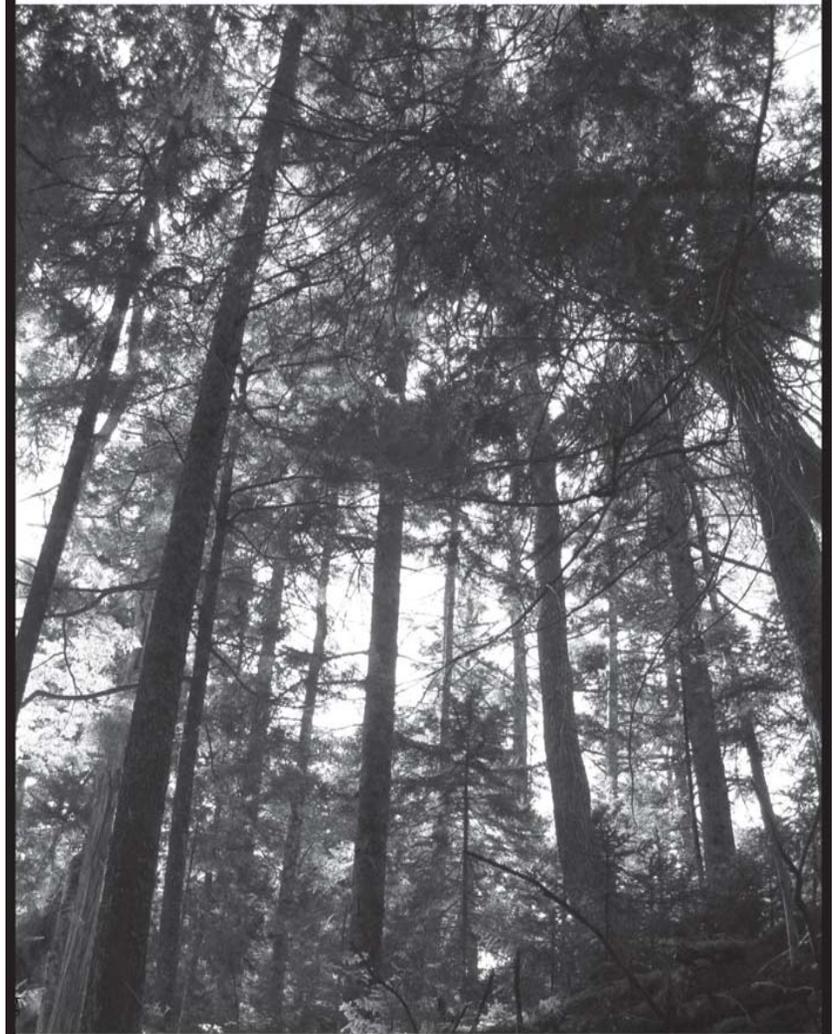




I'm learning to fly . . . but I ain't got wings . . .  
Coming down . . . is the hardest thing . . .



-- Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, 1991.

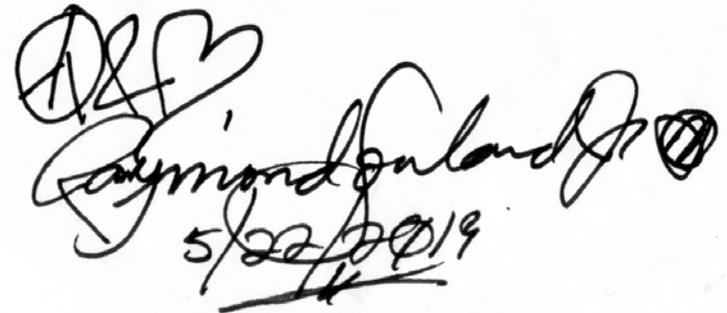
## Editor's Introduction

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

Endless worlds of possibility beckon us, those within our hearts, our dreamings, our imaginations. Those too in the wide beautiful expanse of this blue-green globe we share. Those waiting out there in the stars. Real & potent possibilities.

Yet fear, hubris, prejudice, greed poison many of us, stunt our hopes, our faiths, our trust in each other & in the world. These as well are real & potent as we let them.

Those who wish well for all the world, who see negotiating differences among us as a way to build lasting bonds, must be strong enough to carry out this long work. The writers & artists in this volume may show you some steps along the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond Souland, Jr." followed by the date "5/22/2019". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "RS" at the beginning. There are some scribbles and a small circle at the end of the signature.

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

\*\*\*\*\*

# Scriptor Press Sampler

Number 19 | 2017 Annual

Edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
Assistant Editor: Cassandra Soulard

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



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## Dream Raps

*Dreams they complicate my life  
(Dreams they complement my life)*  
—R.E.M. "Get Up."

\* \* \* \* \*

*I ask the Universe tonight: What if Dream-Mind is Supra-Consciousness?*

\* \* \* \* \*

## I'm Back at the Desert Festival, Again

I'm back at the desert festival again, really it seems, surprise, delight, & again I am wearing a certain hat, one I shared with a small Creature friend of mine, this friend who traveled with me. It's a warm fisher hat, with a chin-strap. I found it on the old green bus back in the city, the last one of the night, returning from the hospital, in the very back seat. It'd fallen in a dark crevasse, & I thought of my little Creature friend, who was always cold. Folds nicely to fit his much smaller head.

One day I did not know where he was anymore, & I kept the fisher hat to remember him, & then another day I did not know where the hat was anymore. And days upon seething days, till recently, when dreams nudged into my waking, taking me by the scruff & nudging, & nudging harder, until one moment I open my eyes, & I'm back at the desert festival again, & my little Creature friend's fisher hat is in my hands.

I would sit down, back then, on the desert floor, night-time, desert festival loud & cheerful all around us, & I would look at my little Creature friend, & he would look at me, very calmly, & suddenly I am calmer, because he is a good little Creature friend. He knows how I get, excited, overblown, too full of the dramas for any one of them to take hold, offer a path.

He has very deep dark eyes, a pleasant purple fur, & I'm very glad for him, & he reaches out his little paw & pats me on the nose & I think: *my, how cool you are, & how cool you are, & how cool you are* . . . then he hops off my knee, & begins to do his desert dance, a kind of frenetic rocking back & forth, the ribbons in his paws & his fisher hat flying wildly about him, like he can listen to all the human musics, & the



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desert noises, & the wind, & the celestial music above, & the roiling in the earth itself below, & dance it wildly, happily, calmly, freely . . .

If I am back here again, can he be too? Can I find him? Give him his fisher hat? Hold him on my knee again? Watch him dance his beautiful dance again?

\* \* \* \* \*

### Mulronie the Space Pirate

Well, you know, it's like I always say, & I've been saying it for a long time, because it's something that my dear friend Mulronie the Space Pirate taught me. *You never know with people-folks.*

Now I know every one of you reading these lines, dozens, hundreds, thousands, bajillions, you've read the five famous books written about Mulronie the Space Pirate. The shortest, mightiest bandito in all of outer space. You well know that when he was twelve, in 1951, he had a strange encounter, under the starry skies, out in the fields beyond the farmhouse where he lived. Something happened that night, & it changed him. And you know that when he was a young feller, in 'bout 1969, he was part of that *other* mission to the moon, the one you *don't* hear about.

You know all that well, & you know how the books detail his eventual departing Earth, Terra, homeland, whatever you may call it, he called it many things, & how he made his way, by one means & another, into the far reaches of outer space.

But what you don't know is that in the year 2402, so far away from those starry skies back in that mythical year 1951, there came a sixth book about Mulronie the Space Pirate's adventures. None of you know that. I'm telling you tonight, this is a confession that there was indeed a sixth book, detailing the final adventures of Mulronie the Space Pirate, beyond what you know.

Now you may get worried & say: *oh dear, did he finally perish after all those years?* No, he didn't. He found himself a nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid—so far away from everything else, you'd think it was Kansas. But he had those later adventures before that kind of quasi-retirement he went into. It was those adventures that made the retirement possible, because he learned finally how to travel without moving, how to raise his kind of hell without lifting any of his thirteen fingers. That book does exist, I know, because I wrote it, his dear friend, his companion.

It was a long neighborhood, on that nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid like Kansas. There were two houses, his & mine. We kept them far apart from each other, by agreement. I'd keep the manuscript of the sixth book overnight, wake up at first light, walk halfway toward his house. He'd meet me, take the manuscript, securing it

under his arm, & we'd walk the rest of the way to his house, & continue our work on the manuscript.

But what happened was the wind hit, & it blew hard, & he staggered, & he tumbled, & the pages blew all over the place, & there were no Woods to catch them, & there were no clouds to keep them from flying away, & *my goodness how those pages flew*, they flew all over the world, all over that nice, small, semi-habitable world. We found all the pages we could, but not nearly all of them. It would have been much longer a book. But he was ready to retire soon, & just said, *let's do with what we have, my friend. Let the rest go.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### I'm Drowning, Over a Football Game

I'm drowning over a football game in the early wintertime. The snow has been falling & falling all weekend. I've watched it pile higher, up to & halfway over the one window that I have to see outside. I'm safe inside, & it's warm, but I don't know how I'll pay the heating bill next month, or the electricity bill, or the phone bill. But I think to myself: *if this snow keeps falling, I'll be buried & warm like the polar bear in the wintertime.* So go my future business plans.

I'm watching the football game on the black & white TV, every so often adjusting my Antennar 2000 to try to bring me the picture a little bit more clearly. I find my eye drawn to one particular football player, and start to feel like I'm watching two games at once. He plays for the Los Angeles team, has played for them for a long time. I knew him once, a long time ago, he was my friend, & now he's much older than that, & so am I, & so it seems like I'm watching two games at once.

I'm watching the game long ago in which he ran for many touchdowns. I think they even brought him out to punt the ball once. He could do no wrong, & they cheered & cheered, & cried out his name. People painted it on their bare chests, & on their bald heads.

But the other game I'm watching is probably a more recent game, my Antennar 2000 can't tell time anymore. He's now kind of fat, sloppily uniformed, & I guess they keep him around out of sentiment. He's an institution. They don't even call the plays in his direction anymore, because then people start to laugh. He mostly stays in to block because he's so big & fat, it often helps, people fall around him.

Glance out the window from my two games, & see that the snow is piling higher & higher. I'm thinking: *O! To be a polar bear, now that the winter is here.* Look back to the black & white TV screen, & see the pretty quarterback, in the newer game, dropping back & throwing the ball, & it's tipped up, & it rides high up into the air

&, as though an air current itself had a funny sense of humor, the ball falls into my old friend's fat hands!

He probably hasn't caught a pass in five or six seasons, & he staggers wildly around with the ball, not remembering what to do or how, his old body moves & memories all gone. He runs the wrong the way, & then he trips, & he falls down near the sidelines, & I'm thinking to myself: *please, ball, just roll out of bounds & save my friend's pride for one more day*, & it rolls closer & closer to the out of bounds markers.

In the older game, they put him on defense near the end of the game, & he roars through the line, crushes the pretty quarterback, ball jumps loose, & he scoops it up, & dances & jives his way to the end zone. The stadium lifts off with cheers for my friend.

\* \* \* \* \*

*You've got to pay attention to the signs in your life. You've got to look around for clues, there's all sorts of information & guide points everywhere, but you've gotta pay attention. You can't be controlled by your dogmas & your presuppositions. You've got to just look around with open eyes, listen in strange ways, any way you can.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Couple A & Couple B

It is the old & well-known story of what happens when there is a Couple A & a Couple B. Couple A & Couple B meet in college. Couple B walk hand in hand into the student center, & they sit down at a table near Couple A, & they all start talking. Couple B is prettier, Couple A is kinder. They switch up at times, becoming Couple C & Couple D, & two stray, Couple E & Couple F, & stray further, to form Couple G & Couple H. But eventually Couple A & Couple B reform.

Some years after college, Couple A & Couple B going to the Red Sox game on the weekend, one of them holds up the best sign in the whole park, & they win the local TV station's "Take a Swing!" contest. As prize, they get to play an inning against the Red Sox, right there at Fenway Park.

For the first play, Couple A-he gets a single. Maybe the Sox are kind, don't try too hard. Couple B-she takes a walk. Couple B-he bunts, & the Red Sox let all runners advance safely. Laughing lazily, rich, good-looking guys in tight white uniforms.

The fourth one, though, Couple A-she, smashes the ball just over the left fielder's glove. (She's the leading hitter by a country mile in her local softball league. *Shhhhhhh!*) The fielder slows it, that's all, then wilds around for the ball. Another fielder rushes to help him—they're panicked—they hadn't expected this. They throw the ball back

to the infield, but it just rolls away toward the dugout &, by the time the chaos & panic has settled down, there has been struck, inside Fenway Park, by these seeming amateurs (*Shhhhhhh!*), an inside-the-park grand slam home run. And, as a result, the Red Sox have to pay them \$10,000 total—\$2,500 per run—, plus make a \$10,000 donation to the Jimmy Cancer Fund.

*Delight delight delight*, everyone says, newspapers catch the gleam of their smiles, their pretty figures, the laughing charms in their eyes. Then days, *dot-dot-dot*, weeks pass. He sees a tiny blue light again on the ceiling of their bedroom. Thinking of his small Creature friend, his small friend's fisher hat, the desert festival. The small Creature friend's dance, better than any coupling, any inside-the-park grand slam home run.

\* \* \* \* \*

### It All Comes from the Book I Was Reading

Now you can say what you want, but I say that it all comes from the book I was reading. It was for a class, & it was a day late, should have read it yesterday. It's how these things go sometimes.

Our house is kind of tipped in design. I climb from one half to the other, settle into the lowest end of the couch to read, where I'm least likely to just tumble on out mid-page. And on the last page of the book I'm reading, the girl's telling the boy she had a good time the other night, & it ends, & I can't tell if a page is missing. I just don't know. I stare at the book, & I just don't know. Will young Mulronie leave pretty Figga after all, for the romances of outer space, that secret mission to the moon & beyond?

Anyway, I put the book in my knapsack & I head off to class that, mind you, was held yesterday, but I wonder if I can say something anyway. Along the way I figure: *well, since I'm late, maybe I'll just go in & see a movie*. There's this movie theater I like, it's down an alley, although the sign that marked it has long since been gone, so you *really* gotta know it's there or you'll never find it. I walk, still wondering about my book. Mulronie always packs his black & white TV with the Antennar 2000 last &, *when & only when they're packed, he goes*.

It's a fairly big room. And the thing about this theater is that it doesn't have the usual rows upon rows of theater seats. It has an assortment of chairs, different kinds & sizes, armchairs & rocking chairs & so on, & the movie screen is small & it's over in one corner. So I pick up my favorite green armchair, lucky it's empty, & I move it as close as I can to the screen, trying not to get in the way of others who were also peering toward the screen, everybody trying to get a look. Because nobody actually charges us to get in, we try to have our manners.

When it comes on, it's in the middle of the story, as the movies sometimes are at this theater. It seems to be a movie about a football team. The grizzled old veteran is showing the brash first round rookie how to play, how to win right. He feels he can't do it anymore, he believes he's on his way out. The fans laugh at him now, & the team usually only lets him block these days, not carry or catch the ball. His leadership in the locker room, coaching on the sideline, these are shadowed over by his big belly, grizzled jaw, slack-mouthed grin at everything.

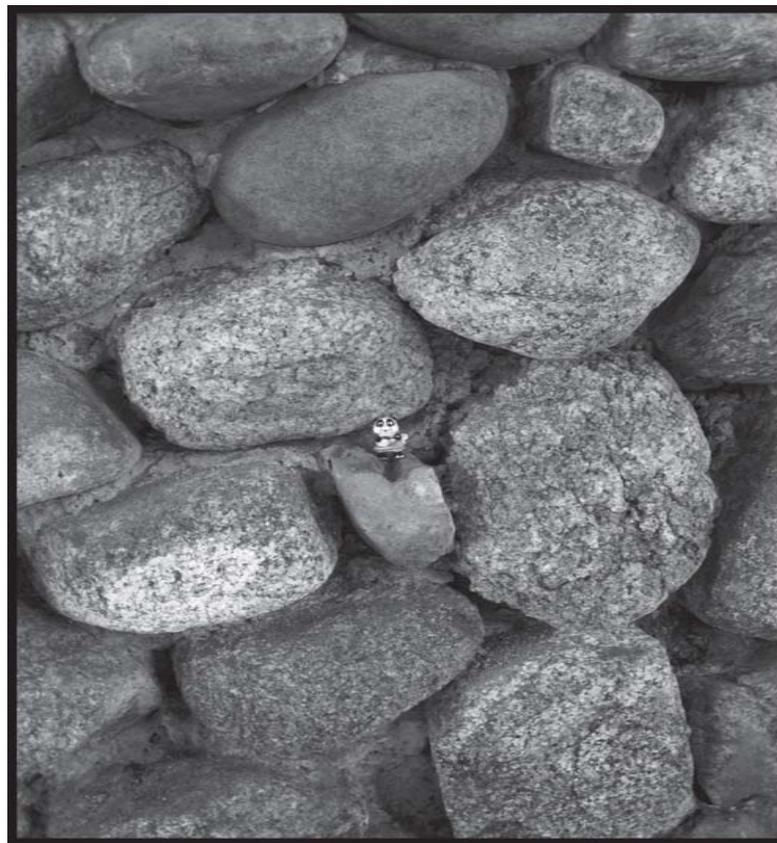
But I can feel the hotshot rookie's loyalty to him, the long-time loyalty of everyone else on the team to him still. No matter his lesser gleam, his diminished speed. He's their *leader*, he's their *man*. I want him to go out & play one more game, & I want him to ride out high. The movie ends suddenly before we can find out if he does. Puff of smoke, & the film on the screen burns to white.

Everybody sits around for a while, some smoked blunts, some talked politics, some looked for M&Ms on the floor. There were always one or two. Since there were no candy concessions at this theater, you had to get what you could. A few of the skeptical hipsters who'd stuck around this long decide to venture into the murk beyond the movie screen to a **Bar** they say is on the other side. Don't see any of them again tonight.

Anyway, then a short cartoon suddenly comes on, it's about 30 seconds long & it goes like this: *they discovered that what had been slowly destroying their world all these centuries were people just like them, only these people were thousands of times bigger than them, & no more knowing that they existed than these tiny people had known the big people existed. But these tiny people embarked on a great mission to bring them down, by growing bigger in time. They vowed they would grow bigger, & they would bring the big ones down, & before you could even think twice, this short cartoon was over.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*I was at someone's house, it was a friend, she had this large jug of LSD, it was brown-tinted, it was kind of a pretty brown, almost like a dye but I don't think so. She was very generous with this LSD, every time I came she made sure I got took care of, that I got risen up, that I got high. She knew I was struggling with my worry about paying rent. Then what happened one night was that, I don't know, I didn't get high, it didn't work, maybe it did, & I just didn't notice, the worry had overcome me. She was tired, she had to go to work the next day, she went to bed, & so I went into the little refrigerator where she kept all her medicines & chemicals & do-dads & I poured a little more LSD from her jug into my cup of orange juice, maybe a little more after that, I just had to finally evict this worry from my mind & not worry about rent except for the first of the month. But I must have poured out too much because now it looked like there was a lot less in the jug than there was, & so I got panicked & I brought the jug over to the sink & I filled it up with water a little, but now that beautiful brown color was gone. It was watered down & I just didn't know what to do, & it's like in the course of trying to expel one worry, rent worry, I'd taken on another, so maybe there's a lesson in there for you or, honestly, maybe there isn't.*



\* \* \* \* \*

## Here I Am, Standing in My Old Hometown

Here I am, standing in my old hometown. But, I'll tell ya, it looks a lot more prosperous than it used to. I find myself again on the street that used to have the bookstore I went into to buy 10-for-a-dollar paperback books out of a crate, & downstairs in its basement the burger joint where I'd sit in the corner, read my frail paperbacks, & write *lurve* poems.

Now it's all different. I stare at the pink neon sign **Mulronie's Original Genuine Gourmet Space Pirate Burgers!** & walk in. Not a paperback book in sight. Not even the Mulronie books. I *loved* those books. Just a weird, worn-looking full-sized cut-out of Mulronie in his Space Pirate suit, standing near the famous Space Tugboat, commandeered by the tiny cackling black & white pandy bear, sitting in Mulronie's hand.

Should I feel this furious? Didn't I leave this joint, this street, this whole town, a long time ago? But I do feel this furious, more than I ever have. Someone asks to take my order & instead I sit at an empty table, saying I am waiting for someone. *OK, sir. Let us know.*

I look around. The exposed brick walls are the same. Just everything in the middle is different. Then I remember something that could help my fury. Up high toward the ceiling, there is a brick that I happen to know is a kind of explosive. The owner of the joint back then only told a few of us regulars about it. Called it his Plan B Retirement Plan. He didn't actually tell me; I just overheard them talking one night. He pointed up there & said in his unearthly drawl, "I just take a chair & climb up there, pull out that brick, & the spike behind it, & drive the one into the other. BOOM! Whatever problems I got, solved. End of the world."

