

Things Change (Six Thresholds)

[a new fiction]

by Raymond Soulard, Jr.

“Nothing I see can be taken from me”
—Phish, “Bug,” 2000.

Part One

Something, not yet word, nor yet shine, yet beyond shadow, no longer blue fancy, i don't know, a game, this cosmos? time + play? something from somewhere, wreckage of a dream, not yet word, nor yet shine, no longer blue fancy—

She turns away. i follow the path her dark blue eyes trace, through lights & trees, through mortal noise, trackless breathless path, i follow wishing to learn, she turns back to me & smiles, I drop, am dropped, then she must catch me too, must teach me, must show me how to learn, not yet word, not yet shine, not hardly blue fancy—

Night burbles fulla details night is secret governance of all, night is scripture & confession, truth & heresy, lights fulla water, flames floating flesh, she turns away again I close my eyes & discover better how to follow, what reveals to he who does not seek—

World not revolving, no, world undulating, world mist & meat, world history & undifferentiation, world the plow & the pen, wet with desire dry with mortality, world floating careening crashing creating music world all music world is all music all music—

the flow of energy into, out of, creation, time a mischief floating nowhere, everywhere, time spun by fear, evaporated by laughter

she's tickling again it's how she tells me certain things what words? none—her touch dances & presses—fingers telling of colors she's been dreaming no formula yet for their pigment—laughter rips through kings & maps, laughter fringy with weeping like always—

Universe, we do not know thee most times, we mistake thine glimmer for thine truth, art thee grasped somewhat listening to heartbeat, falling through water? Universe, we writhe & reduce thy depths to our tears, our twinklings, our lingual writhings, we are things, we are animals, we are spirits, all in one, we pray while deaf, we are someone from somewhere, who are we? Birdnoise explains but we speed past. Dusk drips meaning midst shadows we remark the day's human traffic. Night bright & wise with revelation we angle our attentions toward blood's several yawpings, the squawk of seed the whine of nesting—

She disappears at times leaving a glint to cuff me—then off to where liberation's sexy voice leads—I leave a full plate & a neon carnation for her return—for the need, for the hunger, for the deeper reasons she always returns to me—

Returns oft-times at night, holy night, reverence to thee in wakefulness & restfulness, when together we observe what emerges, when apart what disappears—kindly night, buzzing architect of our touch lingual lovemaking—night dancing, nocturnal ecstasy, pouring & burning & hollering & arriving into dreams, the door, dreams, the open door, dreams wherein Rebecca & I are never apart bloodlight bonded—Night raging, a herd wild, grieving, unsure, lost, clues everywhere, even fancies roar with Goddly night, a bellow of

wounded Yeses, a ballad of breach-bred bitches wed ever to their numb natty corpses, build up build up easier target to curse & firebomb—

She says “I love you” & does not stir—

Night the blank paradise still dotted with glimmers of resistance, night awaiting continuous for the glaring puppets & young gems to return & better learned in the ways of he with club he with property he with leashed & muted heat—filling, emptying, everywhere a prophet, a scripture, a chunk explaining the beginning happy wiggle of first days with one explaining the end what way to float out? Buried & regretted? Released & expanding? How to depart with a greater cry than arrival’s? Never *end* stop crying from arrival to departure—

She moves near, the answer is Art, ever, the answer is Art, ever, the answer is Art—

We decide that these stories must continue, that Luna T’s Cafe must continue, that Noisy Children must continue

This world—it is ours—belongs to the extended family that foremost people it—I write down its narrative, I am husband to one of its principals, but it is no longer merely my world—I have relinquished such claim—

Anxious, irritated, closer to the source—fire explains only fire—love reveals nothing—trees provoke patience—kindness seems more important—Aldous nods, old, tired, true & good as a soul can be—there is movement—nothing changes—memories of a tin shack in the woods—

“am i there with you?”

—memories mean nothing.

Someone smiles pretty & asks me when Noisy Children is gonna bust out *Tapdancing in the Mindfields* again—says they play all of the songs but never with the narration—I shrug—“Are you like Hunter & Marshall?”—“you think I am?”—“I’m guessing—someone argued it on a website”—“oh”—“it makes sense”—“it does?”—“sure—you don’t play—you write—we figured you had some important role”—I nod—another pretty smile & gone—

Everything here remains at stake, more than ever, gone the city, the map, the road, kin only recollected with distorting buzz, no way back, no interest, travel now virtually limitless now beyond where/when, the predicaments subtler, the joys more mist than meat, fear more in the pauses & distractions, big attractive empty worlds—

Stop seeking, every sort of crazy scripture says. Wisdom from voice & star, rhythm & tree. Stop seeking. Listen. But I don’t know how to stop, don’t want to stop, have never before stopped

“It’s OK” she says “I’ll show you how” she smiles—

“Furious with existence, how to live, how to live, how to live & why?”

She looks at me blue eyes dark blue eyes cannot be explained she says “follow me in here, OK?” through a frame into a bedroom “follow me in here” she says to where things twist fall, curve, tricks, there is too much meaning then there is none, the floor perpetually giving way, the doors & windows do not help “what do we do now, Reb?” she says “follow me” & we crawl into one of the frames on the wall, watch from the other side the collapse

imminent “follow me” & into empty poppy fields absent of the human I we share a bouquet of dreams become naked become play become easy even beyond the subtlest hustles of rhythm & breathing “follow me” she disappears like the most revealing music does into the endless fields of glowing wheatstacks she nods I smile we agree there is a corpsey blue man playing guitar without shaking the air without jiggling a bone wild music sourced in no mortal nor any kind of singular personality yes she nods I smile we agree six windows approach from the distance, a choice or a wealth “follow me” I say, our blood heaved with blue music “follow me” she replies

There are more windows, this was but the first, there will be more windows, thresholds, each with a communication, a lesson, a yawp here we are, here we go—

& I will do the writing with humble pen you painted for me & you will do the painting with the bright brush my words handed thee

here we are always

here we return

supersonic wheatstacks

we, accolates, masters

another marriage inside

another collaboration

hands twined leading each other to the farthest wheatstack, the deepest, glory, fecund, glory, potency, yes this is the one

one of us nods th’other agrees—& wheatstack becomes window as my pen her brush render it true one of its several moments anyway, wheatstack in snowy field, lightful grey sky, trees & farmhouses in the distance, becomes a window where we pause for a time, cusp of further gain, seeming always partnered with equal amount of loss, true if measurements were valid, now a tumble in, release, acquire, tumble on in—

“Call it Reality” I say in gesture to the most prominent wheatstack, Reb nods as tho she already knows, her hand sketching blurringly I follow more slowly taking in what we have here, the grey skies, the thick air betokening coming or departing storm, the other stacks present & how my eyes cannot quite group them all together, each is alone tho all of them will eventually become food or rot, still the one I began with is now called Reality uniquely among them, & Reb’s fleet hand is producing an image of it foremost among them all.

Rebecca sketches nearer & nearer to Reality, seems to wish to climb within it, I watch as she does enter it but it seems like the wheatstack makes room for her she does not disappear within it but made way for, her sketch deepens, develops an impossible multi-dimensionality about it she & Reality grok deeply in this moment of making I find myself drawn into Reality too so connected am I with Rebecca that Reality must have me too—I am still standing without the stack & I sense Reb is too while I feel us traversing deep within it—deeper than physically possible for it or either of us—toward what end tho?

Toward the wheatstack field within, through another frame, the air warmer, the sunset not a bitter old winter light, & our corporeal selves, such as they are, arrive after us, & here we are, deeper & deeper, lapping at possible meaning with black pen, with sketchpad, Reality stands again before us, alone in this dreaming, again, no matter the trees in the distance, the farmhouse, the other wheatstacks, thawing & dreaming, neither remembrance nor regret, no expectation, no words of any kind, seeking release? Final cessation to all suffering & music? Are we thusly arriving at meaning at last? Rebecca is sketching with both

hands now, her picture now has kinetic depth, she turns & smiles at me & I sense we must enter her picture now, faith again leading corporeality, Reality now gains a communicative music, drifts & swirls & follows us within the picture of itself, calls for more color, wilder music, the beginnings of a new freedom, thinking not in cycles nor maya but to reinvent the world you must begin everywhere & nowhere—“Yes” Rebecca nods & I agree—

Within, without, both, neither, without sinking to fall, to fall, & know nothing once more, happily, her & her crayons, me & my football, her smearing jelly, me secret joy beneath a willow, her Dorothy, me Dorothy too, it seems to be our root, seems, perhaps there is deeper, no doubt perhaps, within’s within, within’s without, even deeper we share love of that which lies in ruin behind a gate & a sign & a padlock, Rebecca nods, we leave Reality behind, the truth of Reality is no-truth, we hold hands, my left her right, I write, she sketches, we leave Reality with poems & pictures hung to its strews, leave neither entering nor passing on, the music is everywhere, one moves from note to note, no lines all curves, without’s within, within’s without, all flows, all matters, nothing is lost—

Nothing is lost, nothing is unimportant, all feeds all, everything ends, & a beat, & everything begins again, Rebecca is tired. We sit somewhere. There is cheese & bread & clear water.

