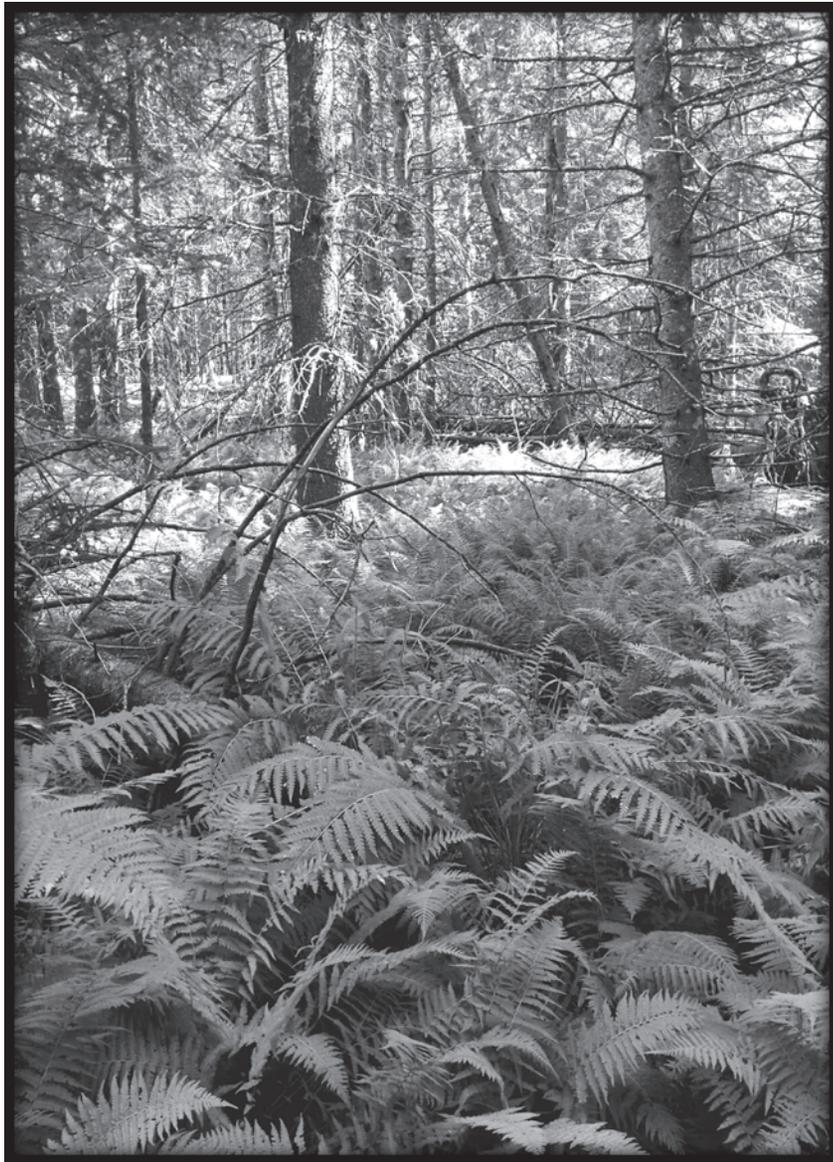
We are not kissed by fortune,  
nor blessed by happenstance,  
so there is reason to fear,  
and, that being said,  
while they may be hardened  
by work, by slavery, by rancor or pain,  
there are still hands, warm caresses on our heads.

And, while the nourishment of good sex  
is undervalued, and turned sometimes into revenge,  
the bare calves of a lover beneath a quilt  
still sustain and condole.

*I'll throw you no drag, no matter what.*

I say *live*, even precariously, even sadly.  
*Live*, you who are left to listen,  
as though the notion of life intrigues you,  
as if living is all there is to do,  
even as it remains a velleity.

\* \* \* \* \*



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



## *Labyrinthine*

[a new fixation]

# *Part Eleven*

*or be enslaved by another man's*

—William Blake,  
"Jerusalem."

*xxxiii.*

The Heroes were not currently on their lecture tour when they decided to meet at the Ancienne Coffeehouse in the Village to catch up on things, talk of new adventures—

The imp, tiny cackling Rosa!eeta, arrived first & immediately joined her fellow tiny pandy bears on the game board of Spot On, to cackle & gnatter their news.

The blue & pink piglet, Belllla, came in sometime later & found R! amongst her friends. The two sat together & R! told Bellla that she had heard something had spooked the shy & colorful Moosei, Minnie & Maxie, two many-colored moose, well-liked amongst the Creature-folk.