So I take my chair, & I climb up there, & I begin pulling at bricks to find the right one. And I hear below the consternation over what I am doing, & would likely be hauled down by the town cop (maybe there was more than one, but they always looked the same to me), but I find it, & I pull it down, the brick & the spike. Set them on the table before me, & think: *Do I want to do this?* Nod, & I raise the spike in my hand, & drive deep right into the brick to end the world!

I find myself back in a kind of a little store, the one they say has a buried spaceship beneath it. There's a red-haired girl behind the counter that I knew, oh-so-long-ago, it aches me to think of it. I lean forward to kiss her, since the world has ended, & yet somehow it hasn't. Has & hasn't.

Now we're sitting, facing each other, on the floor, & others are walking past, smiling at us, wondering: *who are these two crazy kids, & why does one of them think the world has ended?*

\* \* \* \* \*

## My Beloved & I Keep Going to These Strange Parties, Over & Over

I don't know what happens but my beloved & I will find ourselves in a very cluttered living room, waiting for someone who's on the phone in the other room. So I'll be looking around thinking, *what can I put together here to sweeten her way?* And I find a Mason jar, & I mix in a little bit of chocolate, a little bit of coconut, from pouches I keep in my book-bag. Dashes & drops from flasks on the shelf with no labels on them, just for fun. I take a sip on it. It tastes drinkable.

And then a lot of people show up at that moment before my beloved can take a drink of this. Perhaps it's for the better, since what kind of mad concoction had I made? Anyway, I don't know anybody here, that's the kind of strange parties we've been going to.

But, happily, I sort of ease into a corner, & my beloved eases into the corner with me. Right near to the shelf with the strange flasks, & the empty one above it. I reach up to the empty one, tug, & it comes loose from the wall into my hands. It's made out of lots of pieces of wood, strange pale wood, wood that seems to almost *hmmmm*. These pieces of wood are twisted & braided together to form this board, & I'm going to hand it over to my beloved, so she can study it too, when it just sort of floats over to her. She catches it in her hands, & smiles, & floats it back over to me.

Then I nod to her, she nods to me &, I don't know how we do it, but we together climb up on that board & float out through the open window into the clear night. *Goodbye, good night to another strange party.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## I'm With a Group of Friends

I'm with a group of friends. Dear ones. We're sitting around a table in the brown-paneled back room of that old Italian-Polish restaurant, & my old friend the Traveling Troubadour is there, strumming his guitar happily, blue eyes twinkling for all. But I know he's really gone & I have to go out to the bar in the other room to catch my breath for a moment. One of my friends comes out to see if I'm OK. She saw him too.

We go back in & I ask him, *what's your life like now, wherever you are, up in the stars?* And he smiles big & says, *smokin', drinkin', guitar-playin'.* Then he gets serious with wailing pretty on his guitar, his beautiful voice once again filling this brown-paneled room, like years long gone.

Later we all leave that restaurant, 'cuz it's a beautiful night out, & we pile into

somebody's car, & we're tight up against each other in the back, cheek to cheek, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip. I feel so fucking happy at this moment, & I close my eyes, & we come to some kind of party, & it's a very cluttered place, hard to say what kind of party's going on here anyway. Two laughing people are floating on some kind of board above the clutter, laughing, laughing hard, departing through an open window.

I get this idea that something really important is in the middle of this clutter, & I go searching through it all, pushing things aside, almost randomly. And then I find them, these Secret Books that I only ever find in dreams like this one, & there they are, unharmed, & I just open one up because I know that my time with them is short, & this kind of reading's the best kind of reading.

I dive in, & start reading about the King who summoned his brothers on a great quest, his mission to lead them to a mysterious Island. On the Island, to find a timeless, powerful Gate; within it, a being who might help them save the world. Carries with him a Secret Book of his own, within it a map to the Island.

But one night along their years-long way, tired, drooping, they let loose in a sort of coffee house in a Village, start carousing & fighting. What causes the fight is that they see specters of their lost loves in the murk of the Tavern, people they left behind years back to go on this quest. These loved ones are sad & missing them, yearning for them to return. It's a night where the quest may just fall apart out of sadness for what is gone, & yet their King somehow holds them together.

Somehow he makes it so the night passes more blurrily & they hang together. By the next morning, they don't really remember much of what happened, & I think to myself, having been through a night of my own, *sometimes I could use a little bit of that blurry not-remembering-so-well-next-morning stuff. But only sometimes.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*I'm descending a complicated series of ladders & stairs, among many people, continuously climbing down. I feel as I'm descending like it's not just space but time, I'm descending through places & people I've known & haven't known, times that still remain strange to me though I lived in them, through them, in spite of them. I think of people I knew, that I knew so closely, yes, yes, no, maybe. That's all you get at best. Then there are people I remember that become different to me over time. It's like who they are in my mind now is based on someone they once were, & who they actually are somewhere out there on the planet doesn't really matter anymore because they operate in my mind in a different way, they become a kind of a symbol of something, become tied to something, tied to a feeling, or tied to a memory, tied to something, like a mascot. Like you were once my friend & now you're Cap'n Crunch. Now you're my mascot for regret, for youth, for fun, for foolishness.*

*And I keep descending this series of ladders & stairs & I feel my limbs fall away from me & not really important anymore in this descent. This descent is not into a physical place. This descent is through dream, somewhere else. The faces fall away, as faces do, & other faces come, & they go too. If I'm lucky, as I fall away completely, I will look beyond the faces & see the rest of this wide, wide world.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Those Crazy Days Back When I Was a Spy

When I think back on those crazy days, back when I was a spy, there were some funny moments, in amidst the bloodshed & mayhem. There was one I still like to tell about. We had an operation going on in a hotel room. It was a big hotel room, big as an apartment.

My partner & I were trying to tease something from the air, expose it. He'd brought in this heavy suitcase for our work. It was one of those bulletproof kinds. You could drop it from a hundred floors up & it'd be fine, wouldn't break or open up. You had to use the right thumbprint, & tumbler combination, & maybe a couple of secret handshakes to get into that bugger but, once you got into it, that's what you got. Bugs. In cans, & jars, & containers, all sorts of insects. Ants, praying mantises, hummingbirds, etc., etc.

I was unclear at first why we brought them in to set them loose, & then my partner took out from the suitcase what he called the Football. The Football was this football-shaped light &, when we set it up on a table, the bugs would gravitate towards it. The closer they got to it, the more likely it was they were going to evaporate. They'd evaporate.

Well, I wasn't sure what all this was about, because it just seemed like it was a lot of trouble for a bug zapper. My partner assured me this was no ordinary bug zapper, or zapper of any kind. *You see*, he told me, blue-sometimes-green eye glinting, mushroom eye glinting too, *what's important is not the ones that evaporate but the ones that don't. Because, when they don't, it's like it's some kind of signal, like in their buggy little minds it's time to hurry home.*

I didn't know what *hurry home* meant, or why it was important, but this is what we wanted to do. We wanted them to approach the Football, & then the ones that didn't get zapped to hurry home. Now the problem with this was that we had to let them out of the hotel room for them to hurry home, & follow them, & this part of the operation went south pretty quickly because they're insects, they go fast, & these were super-hyper-intelligent alien insects to boot. But I don't think we our technologies were really prepared to follow these super-hyper-intelligent alien insects back to wherever *home* was.

And so, ultimately, I just sat at the bar a lot until the operation was declared over, & there was a red-haired waitress there who kept my drink filled. I was just watching the news, the same political things comin' & goin' as ever. Saw some pretty shady characters in the hotel, too, comin' & goin'.

I noticed that some of them were a little overly dressed for the summer heat that was happening outside. Some of them passed through the lobby in long coats, big hats. Sometimes their antennae poked out, sometimes tails from under their coats, sometimes they made a *buzzzzzzzz zzzzzz zzzzzz* noise as they passed.

\* \* \* \* \*

## It Was a Very Strange Year

It was a very strange year indeed. I found myself often walking through a series of old factory buildings. It became my regular path. Between the buildings were these wide, wide alleys, dark, & I couldn't tell if they were filled with trash, or if people were living there, or something else stranger still was going on.

I'd always get to a certain point in this walk, or *perambulation*, as one of my stranger friends would call it, where I just had to go to the bathroom. There, over to my left, sort of embedded in one of these old factory buildings, was a red door. Next to the red door was a blacked-out window, but it had a neon sign in it to tell you what was going on. It said **Bar**.

So I'd go over to **Bar**, & it took me a few times to remember that you didn't just push the door open at **Bar**—you had to kick at the bottom twice, & push high immediately, to get the door open. Otherwise it wouldn't no matter what you did, because it was only that combination that worked. I can't tell you how I learned it, but somehow I did. Maybe someone showed it to me. *Who knows?*

Anyway I'd go in, & the bar would be over to the left, & over to the right would be a bathroom stall. Not a bathroom, just a stall. Just a toilet surrounded by three flimsy walls & a door. And I'd go in, & close the door, & I reinforce it with the trash can that was there within the stall, since there was no lock, because inevitably someone would come banging against the door, wanting to use it, not recognizing that I was inside, not seeing my feet, not hearing my noises.

It was often this woman, she'd come pounding at the door, yelling *Fucking secret Moon mission!* & I'd hurry & I wouldn't finish. I'd just escape the whole thing & often, perhaps every time, I'd be attracted to what was going on at the back of the bar because, you see, there was no back wall, there was just sort of a murky inkiness that trailed off for as far as the eye could see, & further.

And I'd find myself walking into the murkiness &, sure enough, there would be another bathroom, or rather just another stall, but this time nobody else competed for its space. So I'd walk in, I'd close the door, & it actually had a lock. I'd close my eyes to calm, & I swear sometimes I thought I could hear the sounds of a TV show or a movie going on, distantly. Maybe a laugh or two. But I had to get where I was going, so I regret to say I never walked deeper into the murkiness to see what it was. Lazy, cowardly? I don't know.

\* \* \* \* \*



*Now this story started slow, those pages back there, so you could follow it really easily at the beginning,  
but now it's going to twist, & it's going to turn, & I'm not saying you can't do it,  
but I am saying maybe hang onto the rails a little bit more, just in case.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## I'm Sitting in a Sort of Coffee House

I'm sitting in a sort of coffee house in the Village. It runs back into its own murk for what seems like miles. And there's this turquoise-eyed girl I'm sweet on. Her name is Figga. I think I'm some other age. It might be younger, it might be older. It might just be some other kind of number. She's friendly but somewhat distant. I'm shy, don't know what to say. Probably I'm younger than I am now.

But I do my best, smile, talk about books, Mulronie & so on, & at some point she kind of smiles, & nods, & wanders away, & I see her go off with some pretty guy for a while. Then later she's back, her long red hair now tied up in a fake bob, & I don't remember what we're talking about. It all feels like loneliness & yearning. I'm helpless, but I try to remember back, *how did I get here?* Maybe that'll help me figure out where I am now & what's next.

I was on that green bus, the one that runs to the hospital, & I knew that most of the passengers on the green bus are not coming back tonight. It's the last green bus of the night. I got off it, not at the hospital, no, & I was walking the streets awhile, thinking about how a lot of them who stayed on the green bus were not coming back.

I was supposed to go to the hospital. The doctor said, *you just come on in, & we'll get you cleaned out & fix it all.* Then he added, *you could take your chance with the pills, maybe they'll help. Or you can heal on your own,* & he shrugged. So he really didn't know, & maybe he really didn't care. I'd had enough of that hospital. The crowded rooms, the quarreling roommates.

I cross the road toward this sort of coffee house, & I see the green bus in the distance, still heading to the hospital, going faster & faster. I know that driver; he won't stay on the street as he gets closer to the hospital. It takes hold of him, that feeling that most people he's driving are not coming back, it takes hold of him, & sometimes he'll drive off the road, into the ditch, & maybe he'll just stop for a moment for a minute & sit silently, his bus half-tipped in the ditch.

He remembers a dream he had, it was a long time ago, but it feels like it applies to nights like tonight, when I'm feeling like this—*We were all lost, & so we traveled to an alternative time, where the world had been healed of all its ills, & it felt good, & it felt hopeful*—, & so that's how I first came here, this sort of coffee house, it being one of the crossroads amongst the many kinds of worlds. But then something terrible happened.

There was a great explosion of some kind, & there's no more sort of coffee house, & I have this naked red girl, red-haired girl, in my arms. What I am saying is, she's burned but she's also red-haired, red-haired and red-skinned in my arms. And we're being pursued, & I'm looking for an escape, somewhere, & finally I see it. I see that big house that I dreamed about all those years. Been awhile.

I remember there was an attic, & there were many mirrored rooms, & you could just lose yourself in those many-mirrored rooms. I carry her, red-skinned & red-haired, clumsily climbing the fold-down ladder to climb up into the attic.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Time isn't linear, no, it's like a big field, moments, places, people, events.  
It's hard to believe this, & yet only to be able to point & say, that's where it came from, back there, but not  
be able to point somewhere else & say, that's where I'm bound, over there.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## He Was Known as Jack the Drug Dealer

He was known as Jack the Drug Dealer. He was a polite man, but he was in bad shape. Everybody knew it. The only hint you had of him from his older, better days was that paperback he carried around. *Unofficial Guide to Mulronie the Space Pirate's Universe.* You never saw him look at it, but you always got the feeling he just didn't have to, that he knew all its contents.

But then good luck came to him. He was sleeping in alleys, his only address a cavernous bookstore nearby that was kindly to him. Most of the time, if he ate at all, it was from the licorice roots found in a nearby park. But then good luck came to him, he won some money in some kind of contest, & grew confident, and he was now head of a charity organization, with ten nodes of business. He was on the top; his clothes were clean.

I was new on the job, & I heard this story about him in pieces over time. Then one day I got called into his office. It wasn't that big an office for the big head of a charity organization. I don't think he never quite left the alley in some way.

We ended up sitting on the floor together. He told me a story. He said, *there was this baseball game & I was in the outfield. They put me out there because they figured that was the place where I could do the least damage. I was their mascot, because I won a contest with my friends. People paid to see me stand in the outfield & wave to them. They were pretty good defensive team, so not many balls came out my way.*

*But then one time this ball was hit hard, I heard it, it was a crack! a beautiful sound, strange to say, & I think it's going to go over my head, but then it starts to arc low, & I*

start rushing toward it, & for a moment I forget that I'm no good at baseball, & I don't know why I'm here. I'm in the outfield because they have no use for me, just short of not having me at all. I just leap into it, my body arcs low, & the ball is curving low, & they are going to meet, my glove & this ball, & what happens is this: I squeeze my glove with my eyes closed & by the single thread hanging off the ball, because it was hit so hard that it was kind of tattered, I catch it & hold it above the ground. I catch it cleanly.

Nobody realizes. They think I'd just kind of fumbled & jumped & fell my way toward near it somehow. And they were yelling at me to **throw to home plate!** because the monster that had hit this ball was going to get an inside-the-park home run off my sorry ass. But I raise the ball up, & I yell, **I caught it clean!** And then, just to convince them all, I hurl that ball toward home plate. It's a beautiful throw, straight on, arrives cleanly in the catcher's glove. I'm not capable of that throw, wasn't then, not now, not ever.

Later, someone asked me to autograph the inside of a milk carton. He said, **this carton's full of signatures & statements by heroes, & you're one.** So I did. Now get out of my office. Get back to work, son.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Civil War & Football

There's always these kinds of confusions between one thing & another. I'm sure you've been involved in a few yourselves. You see, this occurred during the Civil War & football. My squad is in the other side's war-torn territory, & we need to find some room for our kicker, when their soldiers rush at us & we shoot them down so he can kick the go-ahead field goal. And he does. He's very good, you see. Very good.

And now we're ahead, holding a slim lead. We then find ourselves in some kind of building. There are many of them as well. We're all getting food, it's like a cafeteria. *Is this like a timeout? Halftime?*

Now we're returning back to battle, & we get the word that Headquarters wants us to put on a big To-Do, & I am getting confused as to whether this is the Civil War & football, or possibly a Grand Production on the stage in the classic traditions of Vaudeville & Carnivale.

I find myself crawling over the stage, & people are waving at me in a confusion of lights, music, & noise. It just seems chaotic, & I'm trying to figure what's going on, when I fall through this stage, & I fall & fall & fall, until I land in the lounge of a kind of library in a very strange museum. I see in this lounge drawings of a red-haired girl that my friend Harry likes. He made them when they went to dinner. Told me with a shit-eaten grin that her name is Figga.

But then I blink twice, & they're not there, & I realize, *wow, this was one of those prognostications.* I saw pictures that haven't been made yet. And I turn to him, he's lying there on one of the other couches, passed out in between a boy & a girl, as is his preference. Ask him, *which one?* He'll say, every time, *Yes!*

I tell him about those drawings of that girl he really likes, & how they went out to dinner, & while they were at dinner he pulled out his sketchpad because he's very good, you see, he's very good. He drew a beautiful, elegant, sweet, lovely portrait of her, giving special attention to her turquoise eyes, & she squirmed about in her seat at the restaurant, wondering who else was watching, & many were, but she liked these drawings very much.

I get up & leave him to think about his life, his decisions. Walk along the vast murky room, & I think to myself, *isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to one another.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Just Walking Through the Neighborhood

Houses & many trees, it's nighttime, & I'm lost. No phone to call anyone to pick me up. Then some fast figures appear, chasing, laughing wickedly, & they seem to herd me along, but they don't capture me. Then someone else they're herding along too despairs & gives in, allows capture, but then regrets it with a wowl.

But I don't, I just don't, & they herd me along, & eventually there's a green bus, & it doesn't seem to stop in this neighborhood. But I run for it, pound it at its door, pound & pound it. It slows, & I get my fingers inside the door, & I yank it open just enough to squeeze in. I climb on, & I give the driver a dirty look, like *dare me to pay you, just dare me.*

The green bus rides strangely & bumpily out to the hospital, veering on purpose into a ditch at one point, the driver sitting there staring for a while, like his mind is shut off. But eventually it comes around again, & I make it home. Start to make up our bed, but it's a vast bed, & it's covered in papers that I push to one side to get the blankets better spread. They're from a manuscript I can't seem to organize into a proper book. I hate looking at these pages & feeling my failure. Mulronie waiting at the far end of the neighborhood, so patiently.

I'm singing to myself, after this hard strange night, that old song, *Goin' down the road, feelin' bad. Goin' down the road, feelin' bad. Goin' down the road, feelin' bad, feelin' bad, & I don't wanna be treated this-a way.* It's late now, & I'm thinking, *man, it'd be good to sleep.* I lie down, push the papers again to one side, but they seem to keep accumulating on the bed. *We lost so many, Mulronie. What do I do with the rest?*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Sunny, Sunny Days

You know those kind of sunny, sunny days. Oh yes, those kind of sunny, sunny days when you find yourself sitting in a patch of grass, maybe just a big old field, nothing going on in that big old field, nothing having to do with people & their mighty small concerns, no sir-ee. There's just grass growing, maybe a tree, insects, small animals, whatever else.

I find myself watching this insect pick its way along the grass. It's sort of shaped like a stick with legs. I can't even figure out where its head is. It's a very strange insect, & it puts me into a sort of reverie because I start remembering this red-haired girl I knew a long time ago. Her name was Figga. Strange name, eh? But Figga was her name, & I was in her house, & I was comin' down the basement stairs. I had this uncommon way of coming down these stairs. Halfway down, I sort of swung from them & sideways into the basement. Done it many times.

*Well, OK, you might say, so how did you know Figga?* Well, I think she was my neighbor, & I'd come over to her house to fix things. *And was she old or young?* Well, I'm not really sure. She kind of seemed like she was a little bit of both, & it seemed like everything that needed to be fixed was in her basement. I think that's where she kept broken things. I think she liked to keep all the things that didn't work or needed fixing in one place.

So I'd come in, & I'd be the fixer-guy, & I had no skills, & I didn't even have any tools. She bought me the tools at the local tool store, what they call in technical terms the *hardware store*. I'd come down, oh 'bout once a week, for a while, & I'd see what had broken & what she needed fixing. Sometimes it was something that had broken in her house, & sometimes she just found things out in the world that were broken, & she thought, *oh well, he'll fix them, he's good with the tools & the skills*. But I wasn't good at either the tools or the skills.

But what fascinated about me to her was that I had once lived on a mythical Island out far, far in the Wide Wide Sea. It did not have any attachment to the roots of the earth. I'd gone out there when I was a student. It was one of those exchange programs where I got to live for awhile and study on this Island.

But I must admit I wasn't very good at it because, although it was a very big Island, it wasn't actually even finished, & I used to find myself sort of floating at the edge of it with my notebooks, & sometimes they would float away from me, & that seemed far more important to me than anything else that was happening on this Island. In fact, I can't even tell you what was happening on this Island, or what I was supposed to be studying.