She curls in my lap, I feed her in tiny chunks, she chews slowly, kissing hard my cheeks after each piece is gone. She rests more easily, quietly, sleeps trusting in my arms. Fears not a thing.

From dream to my embrace she hums notes, searching, playing, scratching. To play one true note, to offer it from within’s within like a new kind of kiss, one that stays does not dry unto death, the kiss burbling sunshine beneath this life’s nightly bed or rubble, just once, & so she seeks, twists in my arms, I watch her mouth intently, will the kiss blossom there, no, this kiss emanates with chakra-truth from many places, all connected now one, is kiss spasm supernova, & I watch her & barely cohere to scribble:

“What burns in you is beauty.
Beauty burns in all creation.
Here you are, first & last flower
of the world, there you’ll go,
joining other dreamers in those
hills, there you’ll be, now fully
a dream:

Beyond knowing’s fruitless toil.”

She enters more deeply in dream, beyond knowing & dream now, seeking to come at me from the other side of the circle, adding rhythm to paradox, calling it love, yes, calling it love, & calling me now too, down into her dream, “follow me” she says, & I no longer heed the borders between our bodies, I draw her sleeping hand to my black pen, we jack in, conduit of fire, yes, nothing is everything is nothing is everything is—

We believe in everything.

We believe in nothing.

Simply put: Love. Hope. Music.

Nothing. Then Everything.

All alone. All suffering. *Bullshit.*

No walls to breach. Breach doubt.
 All that is, flows. All flows.
 We believe in everything. Always.
 We believe in nothing. Fiercely.

Pen still moving but who moves it?
 Do I? Rebecca? Do we? Do you?
 What are the powers undaunted
 by obvious illusion of existence?
 Who walks bravely on floors of light?
 Who dares think a carnal thought?
 Who challenges nothing with a hard
 wink & a quip?

Who says “Fuck this all I need
 a goddamned drink”?

Who? The vicious glare but count their boxes like old women their frail lace—the powerful
 preen in numbers & bullets but fear empty gardens—

She giggles & growls & pulls me close says “there is no answer,” I remove her sunshine
 yellow frock & think “there is sadness & morning light,” she unbuttons us, unclasps, unfurls,
 the need to mount, to have, the need to receive, to contain, I say “There is no meaning” &
 together we ignore the morning light as it accumulates until it no longer exists—

A new day deep in the world’s woods, morning crawls into the sky, flesh & feather breathe,
 branch & antennae, stalk & limb quiver, the dreaming music spires out, then a beat, then
 stillness again, the woods slept, cupped in Rebecca’s two hands as she rests lightly in my lap,
 we are now in a window again, choice again it seems, so it seems, so it ever seems,

now several hours earlier, deep in the world’s waters, no belief as ever in sky & land, fear of
 light, perhaps of change too. Nothing is named or divided. Nothing loves. No loss, no burst,
 no bloom. Rebecca casts seeking, defining blue eyes about & there is a somewhat attraction
 here & a somewhat repulsion there, there is settling, there is ascendance, she sets fire, many
 things burn,

the weaker hours now, time where bullets & beauty clutch & claw, for capitulating cry,
 crosses & cunts, savage combatants, high above the world shimmer & cloud, the silence of
 paradise, of perfect undulation, we wield pen & brush, compel wild movement, the cave-
 born upset of the creating hand, caress, make, hurry, still . . . fuck . . . kill . . . comfort . . .
 create & create & create, night upon midnight, down in the heart of the world, all was well,
 all was calm, change, decay, growth, illusion, beauty, the pyre was ready. Tonight’s
 resurrection will be spectacular. A thousand, ten thousand, ten ten thousand dancing bodies,
 pressing heat to its own outermost ambitions, sparks shaped like hearts tumble toward the
 stars, Rebecca presses deeper within, panting, laughing, does not still for waving machines, I
 follow her as she blurs, as she becomes breathing & no more, trail her as vapor til my drops
 are swallowed & spit too, behind us perhaps a line of followers, learning to know nothing
 better & better, come grab your heart-shaped spark, hurry, follow her, follow her way, follow

til it is futile & funny & you find yourself lost & alone & with a memory & a wish you fashion a road, or the idea of a path, & follow noone & never did, wake up, fool!

Laughter in my ears, eyes now open, awake? Well, maybe. Reb smiling all over my face & pulling me up no obvious relation where we are & where we were, I look around keeping clutch of Rebecca's hand but all is mist, there are things but no words for them so what can they be?

A thing not word, a word not thing, the universe hardens with a burning ambivalence I look at – who is – & – me & so I feel –

Music Power Fecundity Time annihilates light annihilates mystery annihilates that which strays too rhythmically til buried in flesh & words. We curl puppy amongst each other—

There is no answer. Tho I wish & hope & rage, tho he ten ten thousand years ago & she ten thousand years ago & they a thousand years ago also wished & hoped & raged, there is no answer—

yet here on these pages she will ever remain immaculate & young. Cutting air with blood, cheeks soft pink pursue gain gesture moisten still—there is no answer—

“Find the trees. Nuzzle the wind.”

“Learn how to accept. How to nod.”

Disappear along the path home & how often the wish, the hope, the disappointed rage when a reason dissuades. Now riled I tug at my muse's hand & we continue on, back, wherever—

I lead Rebecca for the longest time, hurry, slow, we go at my velocity, she lays her will with me, there is no resentment, I must go, I must bring her, no gain or loss in this

Cease. Fuck-ass stop. Nowhere. Here we are.

A cave because I say so. Rocky womb with blankets & pillows. I go this far then am unable to continue. Rebecca makes our nest quietly, calmly. Paints a soft glow into the air, flickerless candlelight, more flow, my arms command her no hesitation she comes

One cannot embrace & keep tho I try this—I hug her until she can't breathe & she smiles wickedly at me. “don't break your muse, Ray” whispered bonelessly, but I jump

“Is't possible? Can I break you, harm you, betray you, lose you, what then?”

Rebecca does not renew our embrace, she draws us down beneath our covers, holds our eyes, mine hers same eyes now adjusts us hands legs eyes

I push her hair from her face holding her eyes our hands atwist our legs squeezing

I pull back she chases

“Don't let go of me no matter how hard I run Don't let go of me Rebecca”

“You're not running you're here it's OK let go release”

The fury of existence. Call it all illusion watch it slice you burn you break you kill you keep you

Happiness no limits Rebecca nods & bites my shoulder so I will feel how wildly she does exist happiness breaks & mends she pushes me on my bed & I know to receive not offer she sprawls over me gripping my shoulders digging hard her mouth on my mouth tongue pressing in feels me still thinking & presses one of her feet into my groin, hard caresses I begin to lose thought, no more thought, thought is for aspiring species, becoming now bloody-backed angels becoming more than tell or explain blood merging anew depthless agony to release let it all the fuck go

liquify, flow, yowl with all so many years restrained, all is water, learn this, all is water, all flows, beyond water,

my darling, my wife, my mate, my muse inhale exhale inhale exhale

first everything, then nothing, is clear

“Another”

“You sure?”

“Another, please” taps glass on bartop

“Hold on, bud”

“Another *now*”

Americus steps over. “It’s OK, Chuck.” Takes bottle from his friend’s hand, fills glass, leaves bottle on bartop.

“Thanks”

“No sweat”

“I didn’t mean no offense to your man here”

“None taken, friend”

“It’s hard, this time of year”

“It’s *always* hard”

“Yah” kills drink. After a moment, pours himself another “That’s our problem. Always fucking hard”

Americus taps his heart. All three nod.

“You’re kind. I appreciate that. I ain’t no regular here. I’ll pay for the bottle, I promise”

Americus shakes his head. “No. We don’t do that here. What you don’t finish take with you. Chuck will bag it.”

“Why? Why me?”

“Who the fuck knows? We all end up asking that”

“No I mean the free bottle. All this attention. I’m nobody. And I’m kind of rude when I drink”

“Sometimes you gotta say fuck it.”

He nods. “I’d do the same for you. I would. But you don’t want money.” Sips. Sad.