Someone nearby was listening & a gruff but friendly voice said, "I think I can tell you more about this if you come along with me." This was a handsome brown bear sitting in an old armchair. His green sweatshirt said, "Maine," but he went by the name Memphis.

Well, our Heroes agreed to come with him, & they went outside together. Memphis had his Bike Wagon parked nearby. This lovely old contraption was a three-wheeled bicycle with a small basket on its handle bars, & a much larger one mounted between its two back wheels. The Heroes got into the back seat-basket, & Memphis began to pedal all of them out of the Village, a fairly small place, & back deep into the White Woods, where most Creatures live.

They rode up a stony path, one of few in these White Woods, until they came to an old stone bridge. Memphis stopped pedaling & helped his new friends out of the basket. Then he led them down a long rocky hill that descended to under the bridge. There they sat together.

“I couldn’t talk freely back there so I brought you here to tell.” Memphis’s eyes were large & looked a little scared. The Heroes leaned forward to listen closely.

“The Moosei haven’t been seen in awhile because they were spooked by hearing that there was a place in these Woods where the colors were going strange. So they decided to investigate. Colors are very important to them, since they have so many. They worried it might start spreading.”

“How do you know all this?” asked Bellla.  
“I have a friend. I can bring you to her. She might know more,” said Memphis.  
The Heroes nodded yes, & their thanks.

“I have heard all about your Heroic Journeys,” said Memphis. “I like how you say anyone can be a Hero with some courage & pluck.”

The Heroes smiled & nodded. R! gnattered to Bellla, who seemed to agree, & said, “Would you like to come with us on this Heroic Journey? We would like it very much.”

Well, Memphis’s eyes got big again but he nodded many times. “We can use my Bike Wagon as far as it will take us.” So it was decided.

They got back to the Bike Wagon & settled into their spots, & Memphis pedaled on. Another slow path, steeply upward. Eventually to arrive at another bridge.

They got out & Memphis led them to one side of the bridge where he took a special notice of some ferns growing near the side of the bridge.

“Flora? Flora? Are you home now?” he called, several times.  
And eventually, a girlish bunny nose poked out from among the ferns & the Heroes could see a round hole that ran deep into the wall of the bridge. A long narrow home within, with a bedroom at its far end.

Flora came out, clad in a pretty green dress that looked made of moss & green leaves. Memphis gave her a hug & explained why he’d brought the Heroes.

“Flora is a kind of Checker,” Memphis said.  
Then she continued. “If any of the local Creature-folk have a reason to go into these Woods & possibly be gone for days, they come & check in with me. That way I can

reassure their friends & loved ones, if need be.”

The Heroes nodded admiringly. Memphis said eagerly, “Did the two colorful Moosei come this way?”

She nodded. “They came about the colors going strange.”  
“Which way did they go?” asked Bellla excitedly.  
Flora put her paw on her chin, thinking deeply for an answer.  
“They said they were told to travel up six White Oaks past this bridge, & then turn left into the Woods, using the *Hmmm* they were given. That would lead them along their way.”

“Who told them?” asked Bellla eagerly.  
“They didn’t tell me. Just their mission & the *Hmmm*. It went like this—” & Flora taught them the *Hmmm* so they would know it well for when needed.

“I wish you well, Heroes,” Flora said. “Your journey indeed sounds grand.”

And, well, maybe because she was a little wistful, our Heroes invited Flora along too, & after a minute of contemplation, & another of tidying up her little home for while she was away, Flora was then ready & climbed into the Bike Wagon amongst her new & old friends.

Then she remembered something & hopped quickly out. Memphis stopped the Bike Wagon to wait for her.

Flora went & fetched in her home a piece of paper & a pencil & wrote a note to leave by her door.

*GONE OUT  
DO ALL CHECKS  
WITH AUNT AT PENSIONNE  
BACK SOON*



Then she hurried back & hopped in the Bike Wagon. Memphis raised his brown furry paw to let them know they were off again, & peddled on.

Slowly again up the hill past the bridge & slowly as well counted off the six White Oaks of the instructions. 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 . . .

Ah, there! 6. Memphis turned the Bike Wagon into the White Woods, & all took to *hmmming* to guide their way along. The obscure path opened up to their *hmmming* quite plainly.

Eventually, the trees gave way to a beautiful wild field of goldenrod.

“Are we still on the right path?” asked the Heroes of Flora.  
“I’m not sure beyond the White Woods, & the *hmmmming*,” admitted Flora.

At that moment, all of them noticed a little blue Tree Nymph sitting calmly on a stalk of goldenrod. After greetings, the Heroes asked if he had seen the colorful Moosei.