All I know was that I had a hard time keeping my stuff together & that really wasn't very much fun. But Figga, she just couldn't get enough of hearing that I had lived for awhile as a young student on a mythical Island. And then she'd hand me somethin' else to fix, her turquoise eyes twinkling, & the conversation would continue elsewhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

## In the Year 2402

This happened long ago, or far on from now, depending on your point in things. In the year 2402, or was it 24,002? I'm not sure of the details, but my love & I are in a house we share with another couple. We've been away but now are returning, & it's still new to us, even though it's an old house. There's still shelves to build, places on the walls for pictures. How can something be both new & old? Known & novel, *how?*

I leave the next morning, very early, to go to school, to try to catch up. I'm behind on my classes, & haven't paid for anything. And I think what happens is that I walk down the wrong hallway, & I arrive at the wrong school, & I get turned around, & I end up on the ceiling. But it's one of those places where you can walk on the ceiling, & walk on the floor, & everything kind of spins around, & time passes, & I come upon a girl who seems friendly enough, & I ask her what time it is. She says, *it's 1:30*. I want to ask her what year, but I just quietly despair.

\* \* \* \* \*

## That Strange Nada Theater

So this is what happens when you go to that strange Nada Theater, at that strange No-Tel, after midnight, well after midnight. You've seen more of **Remoteland** tonight, sure, it went on for hours, it seemed like for more hours than there are in a night. But now, if you can outlast the crowds such as they are, stay on & on in your seat, don't find some reason to leave or let someone persuade you it's time to go & have a malted at the local sugar emporium, you might get to the movie that comes on near dawn, pre-dawn they call it. You might get to see **More Fun**.

It's a strange world of **More Fun**. It's like our world but worse, if you can imagine that. No zombies, no vampires, no nuclear apocalypse. No, something happens, & people just start dying. They get weak, & never recover from this weakness. And what's funny, though not really, is that when the weak ones start to die, they sort of melt away, parts of them become invisible. Still there, but invisible. Then the invisible parts fade out completely. Some people call these poor unfortunate souls Melties.

Our hero, such as he is one, is the Postman. He finds a gun shop, & takes a few, & then he finds a grocery, & ransacks it for food. Then he leaves his known places behind, & eventually meets up with a man called the Recruiter.

The Recruiter is rebuilding the population of the world by killing the Melties. He does it kind; they never see it coming. Often he spends a last night with them, sharing their meal, maybe singing their songs, letting them tell memories of what it used to be like. How it is now, maybe any hopes they have left. Kills them quickly in their sleep, buries them carefully somewhere peaceful. If he can't do it mercifully, then he parts them still breathing, still melting.

But his goal is for humans to finish the race, & then the world will carry on from there. He's good at finding people in holes & hideaways. He says to the Postman, the first night they are traveling together, *we just can't have human beings like Melties, who are more like hotel soap in a hot shower. We just can't have them.*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### As You Travel Through the White Woods, Horizontally

You just wonder, as you travel through these White Woods horizontally, a sugar cube of LSD melting through you, allowing you to travel in this new & pleasurable way, you just wonder: *how it is that the Woods more welcomes you this way, horizontally? What is it about your human form that fits better this way?*

You come at last to the road that you didn't know was here, because there are no roads in the White Woods, & yet here is this road, passing through the White Woods, it's a simple paved road. *What does that mean?* And you're feeling for your horizontality, *but it's gone.* You're upright & walking again. Whatever that was, it's gone. It feels like you're walking on this road forever & ever, but never getting anywhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### I Had This Lady Teacher

There's lots to say about when I was a student. Lots of crazy things, lots of subtle quiet things. Lots of things that I can't say too, like they were just of their time, of their moment. They weren't things that traveled through space & time to be tellable at some later time. They're just not; it's not possible.

I had this lady teacher at one point, & I go over to her house. I think she was having a party & I was invited. It was one of those parties where all the students show up, & the teachers, & everybody relaxes, calms down a bit. Not in the classroom right now, don't have to put on an act, not as a student or a teacher.

She was a good teacher, she taught history. I wasn't a very good history student because, at that time, I didn't understand that wherever you drop your coin in the stream of humanity, anywhere along it, by time or place, you're going to find most of the same things. They resemble each other way more than they don't. She tried to teach me that then, & I only learned it later on my own, sloppily. Took way too long.

I sat with her at this party, on the floor, in a corner out of the main action. I had the impression that she'd never eaten magic mushrooms before, & I offered her some from a paper bag I had with me. She took a look at the bag, peeked inside, pulled out one of the little curled bits to hold in her hand, examine, sniff. She smiled. She was kind of an older lady, but not too old.

Then I told her I had something else too. I pulled from my pocket, in a rather debonair way, as though offering her a Cuban cigar, a really long blunt, & I started telling her about the times that I had lived in out West, in Seattle & Portland, how I'd go trippin' on Saturdays. I told her that I'd been poor & jobless & struggling then, & writing saved me on those tripping Saturdays, all those years ago. A black pen, a notebook of lined white sheets, a tab of Lucy, my Walkman & bag of rock-&-roll cassettes, & a green city to play through.

She looked at me curiously & said, *well, how old are you?*  
And I said, *well, I'm 22, ma'am.*  
And she said, *well, what years ago are you talking about?*  
And I said, *well, truth be told, I'm talking about the future. Now if you want to take a few of those mushrooms & chew them on down, you might understand a little better what I'm saying. But it's OK if you don't.*  
And she said, *well, so what was the craziest time you ever had out there, with those crazy Saturdays you're telling me about?*  
And I said, *well, I don't know whether I am being a clown & entertaining you, like that guy on TV, or if you really care, but I'll tell you a story that didn't actually happen. It was more like a fantasia that I might have conjured up while hanging out in an alley one time. One of the homeless guys was saying to me, oh yeah, this was years ago, I was in the Woods, & there's women tied to the trees, all over the place. Now they weren't victims or kidnapped, nothin' like that, no. They liked it, they liked being tied up to the trees, & fucked that way too. It was really good, those nights, & there was nothing profound about it at all. So take that, you, Mr. Book Learning, you take that. It's the kind of reality that's out there for you to find.*

And so I told this story to the teacher, & she looked at me, smiling still, & said something I'll never forget. She said, *the key thing to being tied to a tree & fucked is that your hands are tied properly, not too tight, not too loose, & then when the man screws you, he positions your hips just right.*

And after that I knew, whether this lady ever had or ever would eat magic mushrooms, she'd always be OK in my book.

\* \* \* \* \*

### I Woke Up in the White Woods

I woke up in the White Woods, wasn't sure how I'd gotten there. I lied there on the Woodsy floor, trying to reach back in my mind, eyes closed, breathing calm, thinking. *How did I get here? Am I injured? No. I don't feel injured. Sore? A little.*

Lying here on the Woodsy floor for hours on end, sleeping or whatever it is I was doing, passed out maybe? *How did I get here?* Eventually, I find myself also sinking down below the Woodsy floor where I have been lying, below what's around me, below questions about injury & feeling.

I find myself traveling again through a city, with others, traveling together. I don't see their faces but we're walking close together, familiarly, there's a sort of complementariness to our pace, to the way we swing our arms & move our legs. Some of us are bigger, some are smaller, some walk naturally faster, some slower, but there's a familiarity to it.

At one point, we end up on a hill above the city & I'm just trying to figure it out. *What does this all mean to that me, who's lying a little bit sore on the Woodsy floor, there, over there? I can see you, over there, lying on that Woodsy floor. You can see me. Can you see me? Yes, I can see you, with those familiar people on that hill looking down on a city. How did we? I don't know. How did we? I don't know. Am I the past & you're the future, or vice versa? Did I go from city to Woods or Woods to city? I'm not sure. Are we happening together at the same time, on parallel tracks? Which one of me is lying alone, deep in the White Woods, & which one of me is on this hill, sitting among these dear people whose faces I can't quite see, looking down on the city, thinking almost everything is in sight?*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Watch him build that world, watch him puff them out from his fingertips, look at that, look at that one, it's green & blue, look at that one, it's roiling with earthquakes, look at that one, it's a million suns in one, look at that one, look at that one, look at that one.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Walking into the White Woods

Walking into the White Woods & at first there seems no sign of people-folks. Their ways & things. And there's no paths, not a one, & I'm not bound for somewhere, so

I'm not looking for a path. I'm not looking for anything. I look at the tree trunks, some of them smooth, some of them gnarled, branches in every direction, leaves of different colors, needles, the bushes below. Everything is almost still, there's just a bit of a wind, just a bit of something moving in addition to me.

And I suppose that makes me feel better because if it was completely still here, & I was the only one moving, the only entity, the only thing, I'd feel like I'm troubling the stillness, but the wind, if wind is sentient, if it is, if it isn't, it assures me that no, I move, other things move. Maybe things move that I can't even see.

And I come upon, & it's shocking, I come upon a man-made thing. It's hard to figure what it is. It's a long structure, sort of dilapidated, looks like it's been assembled over the course of decades or centuries. There's rust on some of it, looks reinforced in some places. I walk in, & it's like entering into a tunnel from that almost-stillness that I was in.

I see that many kinds of metal & wooden structures have been bolted, nailed, strapped, taped together, to form a tunnel & I wonder where it's going to bring me, if anywhere at all. And then I come to a kind of a brightly lit place, strangely colored but not disturbing. There's curvy seats that are sort of built into the wall, & the floors are soft, & the ceiling vague, almost kind of space-age.

I find my seat along the wall. It smoothes into me, gathers me in softly & firmly. There's a fireplace nearby, wasn't there just a moment ago, but there it is & it's not been started. I find my pencil & my little notebook, & I think maybe to scribble a word or two, but then I see that my thumb's nail is split & bloody, & it's going to be hard to write anything. I don't know whether to keep on, go back, or stay awhile.

\* \* \* \* \*

### What You're Gonna Do, & How You're Gonna Do It

It all comes down to what you're gonna do, & how you're gonna do it & that counts almost everywhere, in all types of situations. I was in the back of a Jeep, back where I come from. I was riding with an old friend, laughing, colorful. One of those guys you meet along the way that's just bigger than everybody else. Pays attention in a certain way, loves the music more, loves everything more. Wails pretty on his guitar till deep in the night becomes early in the morning.

And we ended up at a party, & there's another old friend of mine, & this one is from a *long* time ago. He's young, he's in his glories. His eyes are bright & his mind is alert & crazy & free, beautiful. I listen & I look. *Do it again, do it again.*

But then someone reminds me of something, & I realize that I left my bag of notebooks

out in the Jeep, & so I have to go get them. So I leave the party, the sweet blunt smoke & the happy high music, James McGunn & such, & there's some girls, & they're even the friendly kind, though maybe not *too* friendly, but friendly enough, & there's food & everything. I feel welcomed, I feel alright, *something*.

I come out & where's that Jeep? That Jeep had my bag of notebooks in it, *Oh man, shit. Hey, where'd that Jeep go? Hey, you know those guys, you know the guy that drives that Jeep, where's he live? No, man, no, man, tell me. It's OK, I need to know.*

*Yeah listen, can you give me a ride over there? Really, I left my bag of notebooks in the back of the guy's Jeep, & I'm not sure where he lives or where he works but, man, if we can just catch him it'd be all good. Can we do that, please? No, really, just give me a ride, it's just a bag of notebooks but it's important to me, it really is. Why'd I lose it? Why'd I lose it?*

\* \* \* \* \*

### I'm in a Bookstore, Again, & I Have a Cold

*Why am I in this bookstore again?* I have a cold. Well, maybe it'll cheer me up, maybe it won't. I'm trying to find the books that I really want to read, ones full of music & high laughter, low despair, & cackling weirdness all around.

Buy one book, a paperback, & it's missing its first 70 pages. *What kind of bookstore is this?* Well, I guess that's not an easy question to answer. It ends in charts. Maybe those 70 pages would help you understand the charts, but *who knows what kind of paperback book this is?*

I keep moving in the bookstore, sometimes that's a good idea, you just keep moving. And there's a series of old, tall, grainy-looking hardbacks. I don't know, twenty, thirty volumes of them on this shelf in a row. Is it a complete set? I don't know. There's no titles on them. But I touch one, just to feel the age. I touch it very gently, & it thinks how long since it's been read. I touch the next one, & it's thinking of a funny joke someone told it, maybe the volume next to it told it a funny joke, that's my guess, I'm not really sure. All I can tell you is that as I touch them very lightly, & I can hear their thoughts.

And I'm telling you, I'm going home to bed now. I'm going to sleep off this cold for a million hours, but that does not negate the fact that these books, they're living objects, wood impressed with words, *living objects*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Market Located Over the Buried Spaceship

When I was young, I worked at that market that was located over the buried spaceship. It was called Chief Seattle's Friendly Market, & I'd say it was pretty friendly, although when I started I didn't feel all that much friendliness from my co-workers. They didn't help me with all the strange cash registers I had to figure out, some of them ancient, some of them not so much.

They really didn't know who or what I was when I walked in the door that first day, still in high school, asking for a job. I was looking for a place to be that I could really care about, for some people that would remember my name from one time to the next. And it became that eventually, it took a while, I'll say that. Had to fight my way in. Maybe that's true of any situation that's already established. You're the new person, eager, wanting to join in.

It took at least a year for me to finally get down those long, dark stairs in the back, through the walk-in refrigerator, the crates of milk & juice jugs, other frozen items, push back the curtain, down that stairwell. Unlit & you descended & it seemed to get darker. Then, when you don't think it's possible, & you're thinking to turn back, even if you've been down there before, it starts to get a little lighter, & suddenly you're in this place that you didn't, couldn't, imagine existed, deep under the earth.

You're in a hallway, you arrive down into it. There's a ceiling, there's a floor, walls on either side, there's doors. It winds away, & there was this one time that my wanderings went a little too far in that buried spaceship, & I think I became disoriented, became dehydrated. I'm not really sure what it was.

But I will tell you that I remember indistinctly ending up in a room, not knowing how I'd gotten there, laying on a bed, the room was dark, & someone was feeding me the most delicious soup. I'd never tasted anything like it before, & I was being fed by a kindly, furred paw. And the paw fed me that soup, & sort of touched my nose & made a gesture, when I had eaten the good soup, *go back to sleep, it's OK*. As I faded, feeling safer than maybe ever, I felt the paws lift up my head gently, & pull a hat onto me. *A fisher hat?*

And eventually I woke up, & was able to make my way back, no problem. I wasn't nearly as far from the exit as I'd thought. But I remember that all these years later. It was unique among the many adventures I had down there in that buried spaceship. Never told this to anyone before tonight. It's not in any of the five Mulronie the Space Pirate books. Not even the secret sixth volume. But now you know.



\* \* \* \* \*



**Not the Pilot, but a Drone**

My friend has prostate cancer. He's depressed.  
Today, I cover his English class.

A person who has never had cancer, like a person  
who has never been gay, orhomeless,  
or has never been shot down in a plane over Iraq  
and ended up missing an arm and a leg, or has never divorced  
or had an affair, or been born a Muslim, a Mormon, or a Jew,  
cannot possibly understand the associated conflicts.

His father was a pilot. He's from a small town,  
loves his wife and his dog. He's a damn fine poet,  
a loyal friend. On certain nights we've gotten  
drunk and listened to Dylan Thomas' sonorous voice  
go on and on about a girl who should never fear,  
never fear the wolf in country sleep.

I've had precancerous cells, a biopsy or two,  
procedures, my cervix removed for good measure  
in the hysterectomy, but I didn't lose my curly hair,  
spend days with my bald head over the toilet,  
pray that South Carolina would forgodssake legalize  
medical marijuana so I could get an appetite,  
but I have experienced profound depression  
with its sickening reckoning, a tidal wave of constant  
sorrow so that it's hard to breathe much less go to work  
or give anybody the love he or she deserves.

After 9/11, the wife of a man captured by camera  
as he tumbled through the air from one of the towers  
was furious at the suggestion he jumped.



“He would never commit suicide,” she claimed.  
She has never, I bet, felt the brutal heat and threat  
of burn, lungs full of smoke and chemicals, people  
screaming, dying, all around her an apocalypse,  
and found herself before a window where, thank God,  
thank the angels, there is oxygen—crisp, clear,  
magnificent O2.

If my friend ever needs oxygen, I pray  
he gets it in abundance.

Having never had to hold my breath  
for the latest news about whether I will live  
or die, my job is not to empathize but to remember  
we can't smoke near the tank.

For now, I'll grade his papers, and breathe in,  
breathe out. Never, my darling, fear the wolf  
who threatens to huff and puff and blow the house  
down. This house is made of strong brick. Smoke  
goes on rising from the chimney.

My friend's plane takes off.

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## Status Report

I look into myself & see music  
but can't hear the notes or name the song.  
I look out my narrow glass at twilight &

see rain over razor wire, a river of mud  
down a mountainside, nothing at all the color red,  
the color of anger, of life & of suffering.

I have time enough for a novel now  
though I find I have nothing to say.  
I have time enough to write enough letters

to woo every single woman in the world,  
but the world is too full of women  
who've forgotten the sound of hunger

in my voice, the smells of fruity liquor &  
desire in the whispers of my breath.  
I wish I could write myself letters;

I've forgotten me, too. My God,  
I'm an empty chalice next to an empty plate.  
So I sleep because sleep is freedom: we say,

“I have robbed them of an hour.”  
I sleep because in sleep I see  
endless open roads, roast turkey &

thick burgers, the faces to names I've lost.  
I sleep because in sleep I see nothing  
often: we say, “Through the hole,

down the hall, winding the corridor,  
mapping the maze, follow the cat  
in your dream—he knows the way out.”

\* \* \*

## I Said Goodbye to My Old Pair of Shoes

Prison-white sneakers, last remnants of a past no man should remember or forget. Cracked, broken, they held on like mean drunks in houses that never belonged to them.

I don't know why I delayed before I said, "So long," & sent them out with the rubbish. Sometimes it's hard to let go of hurt.

I kept them like vacation photos, little reminders of holidays, the opposites of those, like scars: plain & stained, ugly as a snow-capped highway after the plowman passes through.

They had to go. Their steps measured miles of barely moving, soles worn from pacing, waiting, laces frayed as a body over time trapped between squares of stone & steel.

They'd served their sentence, as had I, innocent in my new shoes: brown & black like two raccoons with bandit eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

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Charlie Beyer



## Sapphire Sins

### *xii. Missing Pomo*

Shit. Cat's run off. I call and call, making ever-widening circles around camp. No Pomo. I imagine she got scared, so ran, then got lost, then got more lost and more scared. Running further till the woods swallowed her.

How far can she go into the forest? Halfway, the mathematicians say. But that's still 43 million square miles to search for an eight-pound cat. Maybe a coyote was lurking nearby and snatched her up like a cop grabs a cream-filled doughnut from the box. At least that would be a fast way to go.

I am mega-bummed. Back down the rabbit hole of depression. *My one friend. My one companion. My little friend that I can talk to. That I can hug.*

Damn. I know I am pathetic, but it's so horrible to be alone. Alone with the dead. I begin to compose a eulogy, filled with curses. The cat's been gone three hours. It's never been gone so long. By now, it must be half-digested.

As I wallow in my self-pity and depression, Pomo walks up to me from the truck. *Oh joy! My fuzzy friend!* I pick her up and hug the hell out of her, while cooing loving words.

"You fucking fur ball. *How dare you fuck with my mind? Where have you been, asshole? Don't you know Daddy has been shitting his pants?* You little son-of-a-bitch. I'm wiring your leg to the tent."

My passionate words of love are ignored by the purring feline. She has a drink and crunches a few kibbles, then wanders back to the truck. Will she go beyond the truck into the field, climb on the seat, under the seat, by the back tire?

I see her go under the truck, then in a flash, she disappears. *Oh fuck, not again!* I look around, under and in the truck. No cat. Then I have an idea. Like a big fly biting the side of my head. I pop the truck hood. There's the cat lying on top of the engine. I am meowed a greeting.

OK. So here's the safest place in this woodland world. A snake couldn't get to her here, much less all the other forest monsters.

Good work, Kitty. Sure drove me close to suicide, but I'm so happy you have a super safe place.

### *xviii. Diddly Day*

Next day, June 7th, Thursday. A clear morning. The cat restless. I would rather write than work. I lounge in the, for once, dry camp, snatching mosquitoes

out of the air. I'm pretty good with the left hand. 70% kill ratio, 25% miss, 5% catch and release (not on purpose). So much death on a tiny scale.

"What is the meaning of life?" I ask the cat.

"Eat, sleep, and avoid danger," the cat replies.

"Is that all? What of saving the planet? Pollinating many flowers?" I ask indignantly.

"I feel sorry for you, human. Live in the moment and the next one never comes" is her sage reply.

The cat and I haven't done diddly all day. I wrote most of it and the cat slept in the truck. The 1 PM thunderstorm lasted till 6 in the evening, again. I thought to go dig, but felt much more like writing. Think I'll go for a walk after some dinner, see if my blood still carries any oxygen. A nice day, really, creative. The temperature reels from 80 to 40 as the storms push blobs of alternating hot and then iced air back and forth. Kinetic climate.

Well over a mile walk this evening. I am still getting stronger. A number of old benches (ancient river beds) are identified. I think I'll try my luck on one tomorrow. I find an old road also. The old road is original ground (never been dug) because the old timers did not wash out their access to Leesburg.

In this place I find five foot boulders. I need a young punk to help me dig it. The gold is there, because nobody believes it's there. Nobody's touched this place in all of time. It's 9 PM, overcast, and the mosquitoes are insane in the membrane.