The old man rears up just then. Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker who spends his dwindling days & nights at the bar of Luna T’s Cafe drinking black coffee dosed with Kentucky bourbon, smacks his cane down hard on the counter announcing his imminent set of observations.

“Tonight could be the night of revelation & extinction! Quiz not the motives of Doom’s sudden alarms! Wonder not at the first flares of apocalyptic news!

“Do not query the mute flora & fauna, testing & tapping the damnable limits of their aid & advice! The fields are empty of all save sinners fleeing, futile stratagems!

“What lacks here at the end amongst our fugitive numbers is a softness, a mercy, tenderness.” His voice drops. He stands, shaky, but does not fall. Raising a sweeping finger round the dim tavern he continues barely audible. **“Tenderness does not reside among our mortal numbers any longer. The wanton & wicked bear now texts for eluding demise, theses built from the iniquities of modern science & contemporary lordlessness that claim unbesmirched souls now habitate this fallen world!”** Breaking off from this caterwaul suddenly, Knickerbocker agilely makes for the tavern’s lone window & runs his cane straight through it letting in a rush of wind & snow

“Feel that, unredeemed dwellers within these tavern walls! Feel the coldness from without match with the permanent clime within thine souls!”

Mr. Bob the barman makes toward Knickerbocker but Americus shakes his head. The stranger with his bottle sips hard & shakily. “Call the cops! He’s crazy!” No reply to this.

Rebecca appears to take Dr. Knickerbocker in hand, lead him to the manager’s office’s couch in back. He is weeping & raging now, but diminishing. **“No tenderness, child. No tenderness”** he repeats as he is led easily to his rest. No tenderness. None. Fuck it one & all.

I’ve been waiting to love you all my life, nights & rages, bags of flows, ignorance diminishing, words flagrant & lawless in the face of truth, I sleep with you in my arms & dream of sleeping with you in my arms, no truth, no tenderness, nothing

“Stop” Americus says he & Mr. Bob ready for what I might try or do

“I’m chill”

“No you’re not”

“No I’m not”

She sits down next to me & thus Rich & Mr. Bob depart no concerns now.

“Are you OK?”

“Yes, Ma.”

She giggles. “Are we here or not?”

“Dunno.”

“For awhile maybe?”

I nod.

“I’m glad.”

I take her hand, study its slender fingers. To my mouth & I suck each finger slowly. She tastes like flying, I think, helpless for a better word.

This world is fat with miracles & woe, fat, with fire, with pain, with chocolate, with maze, with crowds around an empty water bowl, with stumpy lords rich with echoes & corralled power.

Tastes like flying. I lick her palm & she wiggles.

“We’re freaks, Bekah”

She smiles & nods. "I think so too."

"Freaks" I say again.

"It's not bad, Ray."

"No. Just is."

"And?"

I shrug. "Dunno."

Rebecca stands up. "OK. Let's go."

"Where?"

She smiles. Takes my hand & we leave.

The freaks will never own the world. I keep thinking this without prompt. A praise for all of us. A warning too, I think.

Cease, release, stop seeking to know, my wife nods, now all of 20, she looks slyly at me for my news, & I refuse her none of it, unable to, she nods, smiles, laughter ever floats, ever renews, I nod too, how fool to fight this happiness, she tastes like flying, what more clue is needed?

"A full moon, dancing shadows, fire all night" I say. She nods. Knows the story. "I've learned how to keep dying since, to have the chance to return or not."

"And you do. Um, return I mean."

"Yes." Nothing is what it seems. Stay still. Let the fuck go. So seems the advice that dapples my mind at its clearest. "I'm glad you do," she says.

Stops. Faces me. "I'll find you. If you don't return I will find you wherever you go." She is beyond sprig. Fierce. Steady.

I nod. Hope. Despair. This is what love is like. We walk on.

"Bekah."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to write a book"

She stops again. Mouth opens & closes.

"I mean inside this story."

She's still looking at me dumb.

"You could make illustrations for it if you like."

She blinks.

"I'm going to call it *Why?*"

I take her shoulders, & shake them. "What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"It's like those paintings you see that contain other paintings in them."

She nods. Thinking. "What will it be about?"

"About a man who makes butterflies from fire."

She brightens. I chuckle. Reb is a sucker for an idea like that.

"& you said I can illustrate it?"

I nod.

"What else is in it? Did you write any of it down yet?"

"I'm not sure. It's still mushy in my head. Except for the man who makes butterflies from fire."

We walk on.

"So you like?"

"Sure."

Into the Season of Lights, up the many steps & on in, & at the entrance, upon bare touch of the first tribe of a million we huddle close & our mouths touch & our tongues mate & my small yellow vial drenches these same tongues with the Elixir of Knowing, the Water of Logos, good goddlian drops of LSD-25, ten? fifteen? twenty? I squeeze til the vial is emptied 'pon our tongues & she tastes like flying & now I do too & we become flying, become that which dreams advise me night after night, we become flying, a gull, an oak, a weed, glowing pair of eyes, into the lights, spreading in & about the lights, becoming the light, the one light that in all light we fold forward into cosmic undifferentiation & backward into the deepest reaches of wizard time when all was not known & named, when universes played in groups & reinvented each other & reinvented themselves & still do see now see here time a field of wildly blooming weeds nay a grunting track by a warm pond's edge—

Vision rises, colors & bells, the lights multiply to tree, the trees shimmer like bells, we lead each other through forest of reverberations to the cement clock tower, four-sided, tall silent ridged finger, here we settle back into flesh & time, agree again to the pretty illusion, remind each other not to forget life is but a dream, life is but a dream life is but a dream

Sitting together on a grey cement bench, Rebecca looks at me steadily, waiting, perfectly patient, she knows this is how it is with us, what we must do, & she flows with this nearly always, wife, sister, mother, enemy, student, teacher

mate in joy & grief
 funky bitch, carnal friend
 love made of blood & mud
 teacher with teeth
 mother with hunger
 sister with glee
 enemy til the spasm
 mate in joy & grief

I hug her & we moan healing into each other, exchange knowing heat

“I know less & less, Rebecca,” I manage to say after the longest while.

“Good” she nods & hugs unto me.

“Is there a story here anymore, Rebecca? I just don't know”
 She looks nods at me. “This story is what you are within all the stupid bustling of your world.”

I laugh but then see she isn't joking. “Sometimes I think I'm losing to the bustling.”

“Sometimes you are.”

“I don't know how to stop.”

“But you do.”

Silence.

I do. Through Art to jack into the other, bigger places. Serve the greater sum, always, as it ranges musically between one & infinity

“What do I let go, Rebecca? Or who?”

“Not who. Not what. More like, um, when.”
Silence.

The psychedelic sacrament takes deeper effect as Rebecca & I begin to merge with each other, with landscape, with these words as I write them down it is not joining of this & that so much each temporary autonomy giving way its border—it’s hilarious in a way—that society is constructed on the false belief that these borders are real & constitute a valid way of assessing & denoting order—

we laugh the same laugh neither mine nor hers not even ours really as it no more belongs to us than we to ourselves—but we laugh on daring anyone to happen along & argue

& would it matter I don’t think so because no borders are everywhere & once this is one’s chief thought so much foolishness is simply abandoned—

Falling into these words & finding them wet, finding their depth that of an ocean, into these words, Rebecca’s hand mine hers as we fall into these words & are able to see through them from the other side, looking back up where they float before continuing deeper within them & past them swimming toward a place unknown, plummeting & thinking “Six thresholds what can such a phrase mean? & what does *Things Change?* mean for that matter here we are I am he/she pressing effortlessly through pages & what can we be coming to nowhere somewhere anywhere everywhere ah a light perhaps an answer perhaps—

A moment expands impossibly & there is a slower flow, seems like clarity, resembles clarity, I look at Rebecca who is present again to be seen & she smiles that peyote & cherry vanilla smile at me

shiver, tumble, lean forward, let go, smile too, all is free,
smile, all is free

“How are you, Reb?”

“I’m good. This trip isn’t scary yet so far”

I nod. “I feel like we can do anything right now but what?”

She leans into me and finds my hands & her warmth lights me up. “You never stop, do you? Not ever?”

“I guess not. Too little time. Too many bastards.”

She squeezes me hard as she can. Muse, mate, goddess. Much more.

“I want to go further, Rebecca. Faster, harder, bigger, wider”

“I know. You’re always like that.”

“You’re used to it?”

“I guess. It’s your way. You don’t mind my ways. I think you’re easier than me.”

“I’m easier?”

She sits up, nods. I laugh, don’t know what she means, decide I don’t care.