“Why, yes. They explained to me their mission to find out why the colors were strange in a certain place, & if it could spread elsewhere,” said the friendly Nymph. He appeared to be a clever-faced little whiskery thing.

“Did they say anything else?” asked the Heroes.  
“They asked where the Copper Mushroom was. They were told to take a right at the Copper Mushroom,” Symon said.

Well, this was new so they asked about it. And he told them it was not far, just beyond the edge of the field they were talking in.

Now Memphis spoke. “Say, would you like to continue with us, along this Heroic Journey?” Everyone in the Bike Wagon liked this idea.

Symon smiled his clever smile & was hopped aboard in two shakes. Memphis raised his paw, & they were again along their way.

The colors began to get stranger as they rode along, back into the Woods, & they were lucky to have Symon to direct them. But even he was only doing so mostly by memory.

Eventually they came to a murk that would have halted them completely if Flora hadn’t pointed to something purple & fine moving about in the distance ahead. Memphis pedaled very slowly forward & they could see twas a purple furry bowed dancing Creature, & his colors were not strange at all as he danced with his various ribbons with no seeming cares at all.

What’s more, he was dancing beneath the Copper Mushroom! So they knew to turn right.

The Heroes called out a “Thank you!” & he responded by dancing along in front of the Bike Wagon. This allowed Memphis to pedal along through the murk safely.

So they continued riding along through the Woods when they came upon a crimson-colored bear who was in a sort of workshop, sorting amongst his tools.

The Heroes stepped out & said hello to him. Asked how he was doing.

“Not very well, I’m afraid. You see, I was going to tend my garden today but, what with the light here being strange & all, I can’t seem to figure which tools to use for what.”

The Heroes nodded sympathetically & then asked if he had seen some colorful Moosei pass by.

“I did,” Melbourne the bear said. “They had the only colors that looked right until I saw your purple furry friend come along.”

“Would you like to come with us? We want to find the Moosei & help restore the colors if we can,” asked the Heroes.

Well, Melbourne then knew these were the famous Heroes of legend & figured anything he could do to help, he would. “And then I can finally get to my gardening, & afterward get to a really good nap.”

Eventually, the murk gave way to actual night & they pulled up among some trees. Memphis had some blankets & pillows stored under the seat-basket of the Bike Wagon & so they were able to cluster & sleep together in comfort in the Bike Wagon, in these wrong colored White Woods. Wondering where the Moosei could be, & how they were doing. Not knowing how much farther & deeper along the Moosei were. The dancing purple furry Creature danced all night & watched over them.

*xxxiv.*

The colors were still strange by daylight, but they found that by focusing on Pirth’s purple dancing ways, they could see OK still.

So they got comfortable in the Bike Wagon, Memphis raised a paw, & they rolled along behind Pirth through these not quite White Woods until they came to the shore of a great pond. It, too, did not look quite right to the eyes of these Creatures.

Then they spied something sort of following them along, in flashes, & decided to veer from the edge of the pond back into the Woods to investigate.

Eventually they came out to an open green field where they found a little brown-&-white pup playing a game with a little brown-&-white ball. He would throw the ball down the field, & it would come rolling back to him. Sometimes he would kick the ball high in the air & it would land a far distance, but always roll on back to him.

They rolled on up to them, & said hello. The pup said, “I am Mr. Brisbee & this is

my associate Mr. Eli.” They introduced themselves in turn.

Mr. Eli, who was friendly, bounced up to each of their paws & let them throw him afar & then returned each time.

After they played ball with Mr. Eli for awhile, the Heroes asked if Mr. Brisbee had seen some colorful Moosei pass by here.

“Oh yes,” he said smiling. “They played ball with us for awhile, & they even tossed Mr. Eli back & forth with their antlers. He liked that.”

“We are trying to catch up to them, to help them discover why the colors are all off & sort of funny,” said the Heroes.

Mr. Brisbee looked around for a moment. “I guess Mr. Eli & I were so long in our game of ball, we didn’t notice.”

The Heroes looked at each other & nodded. “Would you like to help us on this Heroic Journey to find the Moosei?”

Mr. Brisbee looked surprised & then looked them over closer. “Are you the Legendary Heroes of Yore?”

The Heroes nodded but said, “Anyone can be a Hero. You & Mr. Eli included. Come along with us!”

So it was agreed. Mr. Eli & Mr. Brisbee got in the Bike Wagon, & Memphis raised paw, & resumed pedaling.

Then, after they’d rolled along a long while, they heard a noise in the trees around them. Didn’t know what it was until suddenly a handsome little monkey fellow appeared before them. He greeted them friendly.

“My apologies, friends, but when I get to jumping & swinging from branch to branch, I forget about everything down below.”