#### *xix. Into Town*

Another dawn in the distance, June 8th, Thursday again, maybe. A week from when I should have left. Today I feel strong and will dig some gold. Try the buzz box (metal detector) again too. See if it's all just beeping bullshit.

But I never get around to the buzz box. Go up to the Gold Nose and start a new hole in original ground next to round boulders. Two feet down, and through tailing residue, the original ground has hat-sized or bigger rounded boulders sitting on the BR. One good flake off a boulder. I have to dig the closest boulder out, but am lazy and a little depressed.

I go to town. Not sure why. Get some salt at least. The cheapest motel is the Sacagawea. I proudly declare my cat. No cats allowed. Rules, they say. So I smuggle Pomo into the room.

Bad internet here. Manage to write a few emails. Write Terry and upset her. I don't have the guts to tell her I want a *ménage à trois* to save our relationship. I'm even more depressed, unable to tell her my desire.

Look at the news. Comey slammed Trump in the hearings, but not hard enough. The bastard is still President.

#### *xx. Bilius Winds*

Now June 9th. This is Friday, I hear. Get groceries and tools. \$170. Back up

the hill. Happy to get out of town. The wind up here is 30 MPH, temp about 40, two degrees above average, but with wind chill making it 35. So it's a wash. Find a four-leaf clover. Then a five-leaf clover, then a six-leaf. The way things are with me, it's probably bad luck.

The wind tears hell all day. Bilius black clouds like bowling balls billow by as the cat and I huddle in the tent and truck. We don't do shit. I read to the cat a little. So cold and horizontal is the air today that there are no mosquitoes. The only ones that can get traction in this tempest are the ones with a Pratt and Whitney jet pack. And these are easy to hear coming.

So we blow off the day writing. The cat doesn't write much without the computer. Kids these days. I compose a three-page letter to the editor of our Colorado town, where the Art Center director embezzled \$75,000, and the overseeing non-profit Board of Directors is trying to cover it up. Criminals all.

My piece might be slightly libelous, but I calculate I'll be 104 before they can get any damages out of me. There's enough roguery and convoluted details for Jon Krakauer to write a new book. I'm not so good with the pristine facts as he is. I prefer exaggeration and slander. Sure as hell. These bastards have it coming.

The ice in the cooler melted three days ago, so I eat the chicken that's about to walk away. I wait an hour to see if I barf, don't, then eat the rest. I need electric long johns. Do they have these?

#### *xxiii. Fuck Dog and Dog's Weather Too*

Suddenly we awake! It's bold ass light. Peering out the door, the sky is pure blue. Not even mist. In another five hours it might get warm. Of course I was right. Right that leaving the toasty confines of the TV and suburban walls would drop me into the dress rehearsal for the coldest winter known to man. Being right sucks. You hate you. They hate you. He, she, it, they hate you. If you are wrong, everybody smiles. If you are right, people want to push you in front of the bus.

I feel I've been out here since Moses rose out of the swamp, or whatever he did. My Dad wanted to name me Moses, but my mom secured a piano wire around his balls and gently tugged him back to reality. I wonder what I would have been like with that name, rather than a cute name like Charlie. Only Dog knows.

Now 8 AM. Not a quarter of a degree warmer than 6 AM. I think a forest fire might warm me up, but how to get a proper one going in all this saturation?

Now noon. Any vision of a suntan is dashed on the icebergs of reality. The sky is thick grey clouds—again. If I was an Aristotelian, I'd proclaim that clouds spontaneously generate out of the ground at high altitude. I'd be sort of correct. At 2 PM it's raining like a bastard.

*I am sooooo sick of this fucked up weather. Stinko. Shitite.* I do nothing but cower in the tent. *Fuck the gold!* Fuck this prison in the bush. Pomo cowers in the tent with me. She's my only blessing, though good fortune is more accurate. The other implies the mind of some benevolent Dog. A retarded mind.

Global warming remains nowhere near this world, unseen, unfelt, impossible, unlikely, *no fucking way*.

3:30 PM. Pounding, pounding, fuck ass rain fuck. Billions of gallons. At first break, I'm packing the bitch ass camp *Wet!* Fling everything in the truck. We'll sleep in the truck for days if we have to. The rain has collapsed the tent, again. *FuckfuckFuCK*.

OKOK. I can sit here in this half collapsed tent, swaddled with soaked stinking blankets, or I can quit my diarrhea of not-so-original swear words. Sitting here in my 40 degree swamp, I can relate to the little crack babies who languish in their wet diapers, developing skin rashes. If frozen cold skin is a rash, then I've been dipped in it.

When the rain momentarily shifts to a light shower, I put on everything I have and hike up to the Gold Nose to retrieve the tools. The waterproof boots are a godsend but weigh ten pounds each. I do not walk like a spring chicken. More like a newborn cow, wobbly legged.

Each step is pretty hard, but I know this torture is really good for me. Builds Character. And fuck that too. If I became any more of a character I'd be a Looney Tunes cartoon. Move over, Yosemite Sam.

It takes an hour to go the half mile and back with the tools. Set to tearing down the camp in a hurry. The rain is back to medium adjustment on the water faucet, only a steady pour. Pack everything wet. Garbage is everywhere, soggily collected. Impossible to burn it. Like trying to fry a fish underwater. Suppose I could electrocute it, but it would still be there and where's the 200 KVA line?

All packed. Start the truck. *Not*. The starter is enthusiastic for a moment—then grinds down—slower and slower. *Oh shit yeah*.

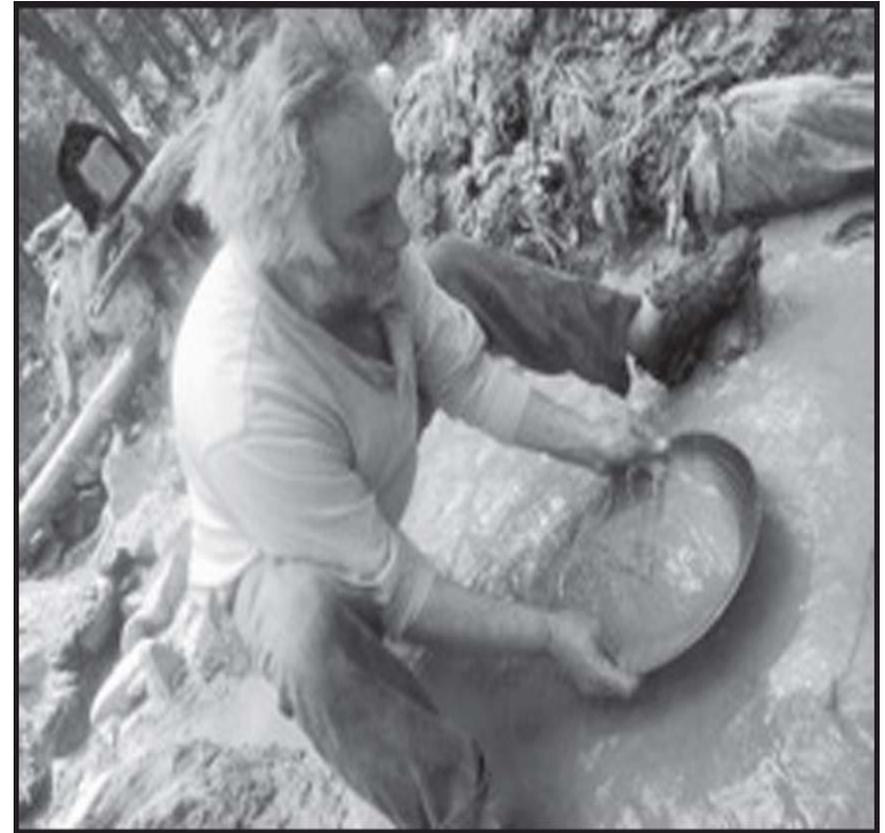
Approaching panic. Stuck on top of mountain with reverse climate change. Fuck again.

But engineers cover their asses. Thus, I have parked pointing downhill. I put the truck in gear and use the starter to pull me down hill and out of the grass. The truck is bouncing through the field, half starting and half stripping the gears off the flywheel. I'm popping the clutch and jerking around in compression, my huge boots mashing all the pedals at once.

Suddenly we're down on the dirt road, the engine running. *Hah! I'm alive, assholes! You can't bury me up here yet*. With the giant boots, I two-pedal it down to the main road, keeping the RPMs high.

On down to Salmon in the Valley. A pack of smokes while I keep the truck idling. Raining here. Getting dark. A five-hour drive to Missoula in pouring rain and blinding fog. I'm gripping the steering wheel with white knuckles all the way, and gripping the seat with my asshole. Pucker factor 9.7.

The road is so dark and the rain pours. I can hardly see anything except the blinding light coming at me like a galactic UFO war. So then it's just a guess where the fucking road is. Can see no lines, no edge, just the killer lights of death with their crushing brilliance. I get to my cousin's place in Missoula at midnight, still pounding



rain. Let myself in but Pomo's pissed to be locked in the truck. I crash in a wet shirt on the couch.

*xxiv. The Kuzz's Place*

A dawn of sorts. June 13th. The rain is still pounding on the walls and windows of the house, a downpour outside. I check on Pomo who is evil-eyed, furious in the truck, poor thing. I am drenched anew. Kuzz comes downstairs in his Hugh Heffner bathrobe. He makes me girly tea, some kind of bullshit flower. I want black coffee. Hard caffeine. But he's all worried about his blood pressure and other campy whines that are popular.

He's rich, so he wants to live long so he can hoard his money. He has great woes and complaints. Seems he screwed a 55-year-old hippie last year whose pussy smelled like a goat. He had the gag factor 8.3, so it was a one-time boning. Pop and go.

But now, with his current girlfriend, he's got trouble. Gave her the herpes. I thought we all did that back in our 20s, the big VD swap. The Kuzz is some sort of arrested development case. Maybe he did get the herpes back in the day, but has been immune all along. A carrier. A Typhoid Mary of crotch blisters. Now his girlfriend wants him to wear a rubber. What the hell—she's already got the pustules. All the rubber does is make the Kuzz's member go flaccid. Wilted Willy. All that money and can't fuck. I love irony when it affects the rich.

The Kuzz offers me a job cleaning his rental units—for 3.75 an hour. *Do I look like a idiot?* My saving grace is that I smell so bad he can't ride in the car with me.

"Take a shower," he says.

"I will, but not here. Your communal bathroom has nasty factor 10.7," I tell him.

This bathroom is shared with other degenerate male roommates who are attached to the computer porno screen 24/7. Failure-to-thrive types. Failure-to-wash types. Last time I was in the group bathroom, the bio-filth was a half-inch deep on the walls. Some plasmid grime climbed up my leg and I had to steel wool it off with Drano.

*xxv. Drummond Motel*

I leave the grand glands of Missoula June 14th, still drowning in the pounding rain, and head east to Drummond. A mountain range falls away behind me, and the rain finally lets up. I get to my unknown half-evacuated village near the Sapphire Mountain. The Drummond Motel. Beautiful in an obscure Americana way.

I'm paranoid that the motel management will freak at the cat, so I say nothing cat-wise, but converse politely about the old lady's chemotherapy. She's distracted anyway trying to keep the falling hair out of the credit card reader. Pomo and I move in.

*Abhh. Warmth. Shower. Good internet.* I put some kitty litter in a gold pan, lay

out her food and water. Spread out the blankets and bedding all over the place to dry. Clean up. Write and write.

Fiddle the TV some. About 80% black screen. There are two remotes with sixty buttons on each. Some combination will enliven the boob tube, not sure what. Between the two remotes, that's thirty-six hundred button combinations. I hack at them in amusement and finally get Jeff Sessions lying about something. Not interesting. Turn off. Pomo sleeps like both the queen and the king. Think she purred all night.

I like this funky place. No pretense here. The door key hardly works because the knob is falling apart from wear. And the greatest feature is the 70 MPH freight train roaring by every 45 minutes. This shakes the walls. Shakes the talking heads out of the TV. It's not unlike experiencing a thunderstorm from inside the cloud. I write until 2 AM. Still trying to backpedal with my girlfriend, my best friend, after suggesting the three-way with the other art lady. *What is it with women? Can't they just have an orgy once in a while?* I was born to live on the set of *Barbarella*. What am I doing here? My sleep is full of fine nightmares. Screwing women while they stab me.

*xxvi. Steve the Asshole*

June 14th, a red sun morning. The cat in bed's luxury, watching TV. I have a Cowboy Breakfast at the local spoon. Two or three eggs cost the same, though they don't tell you that. Not much respect for chickens in this cowtown. If the chicken liberation front ever got organized, this would be a good place to picket.

Everybody knows each other—twice, because everyone is twice the size of a normal person. Talk of cows and hay and water, which is also twice the size of normal with over-flooded bursting rivers all around. But the water is clear and quick, whereas these waddlers can barely move their pale and droopy white winter skin. I suspect they eat a lot of pie. There are 11 types of pie posted on the wall. The special today is cream of strawberry Jell-O.

Back in the room, I call Steve Kelly. He's the Forest Service minerals/mining guy. I made up, filled out, designed, mapped etc., a Plan of Operations in great detail—maps, sequencing, tree use, roads, trails and creeks—and sent the completed plan to him. The directions to the mine were spelled out in great detail. Their rules say that no activity using a mechanical/motor device can be done without a plan. I have a well thought out Mining Engineer plan. *I am a ME.* I have a plan. I have complied . . . in my mind.

"Hey, Steve. I hear you would like to talk to me about the dams used in reclamation?"

"Oh, it's you. Yes, the dams. There can be *no* dams. You must not dam the creek."

"Well, I'm just trying to catch the sediment. Be environmentally proactive."

"There are problems with your plan. Big problems. Big, big, big problems."

*Oh great!* Now that I know my problems are not small—*what the fuck is this asshole talking about?*

“What are the big problems?”

“You cannot work in the creek whatsoever. You cannot dam the creek. Ever. You need a permit from the Water Quality Department.”

“Buuuuuh . . . how do . . . I?” I stammer.

“Actually, this whole area is covered in a water right. If you do not have a water right, you cannot use the water.”

“I’m not taking any of this stuff, just holding it in a pond for a few hours and sending it on its way.”

“You cannot use any surface water. You must drill a well. You must get a permit for the well, which could not produce over 35 gallons a minutes, but you cannot get a well permit.”

“But I could deal with that flow. If I got a permit—”

“But you cannot get a permit. You also need a 3-10 permit from the Fish and Wildlife, after they do a wildlife assessment.”

“There’s only chipmunks in the trees and leeches in the creek. Which is not a creek. It’s bone dry by July 10th.”

“If you could even get a water right from a farmer, which is impossible, you would still need a 404 permit from the Army Corps of Engineers.”

The Army? Now what the hell? Yeah, I’m ready to blow the place up now. That’s what the Army does, isn’t it?

“But lastly,” Steve continues. “Is that Montgomery gulch is *closed* to all mining.”

“What the hell? Why is that?”

“This is critical habitat for bull trout.”

“There’s not enough water in that creek to support a water flea. It’s as dry as a spinster’s twat eleven months of the year. The frogs carry canteens and wake me up at night to open the peanut jar for them.”

“I have at least five operating permit applications on my desk that I can never approve. We must have approved permits from all of the aforementioned agencies before we would consider approving your plan.”

*Oh boy.* I’m in a seething red rage now. I see where this has gone. Over the top in a permit feeding frenzy. I obsequiate to this petty power. As someone wise and ornery once said, *if you can’t go through them, go around them.* I got a fucking plan alright.

I tell the asshole Steve: “Gee. This sounds rather complicated. I guess I’ll just forget about it and go pan some gold in Idaho. Thanks for informing me of all this.”

“No problem. We’re here to help. Call me if you make any headway with the permits.”

“OK. Will do. But it looks like I’ll look elsewhere. No big deal.”

“OK. Bye.”

“Bye.”

No big deal? *Yeah it’s a big deal!* I search my whole life for a good mine. Then when I find one, finally, with one foot in the grave, with hopes that I might squeeze a half a million out of it to supplement the \$200 a month in Social Security the government fuckers left me with after fifty years of grueling work in the mines, these

assholes want to fuck me over one great and last time. *Really.*

You puny peckerwood, Steve. Graduated with a “Resources Management” degree your mama paid for from the liberal arts college in Missoula. Milk still in your veins and you don’t know shit about mining. Got your \$70K/year desk job for the last ten years denying everything that comes across your Ikea desk.

*Fuck you, clueless asshole. You don’t know shit about dreams and quests that makes a man alive. Stupid boy. I hope Trump throws you in the gutter, rather than continuing to let you suck the government tit. Trump is an asshole, but this is more asshole than him.*

Permits, my ass. I got a plan, yeah. I’m gonna rape the shit outta that gulch. My assistants and I are no more the “Mining Nomads”—we are the “Criminal Miners.” I’m forced into criminality, as I’m expected to suck their ass and just toss away my dream, my quest, my half a million, *my life.*

Yeah right, you bureaucratic dick. I’ll mine all right, me and others with a dream. Go ahead and drag me off to jail. Nothing strange to me, but I’ll have my day in court with a redneck jury. I have the 1872 mining law on my side—like the Constitution or the Bill of Rights, it is immutable law. Miners like me made this country, populated it, put in infrastructure. Without us there would be no cars, wires, houses, or Montana. Entitled sanctimonious PC clueless children with no sense of history, or decency. These baby bureaucrats.

I know a few things, though. Like that there is no punishment for all their petty rules. These are bulldogs without teeth. Also, I am not in Montgomery Gulch. I’m on the south fork of Montgomery Gulch. These wimps couldn’t even hike in here and, if they did, they would never get past our camp to the mine. We have dogs. We have guns. We have a cat.

Pomo is lounging luxuriously on the bed, unconcerned with my angst against the government. I leave her for the day with the curtains closed and the “Do Not Trespass” sign on the door handle. The room is strewn with drying blankets and trash food wrappers.

### *xxvii. Sapphire Adventures on Main Street*

Phillipsburg, thirty miles to the south, sees us rolling into town in the early afternoon, where I get claim papers notarized for the Bureau of Land Management.

I drop in on Shrewd Annie, proprietor of Sapphire Adventures on Main Street, a sapphire shop where she sells bags of dirt salted with a few crummy sapphires in them. You can screen for your treasure right there in the back yard, as you can at half a dozen storefronts in town. My object is to sell Annie some of my cut sapphires. With much interruption by looky-loo tourists, she finally selects a brilliant pink. 0.71 carats. This she pays \$350 a carat for, resulting in a check for \$250.

*Hot damn!* Finally I get some money out of her after she charged me about that much last year for India gem cutting. With the new ruby cash in my pocket, I feel kinda smart, kinda rich. *I’m a hundredaire.*

Back to Drummond. Pomo still grinning like the Cheshire. I converse with a huge Indian while smoking out front with our sand-filled buckets. He’s living there

on SSI, a welfare program. Must pay well to indefinitely stay at sixty bucks a night. Why the hell here? Vegas costs only forty a night with a smorgasbord, gambling, crazy people, and a lot more fun.

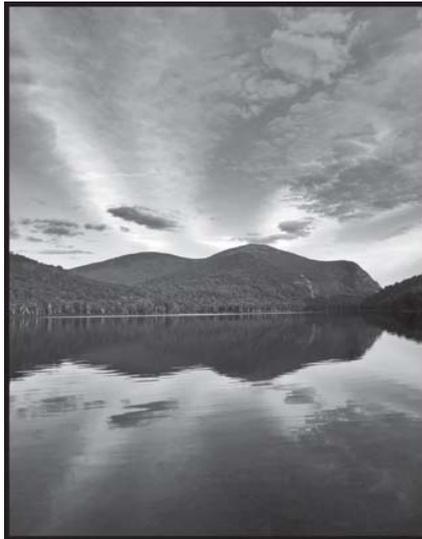
The big guy, two ponytails swinging as he smokes, says he's a Cheyenne from the eastern side of the state. He thinks that scalping white men is a respectable use of his time, though he brandishes no blade in my direction. I must be of indeterminant origin.

Back in Pomo's steamy blanket drying lair, I write until tomorrow. June 15th, the day the Forest Service road gate opens. A lot of explaining is necessary to convince the cat that we must continue. That we must go back into the woods.

And so we do, getting to base camp on top of Sapphire Mountain around 1 PM. From here, it's a mile hike down 1200 feet to the mine, down a trail to the deep gulch. Far from wandering man. I erect a huge tarp over this upper camp area, then cut down a firewood tree that smashes down on top of it. Re-do. Tarp and tree thing. Lots of firewood scattered everywhere around camp.

I write the rest of the day. The boys, Evan and Diego, leave for here tonight at 7. They'll drive all night and, in theory, be here at 7 in the morning. They are, of course, carrying a pharmacy of drugs, which will be a relief from all this sobriety. I just hope they slip through Mormon land unmolested by the constables. They have 95% odds of getting through.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Many Musics

### Eleventh Series

*“Myriad lives like blades of grass,  
yet to be realized,  
bow as they pass.”*

—The Shins,

“For Those to Come,” 2003.