The extended moment of clarity begins to swirl around us & the lights taste strange & the air ripples & I manage to say “here we go Reb again!” before we disappear slowly slowly then quickly—

What remains a holy emptiness, the persistence of mold, still hungering for her crevice of treasure, secret burning city of bliss, invisible forest, happy fleshfulness—

I have only these words to retain you. Symbiosis. Silliness. Flow. Music. Endurance.

I've lost you again midst this cosmic foolery, but have learned to keep your touch by recalling your nude wiggle round our Sunday morning bedroom opening the curtains & sketching my beard, your writhing as my body forms a circuit with yours, fingers within maidenhair, lips upon nipple, fingers tribed fingers, lips pon earlobe, fingers kneading fleshbone—

Today is always the day to believe in everything for no damned good reason. To begin. To continue. To deepen.

A ring of echoes round the universe. A glance that began a thousand centuries ago. Mirrors of fire before time began to contrive its noose. The lost explanation of flight without wings. A book called *Why?* I compose most nights in my dreams.

Merging with my muse, becoming mate to my mate, the swishing sound deep inside solid things, the great secret emptiness powering all animation & existence, the push & grind to whir up color & sound, become mate, become muse, become that which one truly is, Aldous gone 38 years ago talking too of kindness, of the revolution most truly manifested in kiss, in touch, in listening for one clear moment to anyone or anything, the mad whir becomes world, & some moment's gap between why & what, thus loss, thus the twins called strangely Nothing & Everything help Rebecca stop me—

“It's OK”

“I can't stop. I won't ever. Not ever. Not til they drop me down.”

“It's OK. It's OK.” She holds me quietly, bravely, my face muffled against her chest & hair. Hours & years have passed. The TV is on.

“I bought that used in '85 I think. It was used even then. Older than you, wifeness.”

She giggles. “Watch it for a minute or two.”

I then realize more clearly we are actually in Rebecca's bedroom in her & her father's home at 50 Harvest Street near downtown Hartford. The TV's glass screen wavers for a long time abstractly then Rebecca holds my head still & it coalesces.

The man in feathers on TV is a preacher, he raises his arms to signal the chorale's commence & cease, his voice I cannot make out more like noisy rising falling ocean waves at first so I watch his feathers shake & glitter, & fall off a few at a time—

Rebecca disappears completely. My face is shaking again but I think maybe she's gone to greet the preacher on the TV as she greets Dr. Knickerbocker at Luna T's Cafe—

She's said something tho that I struggle to recall. Butter . . . pecan?

“Ice cream!” she says with a tot's grin. She moves me around in the bed as I gape at her—seeing my face she hugs me fiercely—no words—fiercely—

hands me a spoon & settles the paper tub between us—sighing & giggling again, she reminds me about spoons & eating & ice cream—I nod solemnly & she laughs ridiculously—

“Ray!”

“OK—I'm alright”

The ice cream provides balance somehow & I begin to depend on it, eating it slowly in small bites—I look at Rebecca amazed tho I can't say why—there she is—

“Don’t abandon me” I say as quietly & steadily as I can—she looks at me calmly. “Never.”

I begin to calm. OK. Alright. Something settled then.

I look back toward the TV & the picture is a closeup of the feathered preacherman’s grim, wild face, his eyes blue flames, his skin growling with glow—fuck if he isn’t looking hard at me—

“Go ahead, Son. Give her bouquets of ecstasy & annihilation. See how long she stays. Do you call it Love? Do you call your union a marriage?”

I try to turn & see Bekah’s face, see if she could possibly be watching this too—

“Turn not to thine bride. Face me! Question not the verity of my appearance before thee! These words scrawl your heart every single moment!”

I can’t even blink.

“Have you yet chosen whether to survive or perish along the way home? Thou canst do both!”

His feathers glitter like pulsing little beings, his chorus, his fucking pack—

“Thee art known o surely yes. Thy words have scurried & travelled the land. You rile & rile & rile that which is with thine demands—thou bearest fearsome pen at times wildly wielded—the often scattered & by choice obscure powers thou holdeth probe & prey as much as soothe & praise—thee art a danger whose fate in the long view has not yet been adjudged. Words. Wounds. Laughter. Lawlessness. These are thine prominent themes.”

I twist away to see Rebecca & she is watching me—calmly—a breath from smiling—I don’t know what to say to her—impossible to sort out the actual from the possible from the illusory here—

She looks more thoroughly at me & breaks into action. The TV is immediately extinguished. She vanishes the ice cream, moves about in our bed until I am leaned back easefully, off goes the light, & I feel a light sheet cover our feet & thighs. She curls along me & I can feel that she is nude save panties. I wonder what I am wearing. I wonder why it matters.

She says nothing for a long time. She lets the room’s riled air settle. Her hand rests still on my chest. I feel her warmth all along me, waiting but patient.

“Thank you” I finally croak pathetically. She raises up & leans a kiss to my cheek.

I move a bit & she deduces to cover us more & to crawl into the cradled embrace my arms can’t quite offer.

To play one true note, evolving into higher music, into a presence neither wishing nor resisting. To play one true note & watch you dance, cyclone, fury, a mind, several, many, all, watch you top me where I lie, splayed & spun, playing one true note, evolving, hardly keeping up with you, you slow, & wait, wanting to evolve with me however much longer this will take, tonight, my love, I continue to approach you, crawling branch to branch, scribbling moonbeam to beam, approaching you as I am able, you have slowed to wait—

“It’s OK, Ray”

“What?”

“I’m not, um, losing anything”

“You could go faster”

“But why would I want to? What good would it be?”

I nod. She’s right. I’d wait for her too—no doubt—

To have come this far is to have twined many roots together, to have shifted between you & me, him & her, us, them & other ways of denoting countless times—

To have come this far urges the going on—urges hope no matter the clouds—hope—yes—hope—yes—hope—yes—

So we lay atwist beneath our sheet & the day approaches infinitely slow—the radio comes on—piano music—sad & slow unfolding into spritely wild—I think a thousand things a minute but come back to the hope of making Art, its perpetual open door—as my thoughts cohere a wrapping finger at a time around this theme I pull my wife in deeper, closer embrace, open up to her in new, willing ways—

“I want to leap into you, right now, Rebecca, I want to know what is unfamiliar behind your blue eyes. How to do this, my love?”

I watch her beautiful face intently in the cohering dawn light—she ponders knowing I wait—

The apartment is very quiet—Rich’s & Franny’s bedroom is several doors down & not a noise from it—Harvest Street is peaceful this early—my mind is still riddles composing riddles but less so—I’ve laid most of my attention clearly pon my wife—

“I think we need to go to Luna T’s more often like we used to—& we need to do our art together & on our own”

I nod, listening, waiting—

She smiles & taps my nose with her finger—“Are you really going to write a book called *Why?* about a man who makes butterflies from fire?”

I nod smiling.

“& I can illustrate it?”

“Yes, Rebbly.”

She rolls over on me suddenly & squirms to sitting atop my stomach. Still humming with thought. “Will I make the pictures after it’s done or as it goes along?”

“As it goes along would be more fun, wouldn’t it?”

She leans forward to kiss me then remains resting against my face & chest. I rest my arms around her & we are quiet for a long time—the dawn manifests like a third person in our room—

“You’re right about going back to Luna T’s—we’ve kind of lost touch?” She hugs me closer.

“I miss it there, Ray, don’t you?”

“I miss the intensity. Not knowing what’s next.”

She raises & pulls me with her. “We’ll go today then. We’ll show up when Mr. Bob & Mr. Knickerbocker do. They’ll like that.”

“Aren’t you tired? We’ve been up all night tripping!”

“Do you want to sleep for awhile?” Her look is concerned but devilish. “I can go in the living room & draw.”

I’m tempted to say a number of things involving twined bodies in heat but refrain. “Yes, Rebbly, your old man needs sleep.” Saying it aloud brings on hard all the exhaustion I’d been ignoring for hours. Rebecca covers me, then lays atop the covers over me, enjoying us, finally she kisses me slowly & deeply & departs or I assume she does for her kiss propels me into a psychedelic dream state. With my eyes closed I watch Rebecca leave the room closing the door behind but then I watch the room depart too either it floats away or I do because soon I’m undulating in a milky grey soup shot through by lightning bolts—

I wish I could retrieve Rebecca to me but then decide that she wouldn't like this & so it's just as well she's safe—wherever she is—slowly I realize I'm no longer in bed & seem to have some locomotive ability—transit occurs I discover through a combination of movement & thought—the sensation of traveling is signaled through an intense tingling which amplifies through my being the more rapidly I propel—since the milky grey soup is everywhere & formless & the lightning bolts don't really help, I am both physically and emotionally grateful for the tingling—

but what is this place if anything at all & where to travel in it if it contains anywhere other than this?