The Heroes nodded & then asked if he had seen the colorful Moosei pass by.

“Oh yes,” said he. “They said they were headed for the place where the colors began to be strange.”

“They’re strange all over here now?” asked the Heroes.

“Oh yes,” Jacoby agreed. “I can hardly swing safely anymore for fear of missing a branch & crashing.”

The Heroes explained that they had been gathering a good group of Heroes to help, but they didn’t know how far away the Moosei were, or if they were following the path well.

“Oh, I think I can help,” said Jacoby. “While I can still climb, I’ll go up to the tallest tree I know & take a look for them.” He pointed to a tree nearby.

So he began to climb, climb, climbing up, stumbled, climbed, stumbled, but kept going up & up till he emerged on top of all the trees of the Woods nearby.

He looked in every direction of the weirdly colored Woods & saw nothing, nothing, nothing, but then, there! in the distance, colors as many & as unmistakable as that purple furry dancing Creature down below.

So he came swinging & stumbling his way down, stumble, down, until he fell & crashed! Right into the Bike Wagon. Unhurt because so many blankets & pillows to fall on.

But he popped right back up, brushed himself off, & said, “Glad I did that now. I won’t be able to climb much till this colors problem is solved. I saw the Moosei & they are very close to the Wide Wide Sea. That’s the place to go.”

The Heroes were very impressed. “Even though you cannot go so high right now, we think having you along would be a great help. Would you come on this Heroic Journey with us?”

Jacoby felt very complimented & agreed. The Heroes in the Bike Wagon made room for him, & he climbed on in.

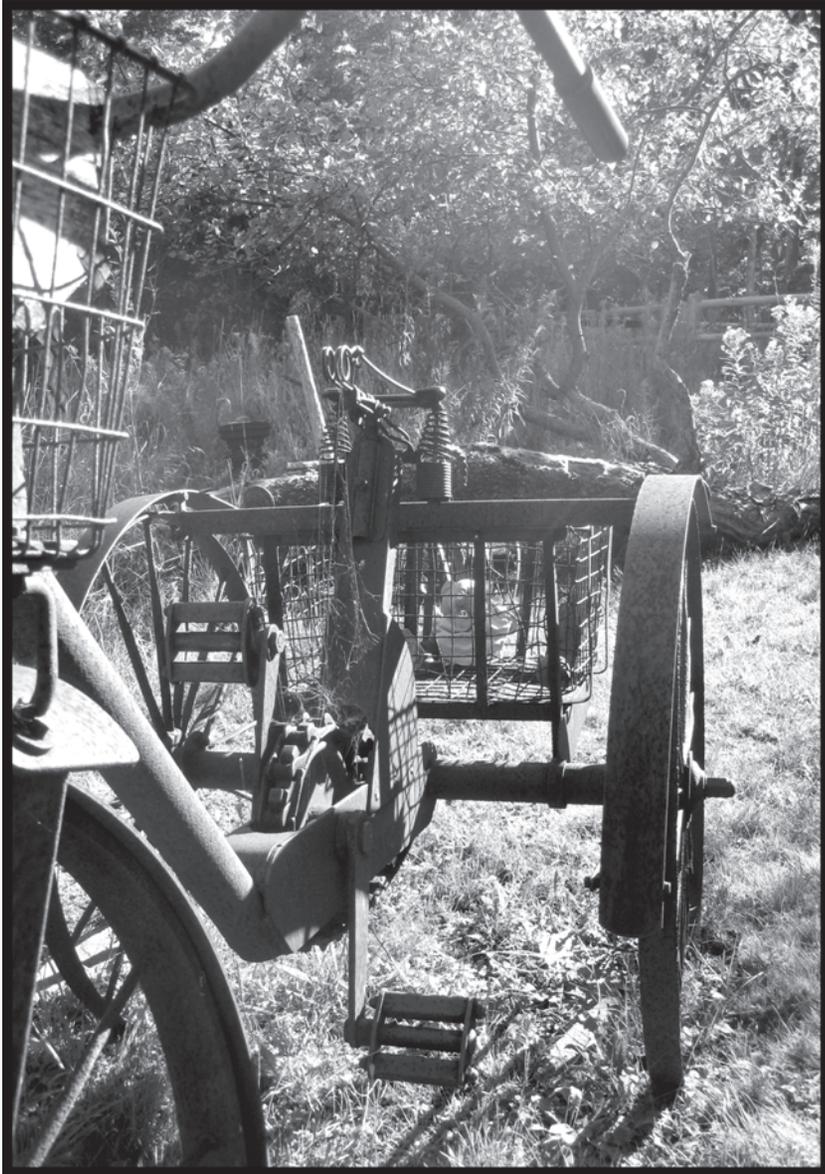
Memphis, seeing how many passengers were now in the cab, unfolded out a safety bar to rest on their laps hereon. “As two little friends of mine say, ‘Safety First!’” Then he raised his paw & they rolled on.