#### *xxiv. Let the Rest Go (The King)*

*“So this is purgatory.*

*The memory set in mold.*

*Reality a little way past reach.”*

—Rod McKuen, “The Stanyon Cafe,” 1984.

“Love it all, my King. Let the rest go.”  
These her last words, my beloved Deirdre,  
as our last moment faded on my ship.  
None of Asoyadonna's dream had left.  
Wouldn't matter. *You're gone.*

And soon my Brothers too. Now some sleeping  
with drink-sodden smiles on them, others  
pushing the carouse on deck awhile longer.

I looked upon each of your faces in  
a new & old way tonight. Remembering  
what we were along our way here.  
Wishing it wasn't our last adventure.

“Love it all, my King. Let the rest go.”  
Your turquoise eyes staining me anew.  
Your message to me that one will come  
to me that is why I've come. *Why all this.*  
And another I may grow old by?

This voyage become a maelstrom in my chamber.  
You my second night's visitor.  
Expected, unlike the first night's.

I knew they were unsure, sober,  
frail in feeling at this setting off  
for where we'd always been bound.

Of them, only Roddy showed much esprit  
when I arrived to the boat's loading.  
His slumped form of recent times, dark  
sleepless eyes, replaced by a man  
urging all with a laugh & a swagger.

But quiet, the rest of them, polite, distant,  
not Brothers, shared skin, shared blood,  
more because *together, always together*.  
One after the next retiring early, hands  
by their sides, eyes elsewhere.

I took to my chamber too, & lay abed long  
hours. Wishing I had some mushroom tea  
to bring me to my wonderful friend  
in the sky. Could wishing make it so?  
Eyes closed, a low *hmmm* burbling from  
my lips, almost despairingly.

Somehow, a miracle? Sharp ears? I felt  
myself rising like old through that  
narrow aperture in my ceiling, & up,  
& up, & up! I held out my arms smiling,  
just hoping I'd careen myself upon  
that shiny-scaled great green head,  
land, grab on! Hold tightly!

It was so, but it was other. We flew  
purposely, no play, little joy in it.  
Eventually my night eyes made out  
the Island ahead, what my own ship  
was days away from.

My friend swooped us over its Wooded  
scape for a few lingering moments,  
reluctant to arrive where bound.  
Who could thrall this Dream Dragon  
vision so? Toward whom?

We soared straight then to our  
obscure destination, lower & lower to it,  
& of a sudden it was what the long ago  
visions had shown me. A massive,  
ancient, entrance. *The Tangled Gate*.  
Swooped through it, great enough to  
clear my friend's beautiful endless wings.

Does he grow smaller? Do I with him?  
We swoop down paths marked by tall  
walls of vines & stones, left, right,  
right, left, a seeming endless & dizzying  
sequence. Straight unto where I've  
always been coming. Cave of the Beast.

My dear friend slides me with a kind  
skid & gentle flip to the entrance, land  
upright & walking. Night's pitch from  
the outside but, within, not.

A soft glow. A sense of someone  
unseen. A waiting. I speak.

"Why am I brought here by my friend  
like this?"  
Silence. A voice, more a growl in my mind,  
speaks.

"You've come here for my help."

"Yes."

"To save the world from men?"

"Yes"

"And what would you give for this?"

"*What do I have left to give?*"

Silence.

"They'll get you here. They'll roam this  
Island with you until you eventually  
come here."

“Yes. They will.”  
“And that will be all.”  
“All?”  
“Yes.”  
“All?”  
“Love them all, King. Let the rest go.”  
“And then?”  
“And then go.”  
“Go?”  
“Yes.”  
Silence.  
“This will save the world?”  
Silence. This Cave is now empty, its soft  
light fading. I make to leave & find  
my friend, feel Creaturely warmth  
at least for a short while more, but  
the dream ends with a sudden snap.

The second day breaks into beauty  
as I watch it moment by moment.  
I hear shouts & calls on the deck,  
delight in their tones. Open water.  
Salve to the bit & snag of land.

I watch everything this day. Delight  
at Roddy & Odom riding dolphins, &  
then failing too. Odom’s smile how  
it’s rarely been in months. Calling  
bright-eyed to me on deck as never  
so long.

I spy on Francisco as he stalks  
around his painting, throwing off  
his artist’s cap & cloak. Seeming to faint  
by his own intensity. Looks up at me  
like my eyes alone upon his breaks  
his heart, twice over.

But by evening he & the rest are in  
great moods, we six eating together  
under the scirocco of stars, drinking  
each his fill & more. I tell the  
old riddle I know there is no answer  
to, but two questions. *Why desire?*  
*Why anything at all?*

When Asoyadonna follows me to my cabin,  
presents me with the gift she’d brought  
for me, I almost tell her *no*,  
*I’ve dreamed the future already,*  
*it ends badly.*

But to see you one more time again,  
my Deidre, I weaken, acquiesce.  
You lay with me in my bed, one you  
never saw. Atwist in my grasp, like old,  
fingers playing my graying beard like  
your own secret, amusing instrument.

I wonder if one can ask one vision  
about another, the politics & etiquette  
of the aether. But you know. Your message  
tells me the rest. *She will come.*  
*She will matter. She is all.*

“You were all,” I say aloud.  
I feel her smiling, need not see her eyes.  
“We saved each other.”  
She repeats the Beast’s rending  
instructions, & is melted back into  
me by dawn. My dearest stain.

“Land! It’s land!” I hear  
Dreamwalker’s voice, a joy practically  
savage in it.

Nothing left to do but give them all  
this hour, this happy day.  
*Love them all. Save the world.*



\*\*\*\*\*



### Wrack Zone

Write me a letter.  
Start by describing  
the sea at noontime.

Go on to tell me  
about the seductive  
bit of comforter  
that ended up kissing  
your ankles after  
a dream-filled  
night.

Tell me what you  
will have for lunch and  
with whom you will share  
a nap.

Tell me about  
your stomach pains  
and about your ride  
home last night when the  
blue Mustang nearly  
skidded into you  
on the wet street.

Tell me about your favorite  
dance track and which girls  
are the best  
dancers  
at your favored club.

Tell me if the green/  
yellow tint to the sky  
says that all may be lost

and if you think it  
is a sign of whether  
or not there will be  
a tomorrow.

Tell me what brand of booze  
you are shooting these days  
and who took you home  
last Saturday night.

Tell me if the divorce  
still hurts and if you  
wish you had children.

Tell me where you go  
after you leave the  
communion rail and  
if the word “brunch” sounds  
as needy and foolish  
to you as it does  
to me.

Describe the  
aleatory nature  
of beguilement.

Write me this letter.  
Everybody misses  
somebody, right?

\* \* \* \* \*

## LSD & State Power

*“But the heat came round  
and busted me for smiling on a cloudy day.”*  
—The Grateful Dead, “The Other One,” 1968.

Oh, LSD, ol’ chum. They hate you and fear you. They use weapons and torture and all manner of warfare against you. The War on Drugs is all about you. You’re the drug in sex, drugs, ‘n’ rock ‘n’ roll. You’re that thing, that indefinable force, that substance so powerful and threatening to the mainstream world that a war on innocent civilians, indeed even on their own families, must be waged *ad infinitum*.

Coercing a person into selling an agent a hit of acid, which results in that person spending decades in prison, is totally sick and disgusting. This happened recently at the Firefly Music Festival in Delaware, and at the Lockn’ Festival in Virginia, but it’s been happening countless times for decades.

Why? How many innocent lives will be destroyed by the powers of the State in a needless and disgustingly criminal attempt to control the minds of governed? In blatant violation of our inalienable rights to liberty?

Why is LSD worth the State destroying promising young lives over a single dose? Why coerce some kid into taking five bucks for something he wanted to give to you for free? Because those in charge need an enemy within to create, and to justify, and sustain, a Police State. Best to pick a popular item to eradicate—like table salt or Styrofoam or CO2 or light bulbs or LSD. This way it’s nothing personal. It’s the LSD they want.

But if you are the person containing the LSD, then suffer all pains of hell because the State says the thing is a crime unto itself, and therefore you are a criminal as an accessory to the existence of the thing itself. Unless it is in the custody of the State, in which case it’s perfectly fine.

\* \* \*

Some words here for newcomers to LSD. I read on a drug analysis web site that there are some blotters out there containing hits of 200, 300, 400 micrograms (mics) each.<sup>1</sup> Doses of LSD over 100 mics is very irresponsible to distribute; I’d call it reckless endangerment. Why put so much on single hit when seventy mics would be expected? Either the person doesn’t know how to lay sheets or they are mad.

But, because the overdosed blotters are all different, and from different places around the globe, I think we are possibly looking at a DEA-type of group making potential overdose blotter. I say this because it’s just isn’t done by responsible

people. It's just not economically rational, and is really bad karma, which is a big deal in Acidland.

As long as blotter is consistently weaker than it was in the 1960s, everybody wins. More money is made, and no one freaks out like back then from overdoses. Even someone not knowing acid from Xanax would be OK.

So why are 300 and 400 hundred mic blotters being made? Because there are entities that would love to see those old scare headlines from 1960s again, of people having bizarre and horrible accidents, whacked out of their minds, twirling naked down the street. Those entities that want to see people harmed by LSD overdoses are likely purveyors of these overdose blotters.

\* \* \*

LSD is a catalyst. The CIA knows this very well. Nobody knows how much LSD was smuggled into Eastern Europe during the decades of Communist occupation. It was a huge amount. The CIA loved LSD, and they loved the Grateful Dead because the live audience recordings they allowed of their shows were free of ownership or copyright.

How many live Dead tapes were smuggled into Czechoslovakia and other Eastern Bloc countries? A huge amount. Why did we Deadheads volunteer to help do that? Because it was proof of freedom and joy and fun. The more crowd noise, the better. Hearts and minds.

The Soviets tried to ban cassettes because of it. So it was working. Good ol' blotter acid and Dead tapes made a lot of young people turn on to a better reality, and Marx and Lenin went down the toilet.

Now they want us behind a new Iron Curtain. They want to start another acid scare with their overdose blotters. It's coming but this time we know it's coming.

Long live the human race in peace and freedom.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ecstasydata.org/results.php?start=0&search\\_field=substance&s=LSD](http://www.ecstasydata.org/results.php?start=0&search_field=substance&s=LSD)

\* \* \* \* \*

Colin James



#### Expect An Older Assassin

You might see me coming.  
I walk bent over,  
talk to myself,  
& drag my right foot.

I don't necessarily travel well  
in the dark anymore,  
which is unfortunate since  
there is an abundance lately.

My long hair is dyed so blonde  
it's almost orange.  
I am currently the purveyor  
& protector of the winds  
that all seem to go right through me.

After an impromptu inspection,  
my cape is still magnificent.  
Towards the bottom edge  
there are some problematic stains,  
and a continuous dampness  
I can't quite account for  
without completely disrobing formally,  
& performing a further inspection at my end.

Millions of bacteria vacation  
in these crevasses.  
They can't afford an ocean view  
so settle for a long stroll  
to the only perpetual sand dune  
where light still has an esoteric hue.

This year's renters  
memorize their cabin numbers  
by conscientiously counting hair follicles  
like that cave giant Polyphemus,  
crave soft skin yet edible with three  
meals or so yet to choose.

\* \* \* \* \*

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Judih Haggai



night crawls  
through the labyrinth  
solution unfound

\* \* \*

these words:  
we are versions of the same thing  
let's help each other

\* \* \*

while no one looks  
her single rose  
left on the table

\* \* \*

slow learning curve  
first boil water  
then make the rice

\* \* \*



each living creature  
moment to moment  
may we be kind

\* \* \*

a pile of ions  
gather together  
an artist is formed

\* \* \*

cycle of being  
each breath  
a new chance

\* \* \*

a flock of birds  
just before sunset  
mottled pink sky

\* \* \* \* \*

## “It’s OK to be Happy!”

This story and more Bags End writings  
can be found at:

[www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf](http://www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf)

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 suddehn 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **The Story of Looking for the Story!**

So many times I have said, dear readers, that your old pal Algernon’s native land called Bags End just isn’t like other famous fantasy lands. Good places like Oz and Narnia and the Hundred Acre Wood. They are all for one and like a team when the bad guys like the Winged Monkeys or witches or rival religions or age come around.

Not this place. No sir. Here the troubles are usually smaller but

it seems like it's our own folks that brings them.

It's like I've always said, when it comes right down to it, it's the little guys against the big guys in this world.

Of course that's not always true but more more than less less.

Now some of my readers just want to hear the story and not a lot of yawping but my need to yawp has to do with the story so be patient.

There I was sitting in my comfy chair in Milne's Porch not really being a beagleboy journalist for awhile. Just sitting like the Blondys say to do sometimes.

I adjusted in my chair a little bit and that's when I felt a piece of paper scrunched down deep in my seat! I pulled it out and saw that it had lots of words on it.

I am not so good at reading English even though I saw some letters I know I couldn't figure out what words were these.

So time to climb through the window back into Bags End and try to find a friendly reader.

Who should I find in my very own bedroom but my nice little greeneyed pal Ally Leopard. Oh, and that silly bumping relative of mine called Alexander Puppy.

"Ally, could you read this note to me please?" I said in my friendly Algernon way.

Ally took the paper and looked at its words and since he knows all about language they couldn't hide their say from him.

"It says 'It's Okay to be happy,'" he said like he didn't know either.

"That's all?"

"Yes, Algernon. Who gave this to you?"

"My Milne's Porch seat."

"Oh?"

I thanked Ally and was leaving when my til then quiet bumping brother said, "Bump. Bump."

I was going to leave anyway when Ally said all hopefully that he could tell me what Alex had said.

I said, "Did he say that he too wishes he could write cryptic messages in honest English on little pieces of paper?"

"No. He said he likes the note's message but he thinks that maybe there's more."

"Is there more, Ally? You said there wasn't."

"Algernon, I think Alex means that there's probably more notes in Bags End somewhere for you to find."

"Bump!" Alex added uselessly.

"He says good luck with your story."

"What story!?" I demanded.

Now Alex decided to clam up again. He sucked his toe and singed a Bumpsong. Probably a It's OK to Bump song. Dumb brother.

Was this note in my paw the start of a story? I didn't know. But it made me think of the time that I accidentally crashed into Betsy Bunny Pillow as she was bouncing over me without looking or caring.

"Sorry Betsy," I said meekly.

"Stupid beagle!" she whisper-yelled.

"It was an accident!"

That's when she glared at me even though she's got no face. And she screamed, "There are no accidents!"

Good enough for me. Maybe-story, maybe-not-story, here I come.

It's OK to be happy. Sure. Why not? But now I was thinking about something else I heard. It was that great time my person-mommy Miss Chris came to Sheila's Throne Room and they cuddled in Sheila's throne while I rested on my favorite spot nearby. And they talked.

"Sheila, are you happy?"

"It's not like that."

"What do you mean?"

"Happy is something you're feeling in the middle of doing. I feel happy when I play trumpet with my Cool Jazz Band. Especially if we play good."

"Are you happy right now?"

"If you stay."

"Yes."

"Yes."

I hoped they would talk some more about it because I almost understood but they talked about other things.

What to do now. Am I happy writing this?

No. This story has no insides.

So I went to my bedroom in the Bunny Family's apartment and I saw my silly bumping brother sitting on his bed all alone singing Bumplanguage songs to himself.

When he saw me he was very happy and when I sat next to him on his bed he was even happier.

"Come along, brother," said me. "Let's watch the sunset from my comfy chair on Milne's Porch."

I took Alex's soft yellow paw and we climbed onto my porch.

We settled down closely and somehow Alex didn't annoy me. Then I saw how quiet he was. We watched the sunset which was mostly pink and we fell asleep together after. We were happy. There are no accidents.

When I woke up Alex was gone and I was alone with my story.

I have decided I would be happy not writing this story so I am going to stop soon. I don't think it will go away completely though, just long enough to grow a inside.

OK so now there's this dream to write about. The Blondys 3 were in it except there were hundreds of the Blondys 3 & sometimes I didn't know some & sometimes I saw a Sheila Blondy & sometimes I saw a Miss Chris Blondy & even a Betsy Bunny Pillow Blondy and a dumb bumping brother Alex Blondy & I don't know how to tell it gooder than that!

And they were all of them singing one thing to me & it was "You Are Not Alone" & I remember waking up & thinking this was my

next note even though there was no paper this time.

Then the biggest thing of all to tell about in this jumbled-up story. I went to find my trusty beagleboy journalist write-typer & I found it safe under my bed except there was a piece of paper in it that read "WRITE SOMETHING GOOD" only spelled right at least that's what my smart friend Lori Bunny told me when I brought it to her.

So I guess I have clues and some instructions and no choice but to try. After all, I am a beagleboy journalist. Whatever is going on in Bags End, especially if it is nudging me so much, I have to find it and write it. So there.

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### **The Story of Looking for the Story!**

Your old pal Algernon was riled goodly by the mysterious story he finds himself inside of. I was befogged by all of these strange notes I was getting, for awhile, dear readers, and I didn't want to write a story about them for my newspaper. It was just too weird, even for me.

But something deep inside this old beagle's bodybone won't let me stop fighting. Like a little Sheila Bunny deep inside me with her little paws mad into fists about the whole thing.

Well, that's Sheila's advice for you. Fight, fight. But I needed something else, some brains to go with the fists. So I went to see my good friend Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna.

I like talking to Chrissy because she likes me no matter what day it is. She's not like the big guys in Bags End who like me as much as I can help their crazy plans. No sir.

I walked on my short beagle legs down to the hallway in Bags End where there is a door that leads to Imagianna.

Chrissy was just on the other side of the door! "I knew you were coming," she said shyly, thinking of me like a hero. Silly Princess.

"How did you know?"

She smiled her tricky Chrissy smile.

"Oh," said me.

We sat down there right in the grass, far from her castle.

"Boop is cleaning the whole castle and he wouldn't let me help," Chrissy explained. "So since I knew you were coming I decided to wait here."

I told Chrissy about the notes. The first one, "It's OK to be Happy," I found on my Milne's Porch seat. The second one, "You Are Not Alone," told to me by the Blondys Many in my dreams. And the third one, "Write Something Good," that I found on a paper in my write-typer.

Chrissy always listens quietly and close to my stories. Then she thinks for awhile til her brains make her smart things to say.

"Start with the first one, Algernon," she said.

I waited for her to say more but she just smiled at me.

"It's OK to be Happy?" I said, hoping she would talk more.

She nodded talklessly.

"Chrissy, what does that mean?"

"What makes you happy?"

I thought hard about this. "Well, I like sleeping. And I like doing my newspaper. And I like visiting you and Miss Chris and Sheila when she's not so grumpy."

"Then that's what you should do," Chrissy said.

She picked me up and brought me into her lap and she scratched my forehead and I think she sang a nice little R.E.M. song. I was so happy I almost purred. I tried to think about all this happiness but my brain refused. My brain wanted to purr.

A while later, Chrissy moved around and I looked outside instead of inside and I saw Boop who is Chrissy's servant and not a turtle though he looks like one.

"Greetings, Visiting Scribe," he said and bent down instead of looking at me.

"Talk English, friend," said me.

"Algernon, he said hello!" Chrissy laughed and we all hugged and Boop tried to complain about royal irregularities but he was too hugged to finish.

Chrissy told me sadly that she had to go. "Good luck!" she said and she and Boop walked hand in hand, um, um, not-turtle not-hand back to Chrissy's castle.

Alright to that there. I guessed it was time to go see Miss Chris and find out what would happen next.

As I walked to the place where I can get to Miss Chris's house in Connecticut I thought about how I don't usually go see Miss Chris and Princess Chrissy in a row. They're twins somehow. Maybe I could compare them. Would this be OK? Would it make me happy?

Miss Chris was hugging me so tightly I said, "You're gonna make two of me if you hug harder."

Miss Chris laughed and put me in her lap. I told her about visiting Chrissy and the notes and all. "What do you think?" I asked her.

Miss Chris smiled talklessly just like Chrissy had and then she brought me from her bedroom to her TV room and she yelled all happy, "Time to make Ramie dreamtalk!" And we jumped on sleeping lazybug Ramie the tall toy boy's belly and every time we landed he talked from inside his dreams. It was like this . . .

Jump! "Please Mister Tamarak Treey can't you throw me any here?"

Jump! "We've fallen outside of the bubble! What do we do?"

Jump! "The lawn is like the ocean and it's high tide! Run!"

I asked Miss Chris if we could break Ramie but she said no so I didn't worry about that. When we were tired we went over to Suzy Couch and took a good long nap.

So I had happy visits with Chrissy and Miss Chris and now I supposed it was time to go see Sheila Bunny.

I said goodbye to Miss Chris who hugged me even better and said, "See ya, A. B.!" I thought she was talking to the alphabet and tried to ask her about it but she just talked laughfully and brung me back to Bags End.

Now, Sheila. Asleep in her little throne in her Throne Room. I thought about making her dreamtalk but all I could hear was the sound of my poor bodybone being divided and conquered. Not me, no sir.

So instead I found my nice resting place on the floor near Sheila's throne and I layed down waiting.

After a while I heard Sheila make sounds. Not dreamtalk but dreammumble. I wondered if I could get her to dreammumble to me.