In dreaming one is more led than leading so I try to give over my tendency to general & let the dream take me where bound—

I accelerate til the tingling in my body is a moderate pace—for a long time nothing happens & I begin to doubt my plan—

Then I begin to doubt the idea of doubt itself & thankfully start to laugh—& as I do, the grey recedes a moment & I am able to gauge that I am really moving pretty quickly—I try to think of something else to laugh at which proves hilarious in itself & the grey soup clears up even more—

I arrive in the Americus family living room, now grounded, walking around, & there is Rebecca sitting in her father's beat old green armchair by the front window—she looks up suddenly in my direction, does all but sniff the air, but then returns to her pencils & artpad, legs curled beneath her, devotion, concentration—

I am dreaming, then—or tripping a visual narrative—um, something—moving closer, I cannot make out the details of her picture—all I can see is the same shifting grey goop I'd just been traveling in—so I haven't left it nor it me—a warning, or maybe just a hint—

OK—so why here? All that travel to arrive a room away from where my blanketed body lies? What is here?

Well the room is familiar but unmoving—no interest really in grokking it closer—Rebecca, then?

Err—study her the better without her awareness of me? Well—

What I see is more real to me than most everything in my own world—& this thought is both strange & plainly true—I don't know how it has come to be so—I suppose it was long ago that now began—creation after creation til one day I'm floating in a dream in a story near a character once my own now my wife—

Her energy is curled around her pad is feeding back & forth with it so I lay thinly along her drawing arm to feel its shifts & quivers—its pauses—its hurryings—I begin to feel that whatever kind of energy comprises me right now is also feeling into this art—making—perhaps Rebecca's thoughts are of me—there are subtleties here I cannot deduce—

I pour into her drawing hand—the fierce moments of its flourishes—then the slow dwindling frequency of strokes as she seems to be finishing—I can feel her focus dissipate & its subjects multiply—

Retreating back up her arm & undulating toward her face—learning, trying to learn—

disembodied to better understand embodiment it seems—spreading across her face, clumping near her freckles, her eyes, her mouth

looking into her dark blue eyes as they do not return my look so perhaps to learn them better—or not—for they seem at the moment less engaged, a kind of psychic dimness after Art? after loving?

seeing her this way is not knowing her better—to reveal, confess, share is an act, is a privilege, not a voyeur's toy for it is not me seeing her in white panties alone that means anything—it is *me* seeing *her*, the luscious moment we share, the feelings bathing us—

so I begin to dwindle back toward my body & bed wondering had there been any point to this—

“Of course!” she says, leaning over me provocatively & kissing me wetly midst my surprise—cherry vanilla & peyote—mm mm—always

“Are you finally awake?” she demands. We wrap in our sheet & I'm pleased she's naked as me—

“Time to carry further along this fixation, eh?” I smirk—

She nods half winking half serious—

“You're best when you do” she says fondly—

Yes—we are—OK—here goes—

“Stand! Up! Now! Pull me up! Now scamper & get dressed before my lewd thoughts assemble & riot! & yours too! Good! Fine! Cover it all up! Hey! Not that much! OK—better—fine—need a little treat for waking up! hehe—”

It's hardly 8 which amazes me but several clocks round the apartment all agree—Luna T's unofficially opens at 10 when Mr. Bob the barman arrives, shortly followed by Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker—

I dress in black—black t-shirt with curvy blue Phish logo on its chest—black corduroy jeans—Reb called this my delicious poet outfit—hehe—

Rebecca dresses for me plain truth—tight blue jeans, bubblegum pink t-shirt, tie-dye vest, old blue sneakers, a single-braid nestled amongst the long brown hair running down her back—she brings her artbag & her sweetest smile—

I think to myself: what my own world has cheated me of, or what I've cheated myself of, at least so far, this fictive world has provided—amply—

A walk from Harvest Street to Reckoning Road could take, has taken, minutes, hours, days—but not this time—the day is somewhat sun, kind of warm, but more anonymous than takes to lure me from our destination—so we arrive early—

Once through the barroom entrance, door locked behind us, a moment of ambiguous intent—

“Mr. Bob will know we're here” I say “or someone anyway. He can read raised dust”

Bek nods, smiles.
 “What do you want to do, Reb?”
 Her smile wickeds but she shrugs—

We sit on our stools far end of the bar—I ask her to draw, tell her I’d like to watch if she doesn’t mind—she doesn’t—opens her artbag, pulls out her sketchpad, fusses a bit before ready—

She uses a pen I gave her—black ink medium point expresso—same kind I use to write—it’s funny to see this familiar-looking pen in her slim fingers making no word but picture—moving easefully about the page even as my pen nearly always moves left to right—top to bottom—Rebecca’s fluidity—her visual music—I watch for the longest time not the paper but the pen, & then look for moments at her face—blue eyes humming, mouth a-smile like always—facial muscles neither tensed nor relaxed—in this moment Rebecca is home, native to this making—poised, kinetic—a perfect skein of notes—calliope—levitation—

Slowly she is rendering a Luna T’s the like of which doesn’t usually appear in these pages, a place of smoke & beer puddles, of worn wooden floor & perforated black rubber ceiling, a place of passing years as well as moments, of strangers who arrive once or twice & depart their news untold—

the time passes without audience as Rebecca draws & I watch—she seems near finish when her last detail clarifies itself—the door to the barroom opening to admit a figure—

“Rebecca! Raymond!” says Mr. Bob as I tumble from my stool & Rebecca laughs tribes of giggles—

Mr. Bob the barman, Charles Robert to strangers, closes the door behind himself grinning front & back of his head—Rebecca is over & hugging him in a flick—he shakes my hand smiling an embrace for me as well—

I sit quietly & still, waiting, hoping a scene will coalesce—this no longer my world per se, but as I’ve said one that belongs to others too—so I wait & pay attention & hope—um—that *something catches*—

& it seems to—Beckah & Mr. Bob know what to do—know I’m waiting—know that this isn’t how fiction goes—usually—or used to anyway—

to collaborate w/one’s fictional characters—one’s family, one’s friends—to open one’s hands to this—risk, foolishness, I don’t know—

The radio is switched on to an oldies rock station, musical news circa 1964 to 1976. *The Hartford Courant* is unfolded on the bartop, the sports section firstly extracted. A pot of coffee heats up. A glass quart bottle of milk. Several letters are handed to Reb, no doubt from the thick bunch the rest of which Mr. Bob handled invisibly. Rebecca is manager of Luna T’s Cafe but none urge reminder on her unless imperative. Her father is the owner but months at a time with his signature unsought.

“They hate thinking of this place as something managed or owned” Mr. Bob told me one afternoon, “So I spread out the mail on my kitchen table & tend to most of it without

them.” Laughing he says, “Usually on Sunday afternoons, my day off! I keep a ballgame on the radio for company when I can.”

Rebecca peeks over at me scribbling away, smiles. Her husband. Always. She knows I prefer her best creating Art or in my arms but she tends to Luna T’s faithfully.

“My dad needs me to do it,” she told me. “Mr. Bob helps a lot but my dad needs to feel my presence when he comes in. So I do the little things only I would know to do. Change his guitar strings on the ones he uses only specially. Um, put up poetry I like or newspaper stories. He likes finding little things I’ve put up just for him, & not knowing if I did it today or months ago.” She smiles. *Her* father. Always.

Awhile later tho she catches my look & knows it to be of a terribly different kind.

She’s with me invisibly fast. With me, wordless. Waiting. She knows.

“I want you to draw something for me.”

“Of course. Um, now?”

“Yes. We have to begin.”

“Begin?”

I nod.

She’s got her sketchpad out & pencil. She’s waiting. She’ll be my instrument in this, as all things, when needed.

The door opens then & a force enters, expands impossibly, contracts slightly.

I frown.

But, yes, he’s part of it too.

“Saloon-keeper though the very day without these tavern doors betokens a wordless grace, an endless cup of redemptive light for all, he or even she alike, who but dip their sinscorched fingers in it, yet doth I observe thine punctual attendance to thine duties as smiling aid-de-camp in the slow but perpetual demise of this establishment’s dwindling numbers! Some choose damnation, Saloon-Keeper! Heed these clear & simple words well! Some would choose damnation every single time tho the cownibbling Hindoos & jihad-aroused Muslims by the millions paint across the skies pictures & pools & seductive cosmos of alternatives!