Eventually they came in sight of a steep mountainous path, a rocky climb up into unknown heights. This could not be climbed by the Bike Wagon, so all got out & the Heroes recalled their first Heroic Journey, when they climbed in the rain & hurricanoes up Mt. Cloudy Day.

The Heroes led their long line of their new friends, climbing, stepping, trying not to stumble among the ascending rocks.

“One step at a time,” the Heroes cautioned.

The Heroes moved step by careful step up this rocky path, & the new Heroes felt like



this is how they would know heroic adventures better.

The Heroes paused their climb & told their new friends to look down the rocky path they had come along so far. The new Heroes trembled to look but did.

“This is what Heroes do. They go on adventures to help others. They take care of one another along the way, & they find a fascinating story to tell at the end. That’s all you need to know of being a Hero.”

The Heroes recalled vividly how that first climb had been doused in rain, darkness, & a crumbling path up &, only by encouraging each other along, could they continue.

But their present climb was just getting harder & harder as they pushed on. They might have kept going too when Jacoby spied a little grey squirrel in a bright orange hat, sitting in a tree, watching them.

“Have you seen some strange & colorful Moosei come this way?” he asked.

The squirrel shook head. “No. But I can see them in a distance far yonder.” And he pointed from where they’d come.

Memphis said, “It must be the strange colors trying to pull us off our trail.” The Heroes agreed.

But Brisbee noticed the squirrel’s hat was not a murky weird color at all. “Maybe you would like come with us on our journey to find the Moosei? It looks like your good hat would be a nice beacon to guide our way.” Brisbee had noticed even Pirth’s purple color was dimming strangely.

The little grey squirrel put his paw on his chin. “Sure you don’t just want my hat? It was given me by a friend who said in times of trouble, it could help. Like now.”

All the Heroes assured that they wanted him & his hat, & so they all climbed down together & found where they’d left the Bike Wagon.

Well the Heroes might been bit a little disconsolate about having to return down the unclimbed mountain when the next event occurred to fill their minds.

They came of a sudden to a seeming impenetrable pass of stones, rocks, & boulders, one it looked impossible to roll or pass through. Seemed like their journey was halted in place. And they were so tired from that climb.

All seemed despairing when there was the quiet sound of wings flapping & a beautiful white bear appeared before them.

“I think I can help you Heroes out,” he said with a smile, & he told the littlest Hero to touch paw to his, & each to touch the next in line. Memphis, who was in the rear of the line, heard a whisper in his ear, “touch paw to your Bike Wagon.”

And thus they all rose above the rocks & boulders, & floated by hours & miles to arrive eventually to the shore of the Wide Wide Sea.

“Unfortunately I can’t fly you over the Sea to where the Moosei are bound,” Boyd admitted a little sadly.

They didn’t have a boat, or any other way to go.

That was when the Heroes gathered their new friends around & said, “Many’s the time we have reached a moment when a Heroic Journey is stalled like this. But we have learned if the Journey is truly heroic, & one meant to help, good will occur.”

Bella, who was speaking, continued. “We must not despair. Not despairing is most of the game. If one despairs, one slows or stops or makes a mistake, or turns back, & does not go on. Not despairing means trying & trying & trying. And then you have a chance.”

It was then that the littlest Hero looked up & started to cackle, & gnatter, & point some more.

Coming toward them all *thwup! thwup! thwup!* was the famous shiny green-scaled Calgary the Sea Dragon!

He thwuped amongst them. He was not as big as he gets. He said, after landing, “I can bring you to the Island where the Moosei went. They got a ride by me,” he admitted. “Did not know any were pursuing them till now. Hope I did not do wrong.”

The Heroes assured Calgary he did nothing wrong. “But if you give us a ride that would be good too.”

So Calgary grew bigger & bigger until he was big enough to take them. The Bike Wagon rolled on up to Calgary’s noggin. And then . . . *thwup! thwup! thwup!* They flew into the sky over the sea.

As Calgary flew on into the night, the Heroes settled back in the Bike Wagon’s seat-basket, clustered together, not to awake till next sunrise on the beach of the Island, under a palm for protection where the Sea Dragon had brung them.

*xxxv.*

The Heroes got ready to go, but the newer Heroes wondered where Calgary the Sea Dragon was.

“He will be back. Sometimes he has others to fly around or help,” explained the Heroes.