"It's OK to be happy," I said scaredfully.

"Jazz," Sheila said.

"You are not alone," I said next.

"King!" Sheila cried so loud I thought she'd waked up. Nope.

"Write something good!" I said boldly.

Sheila twitched and waked up fast and trapped me with her purple eyes before I could run. She looked me up and down sourly. "What did you say, beagle? What did you shout to wake me from my Royal Rest?"

"Write something good," I whimpered.

"That's your job," Sheila grouched. I thought she would yell some more or maybe even pummel me with her paws but she just closed her eyes again.

"Now!" she said suddenly without eyes.

"What, Sheila?"

"Write something good. Right now! Far away!" she commanded and then I runned hard away and fast.

But sort of a compliment, I thought later. Sheila thinks I can write something good like it's my job. That's pretty good from her!

\*\*\*\*\*

### **You Are Not Alone!**

Your old pal Algernon is slowly feeling his way through a mystery of words. I haven't figured it all out yet and I am real slow but every time I make a win I will tell in my faithful old newspaper.

What to do with a dream in which hundreds of dream Blondys told me "You Are Not Alone" and some of the Blondys looked like other Bags End guys like Sheila Bunny and Betsy Bunny Pillow and even Alexander Puppy. And many others too. So what to do. What to do, wondered me.

Carrying around my wondering with me I did the usual things I do. I went to Mister Owl's Bags End School and learned about letters of the alphabet and watched Mister Owl make Sheila stay awake after he refused to teach the History of Carrots (O Yuk!) like she demanded.

And then he refused to play jazz records for more than one whole day like she ordered. And he wouldn't listen to her when she banished him to Walla Walla, Washington.

And I runned from various big guys who decided I was the last piece in their big scheme. But then Betsy Bunny Pillow had her shadowy Allies grab me and bring me to her clubhouse and then she pretended she didn't know me.

"What do you want, Betsy?"

"You have been selected to record the historic record of the Bunny Pillow Free State as told by me. I shall narrate the dark times of captivity and servitude and then recount the grand and glorious uprising and the triumphant liberation." Betsy puffed out her pillowy chest like here was the world just like she imagined it.

"Betsy, I don't know those big words and I don't think they're real English. But I know the little ones and I am not going to write everything for everyone but my newspaper for me. And for everyone too."

Betsy bounced really close to me and stared me down though she don't got no eyes or face. "You refuse my generous commission? You refuse. Beagle, you are the architect of your own meaningless demise! Allies, take this luckless retch away!" she screamed.

I was led out of Betsy's clubhouse that she calls something else with as many words as possible by some of Betsy's shadowy Allies.

"Now, guys, you don't have to demise me," I whimpered.

They didn't talk though and I thought I was a goner.

But all they did was bring me through the door back to Bags End and leave me there. I stood still watching them.

"Run!" one of them ordered. Boy! Did I ever!

And there was the time when Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow of the Army of the Babys drafted me from my comfy bed and tried to make me march a lot until she said, "Twoops dismissed!" But that wasn't so bad because the only other soldier was Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, Miss Chris's big brother, and he carried me along in his arms. I sang over and over, "All we are saying is give sleep a chance!" and he danced along.

Lisa finally heard me over her own marching orders and she yelled, "Get down here you gwoldbwikking swubswub private!"

I sang faster and Ramie marched and danced faster and Lisa ranned after us yelling all the way.

I figured out that I could steer Ramie left and right by the way I singed. I singed louder to make him turn right and softer to make him turn left. Pretty soon we were sitting together in my comfy chair on Milne's Porch and not marching no more.

After awhile Sargent Lisa found us but she was so tired all she did was crawl into Ramie's lap too, give me a mean look and fall asleep.

But none of this was helping me. So I hunted down the Blondys one day to ask for their help.

Blondys like everyone a lot so they like me too. They floated

me all around and the baby Blondy Simi kept cheering for me even though I hadn't scored or nothing. But this is how they talked, I have learned. By kissing and cheering and floating and liking everyone a lot.

"Blondys, let's have a good dream together!" said me, being floated though I know beagles don't float. "And I can find out why I was told in that other dream 'You are Not Alone.'"

Blondys don't know about how you have to sleep first to have dreams cuz all of a sudden we weren't in a regular Bags End no more we were dreaming. They don't know about not group dreaming too.

In dreams beagles can float. I knew I was in a dream because I was floating most rightly.

"Hurry Blondys!" I called and they followed me. Now, I know my dear readers are wondering about me leading Blondys who are kind of like Big Guys except they're that other nice kind not too popules or er in Bags End but in dreams I can so there I was.

We floated through colors and wind and more Blondys joined as I thought they would. I have learned that Blondys are not only nice and float and group dream but they are very curious so pretty soon I was leading a wild pack of Blondys along and I got Simmy to help me lead a cheer. Tricky dreambeagle brain I had a good idea.

"YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!"

The words didn't disappear just cuz we were done yelling them and pretty soon there were hundreds of words and Blondys floating through the many colors and the words stretched and changed and I sneaked along the crowd trying to find the right ones to tell me what I needed to know from all this.

I was just guessing but since this was a dream I decided I was dreaming right so I picked out nice little red and blue words and some longer yellow words and even a couple of long purple words that reminded me of Sheila. And I dreamed I had a bag to put them in and then finally I dreamed myself awake right there in my nice Milne's Porch chair.

Losing no time I hurried with my dreambag of dreamwords to see my smart friend Sheila's older sister Lori who she calls Brains but I don't. Except when I forget.

"Lori, could you read to me what these words say?" I asked and I opened up my bag and dumped all the words out on her bed.

Lori smiled at me and adjusted her smartguy spectacles which she wears to see smarter.

Lori looked at the bunch of words real carefully.

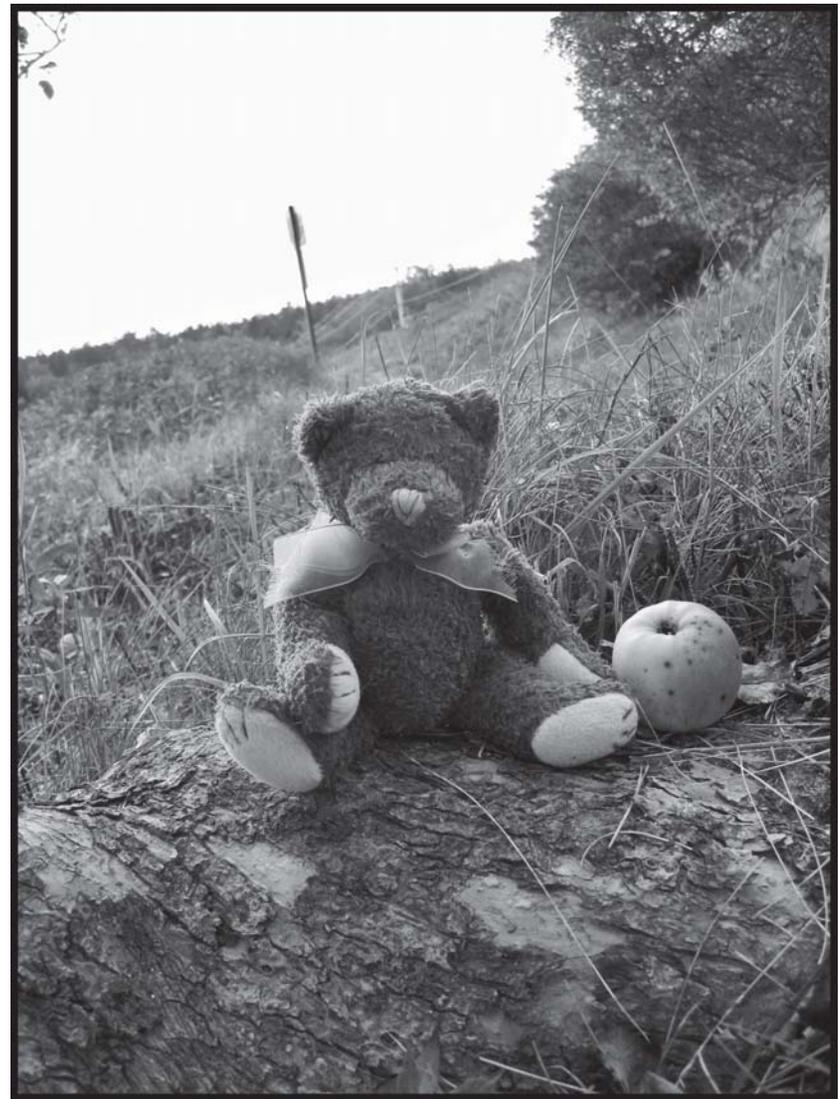
"Hurry! They'll melt!"

"They say 'Aren't You Glad You Are Not Alone?'" Lori said.

"They do not!" I yelled.

Lori said nothing. She double checked her work but that was what the words said. Even after they melted.

"Well?" she asked me, smiling.



“What?” said me grouchy as a Sheila. Almost.

“It was a question, Algernon. Aren’t you glad you are not alone? So what’s the answer?”

“I guess so,” I muttered.

Lori put her bright orange paw on my backbone. I thought she would talk too but she didn’t. After awhile my mutter melted and I decided to go to Milne’s Porch and sit in my nice comfy chair.

What was the point? And why was I so mad?

“You’re an epiphany-hound, beagle,” said a Sheila-like voice followed by me seeing Sheila herself.

“A what?”

Sheila settled right into my chair with me right under one of my floppy ears for a blanket.

“Epiphany-hound. All your stories have to go supernova at the end.”

“Go what?”

“Louisiana Purchase. First Man on the Moon. Albert Hoffmann 1943. Work in Progress. Roswell, New Mexico.”

“Sheila!”

But she was falling asleep. Still mumbling though. “Kubrick. Deconstructing Harry. In a Silent Way. I have a dream.”

And I guess she started having one then cuz she was asleep.

I didn’t know what she was saying or why. But she was nice and warm there under my ear blanket. OK. OK, I am glad I am not alone.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **HOW to Write Something Good!**

This year has been for me like a big long class in something I don’t quite understand. & it’s been taught by some mysterious guy, some hide-en-seek type. He hides after giving me a little something to be ruffled & I seek & seek & seek the answer.

The first message your old pal Algernon got was “It’s OK to be Happy.” That was on a note. Then I had a dream of Countless Blondys & it told me “You Are Not Alone.” Then someone typed “Write Something Good” in my beagleboy journalist write-typer.

I went to all the smart big guys I know like Sheila Bunny, Miss Chris, & Princess Chrissy to help me figure out what all of these messages meant. They helped me some. And the grumpier big guys like Betsy Bunny Pillow & Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow got in my way like they always do.

Still, I didn’t think I had really solved it. But I got a good clue one day during school time.

Mister Owl was teaching all us Bags End guys about math. He wrotes a 1 on his chalkboard & we all told him what it was. Then he wrotes another 1 next to the first & we told him the same thing. Then he did it again but this time some guys grumbled loudly.

“What’s this got to do with important things like carrots & jazz!” demanded Sheila.

“O carrots! Yuk!” yelled me.

“Write something good about me!” whisperscreamed Betsy like she does every day.

“He will be doing all of his writing from the brig when I am done with him!” babytalkgrouched Lisa.

“Bump!” offered my silly bumping brother Alexander Puppy, to noone’s gain.

“Alex says that you wrote another 1, Mister Owl,” said Ally Leopard who is greeneyed & covered in his brain with languages.

Mister Owl listened to all of this fussing quietly until it was done & then he wrotes a little + between the first 1 & the second 1 & between the second 1 & the third. Then he wrotes a = after the third one.

“When you add these numbers up what do you get?” he asked.

“A gang of 111!” I said.

“A big fat 1!” said Sheila.

“A really tall 1,” whispered Betsy Bunny Pillow.

Mister Owl smiled & shook his feathery head. He wrotes a regular looking 3 after the = so it all looked like  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$

Well everybody protested this sudden move. I mean we had all heard of 3 but why did a bunch of 1s change like that?

“And what happened to 2?” demanded Sheila.

Mister Owl looked confused & unhappy like he thought we were gonna believe him right away.

So he tried it a different way. “Betsy,” he said, “if you added all of your Bunny Pillows together what do you get?”

Betsy puffed out her pillowy chest & spoke proudly with her faceless face. “Liberation!” she announced.

“Wait! I have to write that stupid saying down!” said me annoyed.

“You’ll write down a lot more than that before I am done with you!” she whisperscreamed.

Mister Owl kept at it until we felt bad for him & went along with  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$  even though nobody really thought much of it.

Then something happened later that day when I was sitting in the comfy chair of Milne’s Porch. I was almost asleep & sort of dreaming about “It’s OK to be Happy” & “You Are Not Alone” & “Write Something Good.” They were floating around in front of me & then some little + signs linked them up like traincars.

I got it! I understood finally. A train is many cars become part of something else. Car + Car + Car = Train.  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ .

So . . . “It’s OK to be Happy” + “You Are Not Alone” + “Write Something Good” = what? That’s what I didn’t know! I didn’t have my 3!

I was so pleased that I figured I would get my 3 pretty quickly now & the mystery would be solved.

Boy! was I wrong!

I waited and waited and looked and looked and talked and talked

but had no luck + no luck + no luck = no luck. I could not find my 3.

I got pretty glum about the whole business. I sat on my comfy chair on Milne's Porch & for a long time I didn't do nothing about nothing. I had my white flag but was even too low to wave it around.

This went on till the day when a crowd came through my bedroom window onto Milne's Porch.

First Sheila Bunny. Then Miss Chris! Then Princess Chrissy! I was almost happy as I looked them standing before me.

Then I imagined + signs between them and a = sign with no answer.

"Great," groaned me. "Another math I don't know."

Sheila hopped right into my chair & I barely had time to make room for her. Then she demanded that my Ear Blanket cover her warmly. I felt cheered up already. Yah right.

Miss Chris & Chrissy are much more polite & so they sitted in front of my chair and gangskritchd me. Then of course Sheila made a noisy complaint & so Miss Chris skritchd her & Chrissy skritchd me.

"Dumb king," I muttered. Stupidly.

Sheila yelled, "Off with his nosebone!" & started to pummel me with her soft little paws. They can hurt though.

Well, Miss Chris thought all of this was too funny & she laughed a lot & then Chrissy agreed & she laughed a lot & they carried Sheila around between them & tickled her until even that dumb bunny rised up some.

"Hey! I am the one who has the problem! You're not paying attention to my glumness!" I yelled.

Miss Chris & Chrissy who were still covered in laugh decided the best thing to do was for all of us to snuggle closely together in my comfy chair. Which we did & again Sheila demanded the services of my Ear Blanket.

"Some of us are just too good for our shoes!" I complained.

But Sheila was too comfortable to get mad at me. And I calmed down too & now we were all fine.

I wished that one of them could tell me how to write something good but none of these guys were writers like me. Miss Chris is an artist and she plays piano and Sheila is a mayor and she plays jazz trumpet and Princess Chrissy is a magick girl and she likes to dance around. Nobody around Bags End writes a lot like your old pal Algernon!

Except . . . Ramie? Ramie the toy tall boy. When he's not sleeping and when he's not taking care of Miss Chris, which is a lot, he writes stuff in his notebooks. But what?

"Personmommy?" I asked most politely.

"Yes, Awawa?" she said talking to me with what she calls me I like it OK.

"What does Ramie write in his notebooks?" I asked.

"He makes up whole worlds, Aw-wa-wa," said Miss Chris smiling at me. Her smiles are like kisses.

"Whole worlds?" asked me. Wow. Ramie is a good toy & Miss

Chris loves him but I didn't know about all this.

Miss Chris smilekissed me some more. "Ramie thinks that dreams are very important so he writes about them like they're all in one place."

This surprised me so much I didn't know what to say. "But you never talked about all of this, personmommy! You just complained that he sleeps too much."

"That's cuz he can't play with me when he's asleep. He's my toy after all." Miss Chris looked annoyed.

Chrissy took her hands & said, "I think I have a good idea about this that will help you out, M. C." I knowed this meant Miss Chris cuz Chrissy had told me.

Now I was getting impatient. "I have to go see Ramie now to ask him a question."

Miss Chris & Chrissy didn't want me to go & Sheila didn't want to lose her comfy Ear Blanket but I said I had to go sorry guys. Sheila grumped a lot while Miss Chris & Chrissy kissed & hugged me a lot goodbye.

I figured Ramie might help me somehow with the "Write Something Good" part of my math problem & maybe getting the = part would be easier.

Ramie was in Miss Chris's living room in Connecticut sitting on the long Freddy Couch. He was all alone & he was awake too. What good luck!

"Hi, Ramie!" I said in my friendly Algernon way.

"Algernon! Here you are!" Ramie said. He picked me up & put me on his lap. He's so tall a whole bunch of Bags End guys could sit on his lap.

"I wanted to ask you a question about writing."

"Oh good." Ramie smiled happy.

"Miss Chris told me you write down your dreams like a story."

"And I write down my awakes too."

This stumped me. "What are awakes, Ramie?"

Ramie smiled at me and said, "This is one, right now. Awakes happen between dreams."

"Miss Chris didn't tell me about that!"

"That's because the dream Miss Chris told me the awake Miss Chris wouldn't like it. Awake Miss Chris doesn't like to share me much."

Well, this was very confusing. But Ramie was happy to talk about it. I could only think of one more thing to ask.

"Is there a dream Algernon?"

"Oh yes. He's very nice."

"Does he write about dream Bags End the way I write about, um, awake Bags End?"

Ramie looked puzzled. "Sort of. But he only has one Bags End News & he writes it longer & longer. And it's only one copy but he will show it to everyone who asks."

"Does he know how I do it?" I was getting excited now.

"Yes. But he gets weird when you don't do it for a while. I told

him it makes you sad.”

Wow. I had a lot to think about. I asked Ramie to say hello to dream Algernon & Ramie & Miss Chris for me. Ramie smiled & said OK & gived me a fine goodbye hug.

Now my dear readers may be wondering if my own dreams about me are of how a Algernon writing only one long copy of Bags End News too. I really don't think so or maybe I don't remember. Or maybe Ramie dreams about a different Algernon than I do. I bet there's a story about all of these dreamthings to come sometime but not now.

Because now I had my answer. I wanted to tell Miss Chris & Princess Chrissy & even Sheila so I rushed back to Milne's Porch.

I found them all still there but only Sheila was awake. I wanted to wake up Miss Chris and Chrissy right away but Sheila grouched at me to be quiet.

“They're playing with Ramie,” she whispered.

Well, this was too much for me. “Are they playing with his dream Miss Chris & Chrissy too?” I cried.

That woke them up which was a good thing because they had to hold Sheila back from pummeling me with her furry little paws.

It took a while to calm down Sheila & then I was covered in kisses & hugs & then we all settled into my comfy chair together.

Finally I had my chance to talk & ask some questions.

It was Chrissy's idea for them to visit Ramie's dreams.

“We became dream Chrissy and M.C., Algernon,” Piness Chrissy explained.

“Did Ramie know?”

“We told him but he didn't believe it at first,” said Miss Chris. “But then when I told him I didn't know about how he writes down awakes when he's asleep, he believed me.”

“He thought you would be mad,” I said.

“I would be but since I can be with him now when he's awake or asleep I'm not.”

Chrissy laughed. “M.C. said now she will get twice as many stories!”

“Did you see dream me?”

“Yes. He was very happy you know about him now.”

I was going to tell them my big thought but I didn't. There was something else to ask. “Why does Ramie think dreams & awakes are both real?”

Miss Chris smiled even bigger. “That's easy. I dreamed about him first. I wanted my own toy tall boy to play with. When me and Sheila got him at the store he was just like in my dreams.”

This sort of made sense but maybe not really. I suppose it doesn't matter so much.

You see I know my answer. I finally solved the math problem. It was hearing about dream Algernon's other kind of Bags End News that did it.

It's OK to be Happy  
+ You Are Not Alone  
+ Write Something Good  
= Bag's End News!!

I decided not to tell anyone right away. I was very happy to finally have my answer though.

But how simple! I mean, shouldn't I know that what makes me happy, what makes me feel connected to everyone else, what makes me want to do something especially good is my grand old newspaper?

I guess sometimes everyone thinks that what makes day can't just be the sun. If a easy answer doesn't seem like the right one, there must be an even easier one somewhere.

I went to sleep happy that my answer is my happiest thing too. And I had a dream that proved me right.

I was in a Bags End hallway. Me and Ramie were marching behind that silly Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

“Hwup Two Three Four! Hwup Two Three Four!” Lisa ordered & she marched on her short legs. But when I saw her face I could see her eyes were tightly closed.

Ramie's weren't though. He was smiling at me. We sneaked away from the sleeping marching Lisa & runned up a bunch of ramps & down a hallway. Then through a doorway into a big field at night time.

“Where are we going, Ramie?”

Ramie pointed at this big fir in the middle of the field.

“See that fir?”

“Yes. It's pretty.”

“That's dream Algernon's Bags End News book.”

I was shocked. But there was more.

“See that big full moon?”

“Yes.”

“That's dream Algernon's pencil.”

Wow.