“There is for some no choice but damnation, no sane agreement to this life’s prolonged & incoherent duration but a sound thrashing frenzied blackness at its conclusion!

“Doth thee think Our Lord truly resideth in images of lambs & bunnies traipsing a summer’s day?

“Nay, Saloon-Keeper! I roar at thine deafness! Our lord resideth most truly in moments of unutterable pain! Our lord is revealed most plainly in his undiminished & unpretty

magnitude by the manner in which womankind is ripped apart to perpetuate this unjustifiable & perplexing species! Pried open by her husband's first visitation for the seed he shall plant that will gouge from her nine months thence any daisy remnants of girlhood as she presents him with the son that shall add anew to her burthen on this earth!

"Our lord manifests in the shredded thighs of womanhood, in the steaming guts of the battlefield, in the way earth is rendered & sky greyed for plunder & profit!

"Our lord manifests in nightmares & barrenness, in cruelty to the weak & disease in the strong—"

"In swift, Saloon-Keeper, I pronounce upon all the blasted & dirty makings of this befouled planet the pleased markings of the Lord about us, willing to accept our prayers without comment, happy to note unremarking the atrocities we commit in his service, eager to employ our race in its continuous self-gutting *in the name of our Lord!* The chalice of redemptive light without this tavern's sinpocked doors whall not be afear'd for going empty too soon!"

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker slowly wildly enters Luna T's Cafe sometimes aided sometimes impeded by his cane, sometimes that wooden instrument more employed in the giving of his harsh lesson to the nearly empty tavern environs.

My wife swoops over to Dr. Knickerbocker like he is beloved Uncle Arnie & has just recounted his morning grokking with the park pigeons.

"I'd like to dose his coffee just once" she says to me sometimes with the same dark blue-eyed glint.

Knickerbocker forgets Rebecca is 20, has forgotten this for 11 years running as she has aged but he hasn't noticed.

"My bones weary, child" he says sadly. **"I fear I shall not see thee marry & mother"**

"I did marry, Mister Knickerbocker! To Ray, remember? You performed our marriage!"

"He is truly a dubious one, child, to get thee with baby. He's a runner, worries about the rust pursuing him, worries about other chasers too—"

"He makes me happy"

"Happiness holds no real place in this world. Learn this hard lesson well. Note the spring blossoms, how they float by thy face, near, nearer, then away. Mark this image well, it contains much useful if soul-crushing truth"

"Mister Knickerbocker, do you like, um, our lord?"

He looks exceedingly old now, & fearsomely silent. **"We cannot redeem Our Lord's grand creation until we have crushed Our Lord Himself in our**

fists & then lived so long beyond this fateful moment that even its longest-lived recordings have themselves long ceased to bear a print anywhere”

“Oh” Rebecca then hugs the old fuck like he deserves it or something which, I suppose, he does in a way.

Nonetheless I tire of waiting for my matemusewife to finish her attentions to him.

Mr. Bob sidles up to me with a large glass of orange juice & a smirk. “He’s what my young niece Audrey would call a ‘rock star.’”

I nod. He is.

I sip. Wait. Mull. Rebecca’s time with the old preacher matters as much as anything, more than most.

Mr. Bob settles on a stool with sports section of newspaper, laying the paper on the bartop near me. Not too near in case my notebook comes out. But near. Kindred-near.

The barman & the preacher as much family to me as the wife-artist—I find no great surprise in thinking this—the thicker & vaster the web of one’s family the stronger for times of peril, times of upheaval—surely Knickerbocker had nothing the day he first walked in here years ago—older now yet very much more alive—his sermons have become battle cries despite their oft-repeated theme of nihilism & door—

watching him hold hands with Rebecca & speak quietly with her as he will not with any other & I realize he *does* know she’s 20, & dearly wishes to see her a mother—I know without confirmation, & am not wholly sure but it makes sense—

The extended hug he now receives is my signal that her ministrations are done—she returns to me afloat, sharing love for her a thousand sunrises of delight—

She waits. Rebecca is good at that.

“You just know, don’t you?”

She drinks her milk large glass from Mr. Bob thank you for calming the old preacher down for the moment.

Nods.

“I want this book called *Why?* to begin with a picture.”

“OK. What of?”

“A tree. A hand. Your face.”

“Mine?”

“Yes.”

“OK. Anymore?”

“A door. A star. A pen shaped like a lyre.”

She smiles. She knows.

“And I will write out of this picture.”

“And then?”

“And Noisy Children will play out of my writing.”

“Oh!” Pleased.

“They don’t know. Yet.”

“Are you going to tell them?”

“Maybe.”

“Can I start?”

“Don’t need a prompt or a match, huh?”

“Never!”

“Rebecca what will we call our daughters?”

“Eurydice. & Rebecca, you said.”

“No?”

Shakes head. “Only one me, Ray.” Blue eyes stones of fire.

“One daughter then? Eurydice?”

She smiles & starts drawing. “Just pose.”

“Me?”

She takes my face in her hands. “Ray, reflect me. Do it. I want to see you seeing me, OK?” I nod.

She uses two pens, always strange to watch her draw with both hands. Like a piano player.

OK then. A tree. A hand. My face. A door. A star. A pen shaped like a lyre. A picture that leads to words that leads to music. That lead—maybe—to a new picture? Maybe. He doesn’t think that way about Art.

He’s one of us in ways he does not really know, yet, as we never leave him he never leaves us, symbiosis he calls it sometimes thinking these thoughts bullshit, sometimes not.

A tree. I think about trees I’ve known, a lot of them, & trees I see in my dreams, some only once, some over & over, some are Artists like me & Ray tho I’m not sure if trees think of Art as we do, the little ones like it, & some of the really old ones do too, or maybe start liking it again, but there is a time in between where none of them care for it. All of them tolerate me & maybe some like me—they watch me, anyway, & especially when I sit near them & do my art while dreaming—

I let my two hands dance, one to the dream-tree I’ve known a long time, old, silent, impossibly big, I don’t know what kind, maybe beyond all that in a way, the other hand to a pair of striplings near where Ray lives in his other world, these two talk & laugh like kids but they are also wise, wise like it’s easy, like it’s a game, & a tree emerges on my page, a leafless tree with a squat trunk solid, gnarled from which blurrier & blurrier branches emerge, becoming rays of light received from the skyful of stars, & returned as branches of this tree, then I consider the next image, hand, & so draw a simple frame around tree & sky & place this framed picture wholly on the right thumb of a hand crouched into making picture, I’ve had to attach more paper to my first as this picture grows too large even for Luna T’s long & wide oaken bartop—

The hand is a body crouched holding its bloodstick I deepen its wrinkles making it an old old hand, not mine nor Ray’s nor my dad’s, older than Mr. Knickerbocker’s, old as that old silent tree old & oblivious of the picture, scrawled upon its thumb base, a hand lost to all memory & thought & activity but making, hard, constant making the final step few Artists take into a realm of pure creation, where love hate death none above or below each other, where there is nothing but creation & decay & creation anew, a hand into a realm where I will not go yet, nor Ray, nor my father, all invited, all tempted, but all of us still here aware of this greater realm, world, dimension, reality but none ready yet, none of us ready yet—

Using more paper, picture now spread on the floor of Luna T’s bandroom, tables & chairs pushed aside, I see that the hand is reaching through a door, a door strangely alive, furred, nearly trembling, a door warm, blood-warm, nerve-sensitive, the hand reaching through an event in its life, maybe its greatest event, maybe its birth or death, but probably not, probably not sexual either, more of a lesson, a great painful lesson, one yearned for,

feared, the doorway is entirely filled with this moment, wisdom & pain, laughter & release, & then I wonder about the next image, a star, perhaps it is easy enough to have the other side of the living learning doorway reveal a star from which the hand emerges but I think that easy is not really the point here, a book called *Why?* & Ray insisting on its multiple makers & many results so I mull & stand & grunt & return to the bar where Mr. Knickerbocker is standing up, shaking, waving his cane around, saying

**“We bleed & we suffer & we loathe! We pace & we ponder
& we groan! We know, we confuse, we hunger! We flee! We
flail! We fall!**

**“We give years of our attention to the wiggle of the fair,
associate wisdom with a remarkable set of curled eyelashes,
ponder curve, mull whisper, loop upon loop ourselves in
provocative curiosity over a set of ruffled skirts!**

**“We expect of our Lord an answer, a clue, a test with an
outcome we may hold like a bluebird dead in our hands from a
solid stone & a true eye! We bulge with anger over the
inexplicable! We feel shards of answer in the summer’s heat,
the night’s breeze, the cathedral’s hum, the painting’s glint, the
cougar’s shuffle, the locomotive’s thrust, the coffin’s silence!**

**“I say now to every present sinner in this befouled
establishment, be ye here resident or transient: the answer is
atwist with afternoon sunlight every day of thine bedeviled
lives! The answer rests on snowflakes tumbling into the
emptiest & remotest arroyo ye dare not even dream of, the
answer tumbles with the emperor’s sliced head into the basket
lined with black lace! The answer rests quietly upon the closed
eyelids during the moment between the conclusion of thine
uttered prayer & the resumption of thine shattered course!**

**“Hunger, ye devils one & all! Hunger! Hunger! Shriek
clutching coins & talismans, the end will wholly gobble ye
every one to the last!”**

He looks at me quietly watching him & his cane does not slam the bartop as it usually does at the end of a speech. He gets back on his stool with help from my dad. He keeps looking at me. Then he faces the bar & takes his coffee cup up to sip.