Everyone was safety-barred into the Bike Wagon, Memphis raised his paw, & he began to pedal into the sorta White Woods. The weird warping of the colors here was even more pronounced than the previous Islands. But Memphis pedaled slowly with Pirth dancing ahead, & Shelbee & his glowing orange hat perched on Memphis’s handle bars. Flora also suggested they keep *humming* as they had been, & this was comforting too. They got a feeling of rightness from doing it.

Soon they came to the Path of Roots & Rocks, a difficult path to travel even on paw. It was impossible for the Bike Wagon to roll along, & Memphis had to stop. Everyone pushed up the safety bar & climbed out.

“I guess we’ll have to walk it,” Memphis said sadly. He wasn’t worried about the safety of his unique vehicle so much as liking getting folks where they were going. Flora put a paw on her friend’s shoulder to reassure him it was OK.

After awhile of climbing in & among the large roots & rocks, though, some Heroes carrying others, the Heroes new & old began to tire. Then Eli, who was carried in Brisbee’s paws, began to jiggle for his attention. He told Brisbee his worry.

“Where’s the little imp?” Brisbee asked the others. They all stopped struggling forward & began looking for her in bushes & behind nearby trees.

Her heroic partner Bella wasn’t so worried. Rosa!eeta was indeed an imp, a kind of trickster coyote full of her games & shenanigans, but she never left a Hero’s Journey unfinished.

And sure enough, suddenly in the distance came the sound of a wild delighted cackle & a *honk! honk! honk!* of a familiar vehicle.

All the Heroes new & old hurried best they could up the path to discover the imp delightedly honking the horn of the famous Kittees Boat Wagon! Like Memphis with whom they were the huggiest of friends, the Kittees Jonny & Jonny (pronounced with a j- & an y- sound to differ, though nobody knew which was which), & Calgary too, of course, seemed to know when someone needed a ride.

So everyone piled into the back seat of the Boat Wagon & the Kittees made sure they

were all buckled in (Safety First!). Between the Kittes in front sat their dear Friend Fish, Murmur by name, a beautiful goldfish, & she smiled lovely at them all.

The Kittes waited for a signal to start & it came when the imp *honked! honked!* the horn again. Each Kitten had pedals below for two of their paws & a steering wheel they shared between them. Friend Fish sat perched between them on a little cushioned seat.

To traverse the Path of Roots & Rocks, the Kittes had pressed the CLAWS button on their dashboard, & the Boat Wagon's wheels had retracted, & climbing claws came out.

The Boat Wagon climbed steadily along among the roots & rocks, & the new & old Heroes rode with ease, enjoying their view of the White Woods, its many varied tall trees & wee sprouts, tho the weirder colors of everything around them was troubling. And even, distantly, the sharp, salty smell & *whoosh-whoosh* of the Wide Wide Sea.

It was Jacoby who noticed the white flash the Heroes had seen earlier, in the more distant trees, & nudged Bellla to look. Bellla watched a passing moment & then called, "Hello, come along here, old friend!"

And in less than a breath, the White Bunny MeZmer was hopping alongside the Boat Wagon as it came to a slow stop.

Bellla & Rosaleta jumped right out to hug that Bunny & the rest of the Creatures followed. MeZmer could tell from the crowd assembled that her friends Rosaleta & Bellla were on another Heroic Journey.

She invited them to take a little nap at a place she called FernKassi. "Very restful," she said, her mezzmering eyes twinkling with smile.

So they left the Boat Wagon on the Path & followed MeZmer into the kinda White Woods to come eventually to a great green patch of ferns. Big & small, so many of them. MeZmer hopped right into them & the rest waded in too.

They eventually came to a sort of bowl-shaped center to FernKassi where the ferns dipped lower & more densely to form a kind of couch-bed. And there was MeZmer's well-known companion in all her travels & adventures, a small grey hedgedyhog called Holly. He squeaked his delight to see all these new & old friends come to FernKassi.

Many of the Heroes could hardly stay awake long enough to cluster together in the fern couch-bed. Warm, safe, peaceful day, & their mission going well, at least so far. They napped.

Early afternoon all woke, & it was time to move along. The Heroes told MeZmer & Holly about their current adventure.

MeZmer pointed to the ferns around them & observed the colors were a little off. Holly looked at MeZmer & said even her powerful glow was not quite right either.

The Heroes invited MeZmer & Holly along, which they happily agreed to. They wanted to help.

So they all returned to the Boat Wagon, climbed in, buckled up (Safety First!), & continued to roll along toward the increasing scent & sounds of the Sea. Came out of the Woods finally to behold the wordless beauties of the Wide Wide Sea.