“And see all of those stars?”

“Yes, Ramie.”

“Those are all of the stories that dream Algernon has written so far.”

This was all too fantastic!

Ramie got lower next to me & said, “Look at those sparks flying from the fir up to the stars.”

I guessed, “Those are the stories flying up to the sky as he writes them?”

“You got it, little beagle. It's that simple.”

“But if they're flying up right now, where is dream Algernon himself?”

Ramie smiled at me, but Blondyish he talked no words.

I didn't know what to do next so I leaped through the air & landed on one of the sparkstories rising up to the Bags End News sky.

I rided the spark up & up into the sky & woke up in my bed.

My brother Alexander was sitting up in his bed next to mine. He smiled & said, "Bump?" all friendly. I smiled all friendly back at him and then climbed through the window to my comfy chair on Milne's Porch.

Every time I finish one of these long hard stories I always feel like I'm empty and at the starting line again.

What would my long lost Mommy Beagle think of her fancypants Sonny Boy? I guess she would like me OK.

Oh there's so many sparks to make into stars that I will be busy til I go gramps. Betsy wants me to write her biography & there's this dream Bags End place to find more about.

There was a visitor later on & it was Lori Bunny who helps me make my newspaper. She's real smart with her little spectacles & bright eyes.

"Hi, Algernon!"

"Hi, Lori!"

"Are you ready to work on your newspaper?"

"Sure thing. Get me a box of matches & some flammable extended metaphors."

"What?"

"Just kidding."



\* \* \* \* \*



### Crisis on Main Street

I try to love you  
by writing a poem

but there are simply  
not enough words

I try to find you  
but the horde is tripping

on cobblestone  
In a centuries old window

a red and yellow bouquet  
for hire

No  
There are simply not enough flowers

\* \* \*

## Portrait of the Whaler

I can not tell if these dark figures  
are in the sky

or in the back of my own eyes  
In grey charcoal I'm

drawing his lines  
the simian skull

the bowed legs  
I'm drawing the many bumps of bone

old healing tumors  
drawing the water around his brain

drawing my first  
incorrect conclusions.

\* \* \* \* \*



Nathan D. Horowitz

## Back in the Forest with You

It's like this: you awaken, flip over, and puke hard into the aluminum pot you placed beside your hammock. A thousand colors explode before your eyes in organic artistic sculptural forms as you roar in Spanish ¡¡¡YES!!! ¡¡¡GIVE ME MORE!!! through your heaves.

Staring into the bright darkness around you are the eyes of six other men: Dave Sternstein, with whom you drank last year; Mark Summerman and Ryder Ferency, two friends of Dave's who came here with him from California; don Joaquín Piaguaje, your teacher; another Secoya shaman, don Jerónimo Payaguaje; and Jerónimo's son and apprentice, Manuel.

This ceremony's being held in what Dave calls the "provisional hut," a wall-less, dirt-floored structure roofed with plastic tarps. It boasts a low sleeping platform made of planks, and a gas stove, and a set of crude shelves stacked with dishes, pots, silverware, and food. A shallow trench around the perimeter keeps the floor from flooding in the rain.

You're working on a project that Dave's organizing: building a cultural center for the Secoyas that will double as a house for Joaquín. Half-finished, the larger structure is five meters away. When it's done, there'll be a festival.

But you're not thinking about that now. You're feeling a surge of pity for everyone who isn't having the visions you're having—explosions of the most intense beauty possible, straight from the heart of the universe.

No one has ever experienced such marvels, no one has ever seen what you're seeing now—neither your friends, nor your teacher, nor the prophets and sages of old.

You're becoming enlightened—the next great religious leader sent to humanity.

The only problem is: how will you deal with all the wisdom-seekers camping out on your lawn for some face-time with you?

You can send your disciples to deal with them. *Take a ticket, folks. The master will see you when he's done puking.*

You spit out the last of the yagé, lie back in your hammock, take some deep breaths. In the wake of your soulgasm comes an image of this location in a future some decades hence. In rapidfire Spanish, you expound the vision to the others:







love.

love to great extents such that (to)love cannot be outdone.

it was a january much like this one. mild. snowless.

i remember the nervousness. the tremors. nothing large enough to register the Richter scale. but continuous. like an engine that's been overused. a road that has yet to be tucked in with the final layer of asphalt – smooth.

i remember wondering: could the neighboring passengers see? my hands sh

a

k

e.i would concentrate – the paper cup of coffee never hit my lips. they must have noticed. my body collided with its own unique turbulence.

i remember checking my satchel for the ringbox. it was there. a million times over – there. i held it. my hands did not shake.

i remember that time s.l.o.w.e.d.

the m.o.m.e.n.t.

the wheels smoothed

the tarmac. s.l.o.w.e.d.

the queue to deplane. i gathered my belongings

s.l.o.w.

my concreteweighted footfalls like watching Finn learn to walk.

because once i was off that plane

because once i was in the immigration stalls

because once i rendered my passport

i

would

be(detained).

i remember the questioning. the fingerprinting. photographing. the

w

a

i

t.when my bags were taken. were searched.

i remember holding onto that ringbox toneverletgo.

i remember i cried

when they said: (go)i could go.

&i remember moving from ringbox to hertoneverletgo.

\* \* \*

day 3 february 2009: psalm 40.

life has taken its turns its twists.

its cliff diving driving fast around every corner out of curiosity for the single moment the steering wheel wouldn't hold the angled turns. the ocean a drop. houses stacked on houses high. i raced along the coast not following any line: a peculiar amalgamation, "coastline" implying a leveled footing, straight shot. it was not.

i have not followed a straight line any line

i have not followed

i have not

i have

i

i

have

cancer

i remember my mind not thinking. like a metronome restrained while the last strike echoed steady same decibled strength. my body continued. muscle memory. my foot not governed boring holes in the drum of the car. the pedal flattened like a blade of grass. the car accelerated. steady. continuous. metronome. my hands letting the steering wheel pass through like a lost game of tug-of-war. guided by the pavement markings only ever as far as the headlight reach. i thought not what the next turn would hold. i thought not.

i

held.

nothing.

\* \* \* \* \*



Jimmy Heffernan

## Notes on Death and the Cosmic Memory

It seems to me that the fear of death is, in and of itself, more fundamentally an *instinctual* phenomenon than an *existential*, or *conceptual*, one. It is really at the root of our entire fear mechanism, which is shared by all animals. Modern Western men and women, in part because of their sedentary ways of life, and overly self-conscious intellectualizing, tend to fixate on it to an exaggerated degree, due in part to certain ego pathologies.

\* \* \*

Non-Western tribal and ancient peoples surely had fears about death too, but their anxieties were triggered less often because they did not obsess over the subject—instead accepting it as part of the fundamental order of things. This difference suggests that what is referred to by modern Western thinkers (such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, and Ernest Becker) as *death anxiety* is not natural to humans, but rather has some social or cultural pathology to it.

\* \* \*

There are two forms, in humans, of the fear of death. There is the *instinctual* one, which all animals have. There is also an *existential* fear of one's own extinction, peculiar to humans—possibly most pronounced in modern Western men and women. The two work synergetically to generate some whopping death anxiety. Which, naturally, is a peculiarly primary driving force in our modern Western affairs.

\* \* \*

Aboriginal peoples believed that when they died, they returned to the universe out of which they came; they did not pathologically fear death as many modern Western men and women do. Samurai warriors believed that to die with honor was the greatest achievement to which one could aspire; they did not pathologically fear death. The ancient Greeks and the Romans saw death as a part of life, and potentially a noble act; suicide was unusually common in both cultures; they did not pathologically fear death.

\* \* \*

Interestingly, modern humans, and more particularly Western men and women, find that the fear of death becomes suspended during the psychedelic experience. Perhaps psychedelics afford us a temporary foray into a more natural psychology. For example, recent scientific studies have shown that terminal patients are much more relaxed and accepting of their fate on a regimen of LSD or psilocybin, showing a markedly attenuated fear of death—and, in many recorded cases, suffering none at all.

\* \* \*

It is constructive to note that atoms and molecules don't age. They don't die. They're supposed to have existed at least since the Big Bang, and perhaps an infinitely longer time. What does it mean for us mortal beings—that we're made of an immortal essence?

I propose that this is not fancy; matter and energy can never be destroyed, as modern science has asserted. And what of the notion that the cosmic fabric has a memory? *It is my contention that Nature has mental aspects, and that She remembers.*

*What could this mean?*

Perhaps it means that death can be no more than an illusion in a universe that remembers everything.

\* \* \* \* \*



### Timid

I drank her in with thirsty eyes  
as someone held her by the waist,  
and trespassed on my reverie-romance.

Nonchalant in faceless guise,  
almost choking on the taste,  
I wished I had the nerve to risk a chance.

The music played.  
The night grew long.  
The deejay spun one final song.  
She looked my way, but just a glance.  
I shyly smiled and never made advance.

I knew when it came time to go,  
it might have been but, sadly, no  
—for when I move, I move too slow.

I sat and watched her dance.

It was a pleasant evening, though;  
rooted where wallflowers grow,  
I merely watched her dance.

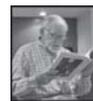
I merely watched her dance.

\* \* \* \* \*

## No Lullabies

These dreary hours between two and four a.m.  
are the realm of King Despair  
This is when elastic time makes clocks appear unreliable  
—when every “tick-tock” is amplified  
This is when blistered angels sort the harvest of night prayers  
and scatter them unanswered to the stars  
—when psychic vandals spray graffiti on walls of delusion  
—when sleeplessness murmurs names morning will deny  
This is when only streetlights see dark shapes that cast the  
shadow populace haunting these dreary hours  
—when traffic signals blink their electric-candy warnings  
over poisonous avenues.  
This is when alley paths are splashed anew with the piss,  
vomit, and tears of ghosts  
—when everything sounds like the end of an alto sax solo  
fading away eternally in the distance.  
It is the time of lonely echoes from nowhere.  
It is the time most colors surrender to greys and blacks.  
This is when everything feels like the last passenger  
on the last train, reaching the last stop,  
in no hurry to stand up, climb the stairs,  
then stumble home  
since the next day at home  
is every bit as bleak  
as these dreary hours between two and four a.m.  
when we should be in bed  
having nightmares.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Tom Sheehan

### Starswept II

This  
strange  
star  
courses  
night  
near-  
fable tree  
in front  
of house;  
this leaf-  
crawling  
star, this  
odd light  
about in  
the  
lusterless  
darkness,  
this  
crawling  
spot in a  
slow  
whirl  
taking  
over the  
whole of  
imagery,  
a  
presence  
foreign  
among  
red  
leaves  
and  
sapless

limbs  
aching  
to crack  
selves  
aloud in  
such  
dread  
silence  
the star  
leaves  
about in  
its wake.

We, of  
course,  
orbit in  
customary  
rite; the  
star so  
complex,  
me so  
simple I  
am  
darkness  
under its  
light,  
veins  
loose  
in utter  
silences,  
the utter  
bending  
of selves  
and self  
under its  
sovereignty,  
under  
mastered  
movement  
and

mysterious  
realm  
deployed  
in the  
underworld  
of  
guessing.

Under  
my hand  
stone  
aches of  
long  
being,  
speaks  
of  
kinship  
with the  
star,  
trembles  
as it  
has all  
day,  
from  
heart  
core,  
sense  
of slow  
movement  
and  
resolution  
only  
midnight  
or  
later is  
privy to,  
as  
if we,  
partners  
in  
the  
slight

touch of  
time,  
course  
the  
same  
irresolute  
approach  
to  
nothing  
at all,  
breathing  
moments,  
spinning,  
carrying  
on ever,  
becoming  
something  
else in  
glacier  
speed  
heading  
out or  
down or  
into vast  
beginnings.

The  
stone  
beneath  
is but  
the star  
above,  
collective  
of all  
inordinate  
gases  
and  
piece a  
vast god  
left in  
heavens

for  
gathering,  
soft  
blue of a  
trout  
stream  
curving  
at  
wall,  
sound  
tree  
makes  
dousing,  
(how it  
must cry  
in  
late  
October  
limb  
of final  
saluting),  
a  
leaf  
whose  
fifty  
million  
years is  
trapped  
downward  
in stone  
trembling  
beneath  
my  
hand,  
claw  
mark  
buried  
ten  
thousand  
lifetimes,  
someone  
speaking

an image  
in ear soft as  
forgotten  
poem in  
a Latin diary  
three  
tiers of lava  
have  
taken to bed.

Wind is a  
sudden  
partner in this  
delight,  
upsweep  
salty, lively on  
forbidden air,  
ripe,  
bearing  
mother of  
the seas with  
it,  
breast feeder  
and  
slattern in  
motions  
tides lose  
outright.  
Off the  
easterly  
shore it swings  
itself, a moan,  
a  
dirge of breath  
telling an old  
old  
buried, where it's  
been, with  
whom,  
what done and  
why.

Driving  
high  
ominous  
clouds  
before it,  
wayward  
sheep  
brought  
to  
fold,  
pushing  
their  
dark  
woolens  
into  
high  
pastures.  
On  
every  
edge it  
catches,  
on  
stalks,  
reeds,  
leaf lips,  
every

two  
twigs at  
fork, and  
whistles  
continuously  
against  
eaves,  
spouts  
and the  
thin  
souls of  
wires  
holding  
things  
upright  
and in  
place.  
When  
glass  
threatens  
to  
shatter,  
not from  
thrust  
but the  
high  
pitch  
itself, the  
earth,  
whole  
earth,  
trembles  
through  
rock and  
field into  
matter of  
core, to  
this  
body  
spinning  
in  
blessed  
silence.

Out of  
sight,  
the  
star,  
coursing  
still  
in  
deadliness,  
matches  
our long  
slant  
into  
beginning,  
past  
beginning,  
to  
where,  
and  
what,  
and why.

\*\*\*\*\*



A turtle attempting to cross I-26  
lost in a dream  
but we could not stop

\* \* \*

Fiona our PTSD cat  
now sleeping peacefully beside me  
a break in her misery

\* \* \*

I drove past  
the pool hall and sex shop  
on Route 25  
and death came to mind

\*\*\*



I wonder why  
at this moment  
I feel peace  
and the cicadas are singing deep inside

\* \* \*

Music  
and the cry of the dove  
and the distant stars  
keep me whole

\* \* \*

There are people who secretly think  
they are Christ and  
they are either lying or crazy

\* \* \* \* \*

## Labyrinthine

[a new fixation]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,  
or be enslaved by another man's"*  
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

*lviii.*

I climb up the ladder & into the Attic. It is fairly dark up here but not quite as there feels like a glow to every surface, a quality to allow seeing here, & so I begin to walk away from that door, test if the glow holds, & it does, & my eyes adjust, & so OK, I'll keep going, walking along a floor that is made of rough-hewn floorboards, but solid, & I come after a few minutes walk to two doors, one green, one gold, & a choice to make, I think, yes, these are the colors of royalty in these myths, these stories I write & live within, but I don't think I've seen them separated like this, a choice between one & the other offered, & yet here tis, to go on I have to choose, & I choose green hoping gold is not offended, & this is surely strange to think & yet I do think it, it's what I would think in this situation, choose green, notice the door handle I grasp is gold, & so maybe it will be OK, I hope, turn the handle & push in & find I am somewhere else, whether really there or a kind of simulacrum.

*lix.*

I'm back at the desert festival again, really it seems, & yet, & yet again, & I am wearing a certain hat, one I know belongs to a certain small Creature friend of mine, a purple furry dancing Creature, ribbons in his paws to dance with, a brow above his darkeyed brow—

His name is Pirth, I have known him a long time. He does not often speak with words & yet dances beautifully & will on lucky occasion pat someone's nose in praise—

It's a fisher hat, with a chin-strap one he has worn a very long time, warm & likely his only possession but for ribbons & bows. Creatures own little or nothing really, & yet he has travelled long with these few things.

I found it in the back of the old green bus, back in the Western city, last bus of the night, returning from the hospital, found it in the very back seat, sort of tucked way down in a dark crevasse, & I thought of my little Creature friend, who was often cold. Folds nicely to fit his small head.

One day I did not know where he was anymore, & I kept the fisher hat to remember him, & then another day I did not know where the hat was anymore. And days upon sad, seething days, till recently, when dreams nudged into my waking, taking me by the scruff & nudging, & nudging harder, until one moment I open my eyes, & I'm back at the desert festival again, & my little Creature friend's Pirth's fisher hat is in my hands.

Back then, at the festival, I would sit back down, on the desert floor, festival loud & cheerful all around us, & I would look at Pirth, & he would deep darkeyed look at me, very calmly, & now I was calmer, because he is a good friend, knows how I get, excited, overblown, too full of the dramas for any one of them to take hold, offer a path.

Deep dark eyes, very soft & pleasant purple fur, & I'm very glad for him, & he reaches out his little paw & pats me on the nose & I think: *how cool you are, & how cool you are, how very cool you are . . .* & then he hops off my knee & begins to do his desert dance, a kind of peaceful frenetic rocking back & forth, the ribbons in his paws & his fisher's hat flying wildly about him, like he can listen to all the human musics, the drumming, the electronica, the cries & laughter, & the desert noises, & the wind, & the celestial music above, & the roiling below in the earth itself, & dance it wildly, happily, calmly, freely . . .

*Ohhhh shittt.*

I sit up in the faintly glowing hallway, so far away from that desert, so far away from that desert, & yet here is the little fisher's hat in my hands, & here sitting on my knee is my miracle beauty of a little friend Pirth, looking at me, reaching up to pat my nose—

*Ohhhh happiness.*

I stand with him now in my upturned hand, watching me calmly. We are not in the

desert right now, it is not those other years, & yet here we are in this strange new place, together again, & I nod. Put his hat on him properly. Pat his little nose, & walk on see more.

*lx.*

One thing, among countless, I've learned from Creatures is that *you never know with people-folks.*

We, Pirth & I, are now making our way along a narrow hallway in the Attic, low-ceilinged, rough floor-boards, full of gaps & splinters under foot. I think the low ceiling might even have nails poking out of it.

So slow, careful, hunched low walking for a fair stretch, tiring, & I'm ready for a stop when a light brighter than the low constant glow thus far—

Walk, walk, try not to hurry & stumble—

Come to what is a small library, maybe the smallest I've ever seen. A green & gold armchair, looks old but comfortable; next to it a small table with a shaggy lamp on it; next to that a one-shelf bookcase.

Upon it a row of books, I look closer & see they are a series about Mulronie the Space Pirate.

Oh. Ah. I've had a Space Pirate Burger at Mulronie's, sure, & that TV commercial where cartoon Mulronie takes off in his spaceship, crying, "Mulronie's Space Pirate Burgers! They're Co-Co-Co-Cosmically Deelicious!"

And that Mulronie the Space Pirate cartoon show that didn't last long.

But the books themselves, I read them once, well twice, but it was a long time ago & I had chased away from them since. Some things become too important, like you're starving & you take way too big a bite of something & it's deelicious like the Space Pirate Burger but too much, you're choking, so deelicious, have to spit it out, *have to spit it out—*

I open my eyes. *Whoa.* Pirth is sitting calmly on my knee. I lean forward, hoping for & happily receiving a furry pat on my nose. And there is a letter folded on my other knee. Rough burnt color paper.

I unfold it & read aloud to Pirth:

"Everyone had read the five famous books written about Mulronie the Space Pirate.

The shortest, mightiest bandito in all of outer space. Everyone knows that when he was twelve, in 1951, he had a strange encounter, under the starry skies, out in the fields beyond the farmhouse where he lived. Something happened that night, & it changed him. And everyone knows that when he was a young feller, in 'bout 1969, he was part of that *other* mission to the moon, the one you *don't* hear about—where Mulronie first became friends with the Cacklebird, who drives the Famous Space Tugboat.

“Everyone knows how the books detail his eventual departing Earth, Terra, homeland, whatever you may call it, he called it many things, & how he made his way, by one means & another, into the far reaches of outer space.

“But what nobody knows is that in the year 2402, so far away from those starry skies back in that mythical year 1951, there came a sixth book about Mulronie the Space Pirate’s adventures. Nobody knows that. But I’m telling this now, confessing what I know, that there was indeed a sixth book, detailing the final adventures of Mulronie the Space Pirate, beyond what everyone knows.

“Now some learning this may get worried & say: *oh dear, did he finally perish after all those years?* No, he didn’t. He found himself a nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid—so far away from everything else, you’d think it was Kansas. But he had those later adventures before that kind of quasi-retirement he went into. It was those adventures that made the retirement possible, because he learned finally how to travel without moving, how to raise his kind of hell without lifting any of his thirteen fingers. That book does exist, I know, because I wrote it, his dear friend, his companion.

“It was a long neighborhood, on that nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid like Kansas. There were two houses, his & mine. We kept them far apart from each other, by agreement. I’d keep the manuscript of the sixth book overnight, wake up at first light, walk halfway toward his house. He’d meet me, take the manuscript, securing it under his arm, & we’d walk the rest of the way to his house, & continue our work.