He comes over to me & we hug immediately & life remembers colors I’d forgotten!
Our hug goes on & on.

“I love you, Daddy.”

“And you, Beautiful.”

“Um, Dad?”

“Sí, chica?”

“I need your help with my picture. It’s kind of out of order but I don’t think Ray would mind.”

“You need me playing?”

I nod, trying not to look about 8 years old. But I can tell by his Rebbly-you-break-my-heart look that I do.

They’re both so much older than me, Ray & my dad. 37 & 41. I’m 20! But I’ve been drawing since I was 4 or maybe earlier so maybe that means something.

It’s not easy saying what here. Realizing what I was a part of just hit me hard all at once. It’s not like being Ray’s muse or making art for Noisy Children’s albums.

“Would you mind, Daddy?”

I think he’s going to piggyback me back to the band room but—no—he wouldn’t right now—& he’d think he was right not to—which he is—but isn’t—

Suddenly I want Franny around very badly—

He takes my hand. “Take care of the Doctor, Chuck.” Mr. Bob smiles & nods.

The star becomes my dad, easily, no seams, no eureka. He sits on the stage’s edge & starts strumming—I hear phrases of songs by the Beatles, Noisy Children, Phish, Jimi Hendrix—& I am drawing him into my picture he is the star, music, light, Art—the old hand holding the pen radiates through the live door from starshine & its partner—hand on the shine’s other side is strumming a pen shaped like a lyre I keep adding little details here & there—my dad is sitting at his—our—little table beneath the front window but facing me—playing eyes closed—he’d seen my picture in a glance while sitting down that was enough—his playing floats—clusters of notes like blackberries on a bush—like a flock of pigeons scared up from under a bridge, flaring, exploding into the sky

& I wonder if it’s enough—I’m usually so confident about my work it scares me to doubt—

I begin to deepen my picture to trace in half-formed images—shapes that trail into meaningless—& I begin to listen more synchronously—is that a word?—to my dad’s playing—adjust to his shifting rhythms—feel how his guitar & my pen & pencil are, um, singing to each other, then singing with each other—my instruments scratching out a frenzied music his guitar twists with til it’s not the picture or the notes per se but the taps, scratches, strums, til there is harmony,

& there is a panicked search for crayons & a hurried softening & crumbling of them, my fingers easing & shoving them into the picture & I go for oils just little bombs, dabs I add rarely but thick & wet, & a bit of watercolor which I always use when I can & my dad plays on & on & is joined by Jim Reality for awhile maybe others time is gone my hands are smudged & filthy with color if I’m going to do this there will be no doubts left swinging ghoulishly in my picture’s face—

Rebecca returns to the bar face shining with stars of ecstasy, smudged, face & hands, the familiar look of the Artist both sated by fierce work & hungry, wonderfully, unreasonably hungry for more—

Her kiss is a bite & her sequel wink a raw estimation of my person—I nod—we walk plainly entwined to her manager’s office in the rear of Luna T’s Cafe—

“She’s gonna get her some”—wet, hot laughter—

“He followed the tried & true adage”

“What’s that?”

“If you can’t find a good woman, grow one”—guffaws like falling shingles—harsher cries for liquor & beer—

I’d looked at Jim Reality earlier—whilst my wife-muse was in the other room warring—& smiled watching him hold his glass of gin like an aroused breast he planned shortly to consume—

“Things change” I said quietly. The bar was still fairly empty, its population scattered about the city, chewing up the workday’s waning minutes fast as they could—

Jim sipped, becoming a gin-human hybrid life-form for a couple of minutes—I waited—

“Things change?” I asked.

“Which?” he replied.

I bit off a few ounces of ice-water & said “You told me things change. I thought about it. I agree but I don’t.”

Mr. Bob settled near us quiet as a shadow. Listening.

Jim took another lustful sip & his glass nearly moaned with happy lover’s glee.

“‘Things change,’ you said. ‘Things change?’ I reply.”

Jim nodded, his blue eyes floating peacefully. He swayed nearly invisibly to Americus’s guitar from the other room.

“Which?” I said.

“Yes” he said, turning to me clear-eyed & fully present.

“Both?”

“Yes.”

“Both.”

Jim finished his drink & stood up slowly. Smiled at Mr. Bob smile barmen play hard & years for. Looked at me. “Time to play.” He picked up his guitar, invited me along with his kinetic eyes, I declined with a headshake, & he was through heavy swinging door to Luna T’s bandroom.

Mr. Bob fetched me a fresh full glass of ice water. Patted my hand as I reached for it, with nay a word.

Rebecca calmed some once we were alone in her office, cuddled on the couch, Traffic’s *John Barleycorn Must Die* LP on stereo’s old turntable.

She was entirely within my arms, hands twined mine, head resting against my chest.

“How are you?” she asked cautiously. Quietly.

“Better, Rebby” I said & kissed her head.

“No, tell me.”

“Hopeful.”

“OK.” This she believed.

“Sometimes pleased.”

She twisted so that her face was upturned to mine & I bombed her lips with kisses. Each one finished with her saying “Mmmmmmm” liquidly. Satisfied, for the moment, she snuggled again against me.

Americus loaded his wife Franny onto the back of his motorcycle & roared into the twilight—she’d been down south with her brothers Michael & Stevie—he’d done some good thinking in her absence & decided he had somewhere to show her when she returned. Told her earlier that day to take a taxi home from Bradley Airport, toss her bags inside their

door at 50 Harvest Street, take a nap, a shower, put on an outfit cute & tight but still comfortable & come over to T's & meet him—all of which she'd done save the nap—too excited to see him again—

Things change. Things change? Yes. Both. This the first threshold, where begun now left, where begun lost. Lost? Both yes.

Months have passed, ambiguously, not a rule of language or narrative which isn't vulnerable to a sneer, to a snub.

Rebecca strokes me suggestively, more than suggestively. Her fingers touch with leer & love. My hands rest inside her panties now, which she'd shed at a flick muchless a nod, but right now enjoying the feel of her pussy, its curves & heat, its pleased welcome of a curious finger

“Fuck me, Ray” she moans.

“I fuck you day & night, wife” I snicker.

Her lips clench my finger tightly. “Fuck me now” she growls. Her hand has escaped mine & marauded through my belt, jeans & boxers to finger me aroused but not hard, this hard caresses, squeezes, teases with purpose & ease til I am raw—

“Fuck me, Ray” her pussy lips & fingers squeezing my finger & cock first alternately then in unison—

“Hungry girl” I croak.

“Very. For you. Now.”

I twist my hand a trifle that a second finger may enter her. She moans.

“Fuck me” she orders.

“Fuck you, girly?”

She raises my free hand to her mouth & begins to bite its fingers one at a time. Bite, suck, mmmmmm. Bite, suck, mmmmmm—

Americus & Franny ride into night into southern Connecticut, eventually into hills, roads less & less travelled, both helmeted, Americus's a tie-dyed design, Franny's a mock of the Confederate flag that once flew over her native Georgia, this one not stars & stripes but peace symbols, marijuana pipes & rock guitars—

Eventually to roads not really roads, paths, traces of paths—

An old building high in anonymous hills, deep in unpeopled woods—

Unpainted, looking abandoned, a sign so decrepit one would not know to look for it—

STARLIGHT LOUNGE – DANCING & COCKTAILS NIGHTLY

Americus parks in front in the beautifully tall weeds, waits for Franny to dismount, then gets off himself. Parks.

They stand in darkness hardly offset by the lounge's spectral glow.

They kiss spontaneously.

“How are the boys?”

“Crazy hicks like always. They wanna know when next my Yankee husband is going to ride his bride down to Dixie & renew his drinking lessons at the feet of the masters.”