And there was someone waiting for them, a Creature friend familiar to them all. He was a black bear wearing a handsome yellow bowtie, named Shatzi.

"You must come along quick, my friends!" he said, excited & waving.

"To where?" asked the Heroes.

"To the final Island of your great adventure. The Moosei are waiting for you!"

"How did you end up on that Island with them?" asked the Heroes.

"Well, I was there having an adventure of my own," he said. "Flora knows because I checked in with her." She nodded & smiled.

"Then the Moosei came. I have to say, the colors were already confusing me when I met them, & they explained that that was why they'd come. So I paused my search for my friend to help them."

Everyone nodded & listened.

"Then Calgary the Sea Dragon came & found us. He was how we had all come to this Island, & he was checking on us. Especially because of the colors.

"He also said there was a group of great Heroes coming to help the Moosei in their mission. The Moosei said I should return with Calgary to the second Island & fetch them, all of you, as quickly as possible.

"So Calgary flew me here & said I could lead you in the Boat Wagon to the third Island. He was going back there to be nearby if the Moosei got into trouble."

So Shatzi got into the Boat Wagon & buckled in with the rest (Safety First!), & the Boat Wagon rolled into the Wide Wide Sea, Kittes now paddling furiously to get them to the third Island. Shatzi pointing the way. Colors getting wigglier & wigglier.

It took a good several hours to finally arrive to the rocky shore of the third Island. The Kittes paddled the Boat Wagon right up among the rocks. Further up the shore, near the edge of the Woods, napped Calgary the Sea Dragon.

Calgary greeted them, & pointed one of his green shiny paws toward where they should enter the Woods.

“Let’s keep up our *hmmming* as we go along,” said Flora, & everyone agreed & joined in.

As they went along, the colors got weirder & weirder. Despite Pirth’s dancing glow in front of them, Shelbee’s hat glowing in the Boat Wagon’s front seat with the Kittees, & MeZmer’s glowing fur in the back seat, the Kittees were pedaling slower & slower, since it was no longer clear what was path & what was tree. The *hmmming* was barely keeping them along their way, & their Heroic Journey was looking perilous.

The Heroes looked at the weirdly colored anxious faces of their crew & said, “Remember that we must stay true to our Journey, & our wish to help.”

Everyone *hmm*’d even deeper & the Boat Wagon kept rolling on somehow.

One more roll of the wheels & the Heroes came to a very strange place. It was a clearing, & in its center was the Moosei. The Moosei were glowing very calmly, & the colors around them were the natural ones that couldn’t be found anywhere else. The Heroes & the Boat Wagon included.

The Heroes hurried up to the Moosei & said, “You did it!”

The Moosei were not happy though.

“Only here. We can only do this for a small area like this. We’ve tried, & the natural colors travel with us. But the further we get from this clearing, the less area around us stays colored right.”

For a moment, nobody knew what to say. Then the new Heroes sort of grouped together, & talked among themselves for a bit.

They returned to the Heroes & the Moosei, & Melbourne spoke for them. “We have been learning all about Heroes & adventures, & we think we should stand around the edge of this clearing, paw to paw, & *hmm* together, with our eyes closed, & think about all the things & folks we love, & their natural colors, & try to amplify the Moosei’s colors.”

So they did. They spread out to the edge of the clearing, leaving the Moosei still glowing in the center, & touched paw to paw, & closed their eyes, & all set to *hmmming*.

MeZmer & Holly thought about the beautiful ferns in FernKassi. Melbourne thought about his garden & gardening tools. Jacoby thought about the many kinds of trees he would jump & swing through. Brisbee & Eli thought about the big green field

they liked to play throw & catch & kick in. Shelbee the squirrel thought about his orange hat & how it was a magical gift from a friend, & it made him feel less jittery sitting up in the trees. Pirth thought about the Copper Mushroom he liked to dance under & its coppery color. Flora thought about the bridge she lived in, the cool trickling water that ran under the bridge, & the ferns that were the door to her home. Boyd thought about flying over the bouldered path around a great pond in the White Woods, flying over the water itself, above the trees, & how he liked to touch paw with Creatures & bring them on travels. Memphis thought about his lovely Bike Wagon & traveling Creature folks from here to there. Symon thought about that field of goldenrod he liked to perch & nap in many an afternoon, listening to the wind, looking at the sky.

Shatzi had come here because of looking for his friend, the dancing black & white pandy bear, & so he thought of the many nights they would dance together under the moon & stars. He did not notice right away that his dear friend, attracted by the *hmmming* & natural colors, had come to the clearing too, & joined right in.