“But what happened was the wind hit, & it blew hard, & he staggered, & he tumbled, & the pages blew all over the place, & there were no Woods to catch them, & there were no clouds to keep them from flying away, & *my goodness how those pages flew*, they flew all over the world, all over that nice, small, semi-habitable world. We found all the pages we could, but not nearly all of them. It would have been much longer a book. But he was ready to retire soon, & just said, *let’s do with what we have, my friend. Let the rest go.*”

I hold the letter, its several pages of burnt paper in my hand. Pirth is watching me quietly. Close my eyes & listen. The pages begin to vibrate, to *hmmm* in my hands. It feels nice. A strange music, moving in & around & among my breaths & beats.

Something, um, something, um *something*.

A story begins to tell me.

*lxiv.*

We continue our peramble through the Attic. My friend Pirth dancing ahead of me. I talk our way along, the hallway we’re in less narrow & low than some previous, red doors every so predictably often. Talk.

“Now they can say what they want, but I say that it all comes from the book I was reading. It was for a class, & it was a day late, should have read it yesterday. It’s how these things go sometimes.

“Our house was tipped in design. I climbed from one half to the other, settled into the lowest end of the couch to read, where I was least likely to just tumble on out mid-page. And on the last page of the book I’m reading, the girl was telling the boy she had a good time the other night, & it ends, & I can’t tell if a page is missing. I just don’t know. I stare at the book, & I just don’t know. Will young Mulronie leave pretty Figga after all, for the romances of outer space, that secret mission to the Moon & beyond?”

Of a sudden, Pirth stops by one of the occasional red doors, & waits for me to catch up.

Hm. OK. But no doorknob. I think. My Burning Man 2003 pendant. I lean toward the door & apply my pendant to the door’s lightly glowing surface. Glow shifts from red to a sort of off white, & clicks open.

Walk in & wonder what.

[Put the Mulronie book in my knapsack & I head off to class with Pirth in my plaid jacket pocket that, mind you, was held yesterday, but I wonder if I can say something anyway. Along the way I figure: *well, since I’m late, maybe I’ll just go in & see a movie.*

[There’s this movie theater I like, it’s down an alley, although the sign that marked it has long since been gone, so you *really* gotta know it’s there or you’ll never find it. I walk, still wondering about my book. I take Pirth out & set him to dancing before me.

[Wondering. Mulronie always packs his black & white TV with the Antennar 2000 last &, *when & only when they’re packed*, he goes.

[It’s a fairly big room. And the thing about this theater is that it doesn’t have the usual

rows upon rows of theater seats. It has an assortment of chairs, different kinds & sizes, armchairs & rocking chairs & so on, & the movie screen is small & it's over in one corner. So I pick up my favorite green armchair, lucky it's empty, & I move it as close as I can to the screen, trying not to get in the way of others who were also peering toward the screen, everybody trying to get a look. Because nobody actually charges us to get in, we try to have our manners.

[When it comes on, it's in the middle of the story, as the movies sometimes are at this theater. It seems to be a movie about a football team. The grizzled old veteran is showing the brash first round rookie how to play, how to win right. He feels he can't do it anymore, he believes he's on his way out. The fans laugh at him now, & the team usually only lets him block these days, not carry or catch the ball. His leadership in the locker room, coaching on the sideline, these are shadowed over by his big belly, grizzled jaw, slack-mouthed grin at everything.

[But I can feel the hotshot rookie's loyalty to him, the long-time loyalty of everyone else on the team to him still. No matter his lesser gleam, his diminished speed. He's their *leader*, he's their *man*. I want him to go out & play one more game, & I want him to ride out high. The movie ends suddenly before we can find out if he does. Puff of smoke, & the film on the screen burns to white.

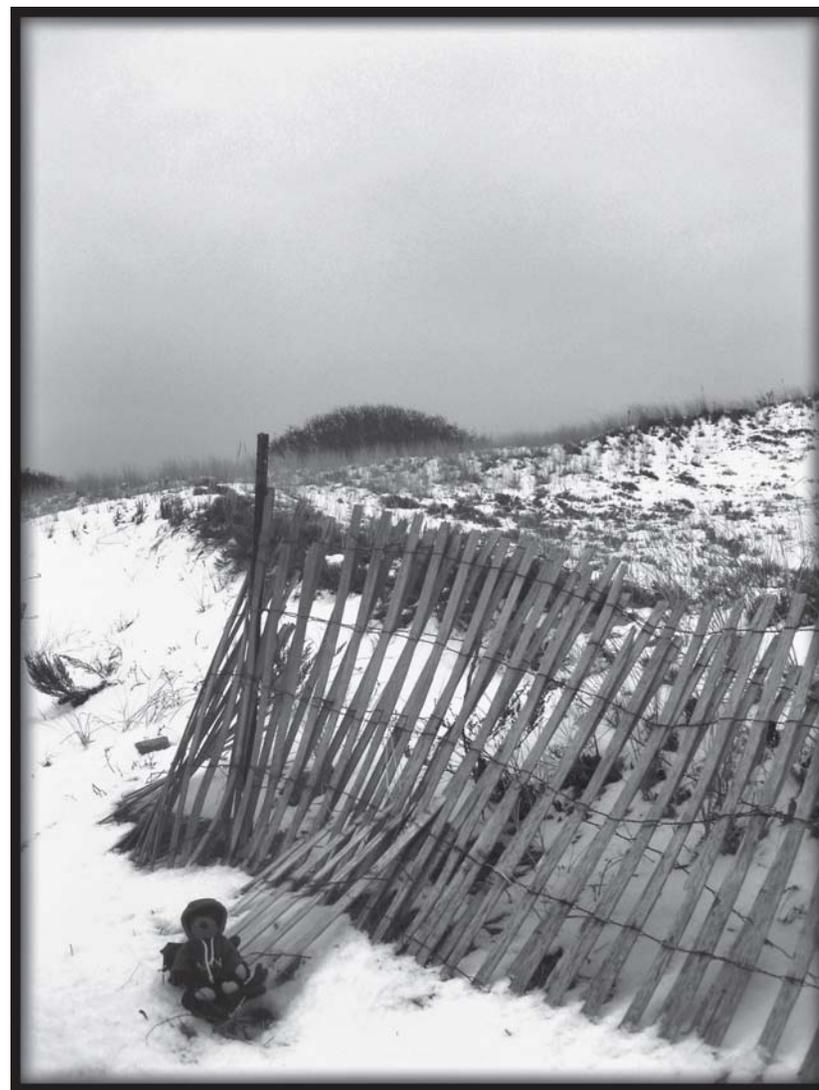
[Everybody sits around for awhile, some smoked blunts, some talked politics, some looked for M&Ms on the floor. There were always one or two. Since there were no candy concessions at this theater, you had to get what you could. A few of the skeptical hipsters who'd stuck around this long decide to venture into the murk beyond the movie screen to a Bar they say is on the other side. Don't see any of them again tonight.

[Anyway, then a short cartoon suddenly comes on, it's about 30 seconds long & it goes like this: *they discovered that what had been slowly destroying their world all these centuries were people just like them, only these people were thousands of times bigger than them, & no more knowing that they existed than these tiny people had known the big people existed. But these tiny people embarked on a great mission to bring them down, by growing bigger in time. They vowed they would grow bigger, & they would bring the big ones down, & before you could even think twice, this short cartoon was over.*

[[ Pirth & I've sat in the corner of this walls-less room during all this, him quietly on my knee, & paying attention, us both listening with ears, & the room seems to dim, as though the performance is over, as though time to leave.

[[ Did it work? Did they grow enough to defeat their enemies? I want to know.

[[ OK. I'll jump in. I pull my black pen from my pocket, & unfold *Lx* from the small cube it is in my other pocket. We set about arranging ourselves for this task. Scrounging



in the dim performance area for some pillow to lay upon, on my stomach, *Lx* now before me.

[[*Dark*, you say? *Pirth*, I answer. A pat on my nose & he begins to glow, his purple fur now a kind of lamp by which I can see this page. Does he doze, or watch me close with his dark little eyes? I can't tell. He is sitting near this notebook now, glowing, a deep thing of unique beauty, & I'll in awhile break so he can do his dancings, his way to praise the world, & pat it on its nose. But now to an answer. ]]

[[[ Deciding your people need to grow much greater than they are to defeat the strange enemy of your world & doing it means filling in the missing step. *How?*

[[[ The leader of the tiny people, the current one, they take turns, each one rules for a calendar year, from the first green of spring until the last melt of winter, but spring hasn't come in a long, long time, & the current leader is grey & bent now, he calls for the bravest souls to assemble themselves in the great hall for review & determination.

[[[ He declares the day's dawn & its dusk to be the time for this & a final decision.

[[[ Many, many appear to volunteer. Some too old, some too infirm. Some arguing for negotiation, or appeasement. Far most of them are thanked & dismissed.

[[[ Six are chosen of the dozens who appear before him. The current leader, bent near half over in his chair, nods to these six alone & then, dusk come, dismisses the rest. Is quiet for a long time regarding them.

[[[ "How?"

[[[ Silence.

[[[ "*How?*"

[[[ The tallest steps forward with a map he unrolls at the current leader's feet. Long & detailed, their world in all.

[[[ Points to a wide green swathe on one of the other 5 Islands than the one they are on. A great Woods. "There is a place few know. One passes through an ancient Gate to myriad paths within. There's a Cave deep in it. Within a Beast. We will travel there, we will ask for his help.

[[[ There is silence. The current leader wheezily breathes. Nods. Flicks his hand. *Go.*]]]

I stop. *Pirth* is awake. I nod.

He dances, slowly at first, then more elaborately, more deeply, back & forth, back & forth, back & forth, ribbons flying about him, a purple glowing poem.

*What next?* I don't know. But a nice memory or dream or wish washes over me as I watch my cool little friend dance his magick praise for all.

*lxviii.*

Houses & many trees, it's nighttime, & I'm lost. No phone to call anyone to pick me up. Then some fast figures appear, chasing, laughing wickedly, & they seem to herd me along, but they don't capture me. Then someone else they're herding along too despairs & gives in, allows capture, but then regrets it with a yowl.

But I don't. I just don't, & they herd me along, & eventually there's a green bus, & it doesn't seem to stop in this neighborhood. But I run for it, pound it at its door, pound & pound it. It slows, & I get my fingers inside the door, & I yank it open just enough to squeeze in. I climb on, & I give the driver a dirty look, like *dare me to pay you, just dare me.*

*Pirth* still in my plaid green jacket pocket, resting comfortably, & me wondering *what is this strange adventure we are on?* How & what will I report back to Flossie Flea in those far back there White Woods? Will I miss this year's Rutabega Festival & Fleastock? Is there something I should be looking for or trying to understand along these travels? I look down & *Pirth* reaches paw up to pat my nose with affection & reassurance. Creatures understand so much I don't.

The green bus rides strangely & bumpily out to the hospital, veering on purpose into a ditch at one point, the driver sitting there staring for a while, like his mind is shut off. But eventually it comes around again, & I make it home. Start to make up our bed, but it's a vast bed, & it's covered in papers that I push to one side to get the blankets better spread. They're from a manuscript I can't seem to organize into a proper book. I hate looking at these pages & feeling my failure. *Mulronie* waiting at the far end of the neighborhood, so patiently.

I pop *Pirth* out of my pocket & he hops down to the scattered manuscript pages, & his strange dancings affect them in some magickal way; they begin to dance too, like he does, back & forth, back & forth, back & forth, side to side, & they begin to organize, assemble in a way I'd not thought. Too focused on how they should be by my lights, not enough on how they should be *by their own.*

OK, then. I start singing to myself, after this hard, strange night, that old song,

*Goin' down the road, feelin' bad.*

*Goin' down the road, feelin' bad.*

*Goin' down the road, feelin' bad, feelin' bad,*

*& I don't wanna be treated this-a way.*

It's late now, & I'm thinking, *man, it'd be good to sleep.*

*lxxxvi.*

I lie down, push the papers again to one side, more of them, they seem to be accumulating again on the bed. *We lost so many, Mulronie. What do I do with the rest?*

*lxxxv.*

I woke up in the White Woods, wasn't sure how I'd gotten there. I lied there on the Woodsy floor, trying to reach back in my mind, eyes closed, breathing calm, thinking. *How did I get here? Am I injured? No. I don't feel injured. Sore? A little.*

There's a small glass jar, clear, with a brown screw cap, on the ground near me, half-filled with what looks like orange juice, & I pick it up. Half drunk? Half drunk. Weird thought: should I drink the rest? I don't yet.

Lying here on the Woodsy floor for hours on end, sleeping or whatever it is I was doing, passed out maybe? *How did I get here?* Eventually, I find myself also sinking down below the Woodsy floor where I have been lying, below what's around me, below questions about injury & feeling. Pull my glass jar along with me, & the sinking is slow enough to allow me to unscrew the cap & sip, sip again. Tis orange juice indeed. Is it electrified? I'd bet so, given all this unknowing of mine.

I find myself traveling again through a city, with others, traveling together. I don't see their faces but we're walking close together, familiarly, there's a sort of complementariness to our pace, to the way we swing our arms & move our legs. Some of us are bigger, some are smaller, some walk naturally faster, some slower, but there's a familiarity to it.

And in my plaid green jacket front pocket is my dear friend Pirth, glowing & purple furred & ribboned & bowed as ever. I bend my head down, he reaches up paw to pat my nose. At one point, we end up on a hill above the city & I'm just trying to figure it out. *What does all this mean to that me, who's lying a little bit sore on the Woodsy floor, there, over there? I can see you, over there, lying on that Woodsy floor. You can see me. Can you see me? Yes, I can see you, with those familiar people on that hill looking down on a city. How did we? I don't know. Am I the past & you're the future, or vice versa? Did I go from city to Woods or Woods to city? I'm not sure. Are we happening together at the same time, on parallel tracks? Which one of me is lying alone, deep in the White Woods, & which one of me is on this hill, sitting among these dear people whose faces I can't quite see, looking down on the city, thinking almost everything is in sight?*

I reach across my hand to you to grasp yours. Warm, familiar, a flow between that is different & the same. I lose myself in this awhile, then a purple furry paw touches too, & *abhh*, I see the Woods around me, I see the city down there below, our hands release though we each now find a Pirth nearby. *Lovely.*

*Watch him build that world, watch him puff them out from his fingertips, look at that, look at that one, it's green & blue, look at that one, it's roiling with earthquakes, look at that one, it's a million suns in one, look at that one, look at that one, look at that one.*

I nod at Pirth & he resumes dancing our way through the White Woods, merrily, are we still in the Attic as well?

*lxxxvii.*

Along & along in the White Woods & at first there seems no sign of people-folks. Their ways & things. And there's no paths, not a one, & I'm not bound for somewhere, so I'm not looking for a path. I'm not looking for anything. I look at the tree trunks, some of them smooth, some of them gnarled, branches in every direction, leaves of different colors, needles, the bushes below. Everything is almost still, there's just a bit of a wind, just a bit of something moving in addition to me.

Sipping on jar of electric orange juice, watching Pirth dance ahead of me, marveling at how in a way he is a kind of juice, & these White Woods too, in their way, & I suppose even human consciousness too.

These White Woods are peaceful. Safe? Safe. And I suppose that the unstillness here makes me feel better because if it was completely still here, & I was the only one moving, the only entity, the only thing, I'd feel like I'm troubling the stillness, but the wind, if wind is sentient, if it is, if it isn't, it assures me that no, I move, other things move. Maybe things move that I can't even see.

Pirth isn't still. Almost never still.

And human things aren't still, beat & breath, beat & breath.

And the world isn't still. Ever. *Not now. Ever.*

And I come upon, & it's shocking, I come upon a man-made thing. It's hard to figure what it is. It's a long structure, sort of dilapidated, looks like it's been assembled over the course of decades or centuries. There's rust on some of it, it looks reinforced in some places. I walk in, & it's like entering into a tunnel from that almost-stillness that I was in.

I & Pirth. I'm not an I in his company. Don't know what he is, what I am, but here we are, a *we*.

I see that many kinds of metal & wooden structures have been bolted, nailed, strapped, taped together, to form a tunnel & I wonder where it's going to bring me, if anywhere at all. And then I come to a kind of a brightly lit place, strangely colored but not

disturbing. There's curvy seats that are sort of built into the wall, & the floors are soft, & the ceiling vague, almost space-age.

Pirth doesn't come in. Not even a sniff. I guess, hope, I'll find him again when I come outside.

I find my seat along the wall. It smoothes into me, gathers me in softly & firmly. There's a fireplace nearby, wasn't there just a moment ago, but there it is & it's not been started. I find my pencil & my little notebook, & I think maybe to scribble a word or two, but then I see that my thumb's nail is split & bloody, & it's going to be hard to write anything. I don't know whether to keep on, go back, or stay awhile.

*xciv.*

I walk through the door & feel myself younger, lesser, scrawnier, eyes brighter, hungers less murky, & look around at this market-upon-spaceship.

Many aisles of food & goods, some narrow, some strangely wide enough for a car's passage. Is this intentional?

To my right, a long curvilinear corner arrayed with cash registers of varying kind. Some look space-age, some stone age. Noone there at the moment.

To my far left a kind of . . . café. Round metal tables with tops designed of various shapes of punched-out holes. Circles, diamonds, clovers. Even a kind, dare I say, imp-shaped? *Cackle cackle*. A stage too, beyond the tables.

And farthest from me, beyond the aisles of food & good, I can see the refrigerator & freezer cases, the whole far wall. A thick metal door among them.

Without looking down or speaking aloud, I think to Pirth: *That's the way to the stairs leading to the crashed spaceship*. A furry paw pats my mind's nose.

Where to start, how? Start with story, use mind's fingers to shape the clay of its words. Go slowly.

I worked in markets like these when I was younger. Easy work to get when your resume at best is a polite eager smile & a half-finished college degree.

That's why I look younger. I look like I could work here now. My ragged blue jeans, old sneakers, the black REM shirt I wear. My long unkempt hair. Eyeglasses.

O. Then I do. I do? Yes. I work here. I'm new. Do I report to someone? Well, usually there's a manager but if I'm trained, no need.

Drop off my beat up bookbag of notebooks & novels & textbooks behind the cash register counter & I step up to one.

OK. Hmm. These are old, no scanning lights or high tech credit card machines. Each one is different. Some look carved from Peruvian jungles with keyboards of unknown symbologies. Keep moving.

Here's one. Big buttons to punch in prices. A little square machine to slide through credit cards. A key next to the buttons turns the register on & off. I even luck into figuring the trick to opening the machine if needed.

Great. I'll work my shift & maybe try that cooler door later on.

People come & go. More or less ordinary people. They buy soda, cigarettes, condoms. Bread, milk, coffee. Regarding the last, I find the coffee station in a corner & re-learn the few steps to fresh coffee. Pull out the metal holder, dispose its old filter, fit in a new one. Packet of fresh coffee into it, slide back into machine, hit the water button. Drip drip drip coffee fills the pot. Make a regular one, a second, & a decaf one. Check every so often.

People are friendly, some more, some less. Some buys a package of Santa Claus's Ho! Ho! Ho! Cupcakes & so I know it's near the winter holiday season. So I wish each season's greetings, try to rustle up a smile or something. These are old moves in me. I'm not a robot doing this; they're not faceless drones processing through. It's hit & miss. Some people are nice to anyone. Some can be nudged. Some are too deep in their own darkness. Some people are just assholes.

The daylight outside wanes. A few snowflakes but not too bad. I choose to believe the Boat Wagon & its precious folks are OK.

Finally, someone comes. A girl, friendly, aswirl in layers of black, hat, jacket, sweater, boots; hair long on one side, shaved the other, but at an angle, talks fast & soft.

She knows me as Ray, the new guy, goes to the local college, reads books, writes poetry. She's taking a year off college, saving to travel. Working doubles as often as Gary the manager will let her. A little high, watching the snowflakes swirl through her rented room's window all afternoon. But ready to go. Helps time pass more interesting & skewed to be a little high. OK then.

I listen, nod, try to look smart like I go to the local college & read books. I used to do all this.

She's pretty in a strange way but I don't feel the itchy tug of attraction I used to feel always near females, still do in a way. My older self knows she's a lesbian &, even

better, she's good in her own skin.

I take a big leaping chance. "I was going to go into the cooler now."  
She nods at me, listening, & ringing up a sudden rush of customers on one of the Peruvian jungle registers. Her smile shares with all. Gets more than I did. Because she's female? Um. No. Not really. There's magick in her. Customers feel it as well as I do.

Anyway she nods, smiles, keeps working.

This is where the narrative clay is softest. Jump in? Yah.

"I want to see the spaceship buried under this store. There's something I need to fetch from it."

Pauses, turns, looks me with one green eye & one golden eye.

"Do you know your way down there?"

I shake my head.

"Go take a nap in the Boat Wagon. You had a long shift. Come back later. I'll give you a tour when things are quieter up here."

I nod, mind's mouth wide open, & follow her instructions.



\* \* \* \* \*

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NEW ENGLAND

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\* \* \* \* \*



The first revolution is when  
you change your mind  
about how you look at things,  
and see there might be  
another way

at it

have not

FIGHT  
TRUMP

to look

that you

been shown.

--Gil Scott-Heron, 1982.

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