The Kittees & Friend Fish thought of all their marvelous travels in the Boat Wagon, on the Sea & on the land too. The Kittees thought about their friend’s beautiful yellow self, & Murmur thought about the Kittees’ so-bloo eyes.

Finally, the Heroes thought of all these new Heroes & the many adventures they had had together, & how lucky they were to have them all along now to put all to right.

The power of paw to paw, & the *hmmming*, & the love & gratitude all were feeling began to *whoosh-whoosh* pulse in & out like a heartbeat, & the natural colors of the clearing began to push out like a widening bubble in all directions, & this soon spread to the whole Island they were on, & on & on.

Calgary the Sea Dragon woke up from his nap & said softly, “I knew those Heroes could do it.”

The natural colors pulsed beyond the Island, into the Sea, into the sky, & the previous Islands they had traveled through, & soon all the six Islands, & the whole world was now thumping with returning colors.

Finally, there was a delighted cackle of the littlest Hero, & a click, & that was that, all colors back in place.

All the Heroes were laughing & cheering for, however this situation had occurred, whyever, the White Woods had a cold, or some extra love was needed to be given, it’s hard to say, now everything was restored to order.

And so our dear Heroes all piled into the Boat Wagon, including Moosei, Shatzi, &

his found friend Bauer the bear, buckled in (Safety First!), & rolled back to the shore.

They met Calgary the Sea Dragon who laughed his charming gruff laugh & congratulated them on their success.

“How about a ride back to the second Island, my friends?” he said. They all agreed happily, & the Boat Wagon rolled onto his great tail, & up & up & up to his noggin, & he took off with a great *thwup! thwup! thwup!* high into the air, & flew them all breathlessly excited through blue sky & clouds to the shore of the previous Island.

Let them roll off before taking to the air again. “See you on the other side, my friends!”

So our Heroes rolled back along the Path of Roots & Rocks, Boat Wagon CLAWS button pressed of course.

They came to where they’d left the Bike Wagon, & all the new Heroes climbed aboard it &, like a two-car train, the Bike Wagon & Boat Wagon rolled along onto the beach where Calgary waited.

Since the Bike Wagon did not float, Memphis drove it right up onto the agreeable noggin of Calgary, & he *thwup! thwup! thwup!* flew it & passengers high up in the air, while the Boat Wagon, Kittees & Friend Fish at the wheel, classic Heroes in their triumphs in the back, paddled below in the Sea.

It was a bright sunny day all around them, sun its natural yellow, sky its blue, clouds their white & grey. Sea its blue-green mix.

Eventually they returned to the Island they’d come from, & all looked natural again. Calgary landed the Bike Wagon just as the Boat Wagon rolled up from the Sea.

The classic Heroes stood up in their seats & said, “You new Heroes have done wonderfully in this Heroic Journey! We want you to ride foremost into the Village as we all return in our triumphs!”

So the Bike Wagon, with Memphis at the wheel, paw up to begin, biked & biked till arriving in the Village.

Everyone knew, of course, that the colors had gone wrong, & that the Heroes were helping the Moosei to figure it out. And then the natural colors returned & it was time to celebrate.

As Bike Wagon & Boat Wagon rolled into the Village, everyone from the region

came to cheer & cheer the classic Heroes & their new Heroes crew.

Everyone went into the Ancienne Coffeehouse to celebrate long into the night, & hear the many tales of this Heroic Journey.

Singing, *hmmmming* &, as sweet surprise, Bauer the Bear taught them all the dance he had contrived from all this. You start out curled small, arms & legs close, head down, no colors, & then you *hmmm* & *hmmm* & reach for the paws near you, & spread & spread till all the colors return. It was danced many times.

At the end of the night, we find our friend Memphis, back in his armchair, tucked out from this adventure, & all his driving. He may take a day or two off.

Sitting in his lap, also all tucked out, is Bellla. Fast friends, napping together.

On the Spot On board nearby, the imp Hero was back with her friends, & they were cackling & gnatting to beat the band.



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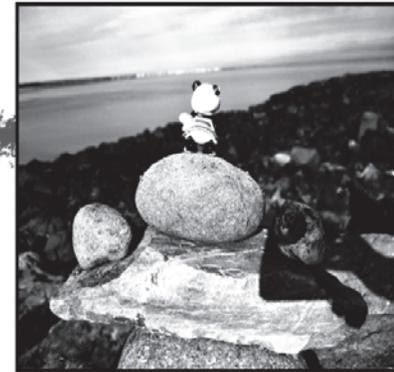
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*Somehow in the midst  
of all this trouble and decay,  
beauty falls like an atom bomb,  
and blows us all away.  
--Jamie Sheehan*



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