They both laugh.

“In awhile, I guess. We’re needed up here. All of us.”

She squeezes him thoroughly. “I’m glad to be back.”

They walk up the rickety steps, Americus practically carrying Franny to protect her from fall, Franny smiling memories of moonshine shacks she’d known in her adolescence.

Rebecca nude laid out on the couch full length on her belly. My fingers, sometimes one, sometimes several, slide along the smooth heat of her neck, back, & buttocks. Her eyes are closed as she feasts on my touch.

I move from the floor to the edge of the couch & she shifts to leave me space. My hands cohere into massaging agents, finding her places of tension & pressure & releasing them one at a time. Her sighs escape gratefully.

“You did wonderful work today, Beckah.”

“I did?” she turns to look at me. Her face ravenous.

I nod. “We’ve begun. We’re along the path now. Things change. Things change? Yes. Both.”

She turns away, lies back, shifts her shoulders by way of suggestion to my fingers.

The Starlight Lounge contains unending midnight, perhaps after midnight, shapes & shadows cohere after a time as one adjusts to them.

Rich leads Franny to his usual table. Makes his way without err to the glass-doored refrigerator in the rear of the place. A shelf labelled “Salinger, Jerome David” & “Salinger’s Muse,” the second of these two labels clearly newer, contains Dos Equis beers for her & Harp lagers for him, & several pints of Poland Spring water for him as well, just in case. He fetches a Dos Equis &, after a moment’s thought, a Harp, & returns to their table.

“Ree-chard, my goodd friend! Youu hahv ree-turned!” cries the pleased voice of the impossible fat owner McFarland.

“I brought my wife, Franny” Americus says, raising his bottle first to him then to her.

He stands in waves & stages & removes his hat bowing low & smoothly, a wonderfully seamless gesture.

Franny smiles big & raises her bottle to him.

My fingers slowly massage themselves between her round, tight asscheeks, descending within & within. She gasps softly when the tips begin to stroke her anus. I stroke harder to her moans.

“You like, girly” I whisper wetly.

She nods, weak with raised heat.

One fingertip enters her & her body shakes like mildly electrocuted. The finger stills, then begins to probe deeper inside. Her moan resumes, louder & steady.

My left hand doing this work, my right hand is free & lands near her mouth. She greedily snaps for it & catches it.

As my left hand does its work, she bites my right hand with greater & lesser approval.

Eventually my fingers withdraw & seek her pussy lips again this time to inflame & explode.

“Things change. Things change? Yes. Both,” I say quietly.

“Fuck me now!” She cries. I nod.

“So this is your bride,” says the woman, Miranda, a set of curved shadows.

“Franny” the girl names herself.

The shadows nod. “Good hips. Bright eyes. A keeper, Richard.”

Franny laughs, loudly, merrily, for a long time, & the Starlight Lounge is invaded & cleaned up for awhile by a powerful blonde light, a fierce living force it has not known in decades.

“Eggseelentt!” cries old fat McFarland. “Eggseelentt!”

I enter her swiftly then pull out slowly, thrust hard, then retreat slowly, again, & again, fucking harder, then slower, fighting rhythm’s temptation, harder, harder, slower, slower, harder! slower, harder! harder! slower

We climax within a second of each other, climax hard then ride lengthily the blind path back, moaning, laughing, kissing, better now, for awhile, o so much better!

Things change. Things change? Both. Yes.

Threshold reached, first one, where begun gone, nowhere & nowhen.

Joy fires wildly through me today, tonight, mind & belly fulla mystery & delight

All is groove, all is flow, sensation, cessation, sensation, cessation

The pages happily fill, the night tumbles in like the tide, these hours passed finely, goodly, days, weeks, months, weeks, days, hours,

& something, nearly word, nearly shine, beyond blue fancy, a game, this cosmos, time + play, something from somewhere, reinvention of a dream, becoming word, beginning to shine,

yes, to hunger & fire & joy, to sunshine young & moonlight wizardly, to tents set up high in clear-aired mountains, morning puffing pipes, & midnight again—

To howls in arroyos, young seekers, hungry beyond words & numbers—

To groove, flow, evanescence, return. Things change. Things change? Yes. Both. Begin. Always.

Part Two

Morning. Resurrection. The least thought matters. Morning. Desire. Slim lashes of flame.

Possibilities.

A stream of mirrors where colors bounce playful, savage, outlaws in shift & movement, two break into five, five into a hundred, two, a few, shifting, moving, things change, things, things change, change, change—

& night trips into today, unfractured by light, unsanctioned in this wild free run, night frail & fabulous, the least thought matters, the pen scratches, buzzing the paper, marauding, etching it forever, scarring its blankness, with truth, with choice, with magick, with gleam, one hand holds another, touch bloods now with furious life—

a note diminishing always, a rock, a flame, no time—

She looks at me & smiles. Hands me a peach-colored crayon

“Try” she says

“Me?”

“Yes”

“If you wear the pink gown & red bonnet”

“And you wear the blue suit & yellow hat?”

I nod.

I take her hand, palm-side up, & trace a diminishing circle from palm’s edge to its center. Tickled, she giggles.

The least thought matters, a ton & a feather, the gown & the suit dancing, the morning & night, the vase of poppies, spring in the loins, summer in the belly, winter in one’s dreams, autumn in one’s heart—

Next threshold, what it might be, heavy glass tank, water filled but depths unrevealing, black glass, black water, a shrug each for what when why.

What may come, I kiss her lips. She is stay, she is grounding, direction & fresh air, I kiss her lips for these things & their many kin.

I hand her back her crayon & she nods; keeps the thick swirl on her palm tho; later carefully incorporates its wax substance into a new picture.

What may come, we sit here tonight, close, clear, bells, high, sit together while most people & events pass us unminding, each gurgling with the cream of self-obsession throat-high—we sit here & what passes perhaps touches too, down in the roots, down in the dreams.

Down in the dreams, into the crackling in the murk, laughter green fruit hanging from trees & electrical poles, down in the dreams, where none mind the myth of You & I, You & I, down in the dreams, the raging ragged colors, spinning freaks, fires everywhere, the night unending, the night crowned with full-moon & low wet stars

Rebecca, stay mine forever—stay mine no matter how far I go—

Art the understanding between us, love the shine, I want to tell her of so many rotten moments, rudeness in a shove, indifference in a crowd, loneliness dwelt in a brick box, but no, what reality have these things? Passing, at most—I want to tell her she’s miracle, & more than this—

mostly to sit hands twined—spit toward years scrawny, years gone—neither does the future mean much—a carrot, someone’s gold-face clock slowing down—

just now—shine & understanding—a story making its obscure way along—

closer, Rebecca, closer, closer to me in the deeper ways—beyond machine & incentive, beyond even touch—beyond shine & understanding—beyond the knowable or possible—

she returns to our bedroom wearing my black t-shirt in blue swiggly letters says Phish & pink panties I’ve stroked many times—

with mind chocolate chip ice cream & a smirk—

I put down my pen but she shakes her head, rolls into my lap & feeds me while I continue writing these words til her caresses slow then awhile stop me—

Richard James Americus sits in the other bedroom at 50 Harvest Street, strumming softly, his wife Franny listening even as she lightly dreams—

His thoughts of his band, of the months passed since he released them back to their separate lives for a break, a sabbatical, & how they all left Hartford, save drummer Cecile Grey, who lives at the local YMCA, but how none seemed eager to go—

“I have a feeling we’ll have a lot to do together again soon. I’ll call, I promise” was the whole of his explanation.

Franny’s sleep deepens & her soft smile evens out. She’d liked the Starlight Lounge, & McFarland will surely never forget the moment she insisted on the dancing the place’s sign promised—she’d danced with both Rich & McFarland & he’d shown himself a nimble gigantus of a man—Miranda had demurred Rich’s offer but said “maybe next time” with a smile—

“Is that place real, Rich?”

“I don’t know. Real enough.”

He strums, poking around new sounds & old, listening, sniffing along, & always the wiggly sense of his bandmates—Grey, Pascale, Tormé, Black—& the pressing shimmer of his heroes—Lennon, Townshend, Hendrix, Clapton—& the shifting bloom of his blood-loves—Rebecca, Franny, Reality, Robert—& the scratching tickle of his mysteries—Soulard, Mickey, Knickerbocker, Time—& a swirl high & low of other faces & places

Strumming—the hustle for a new song’s hook or groove—shape the noise—thicken, push, chase, release—

Far more yes than no in recent years—not a man without fight in him, far from it, but rather a turning sense of what’s worth engaging—

his music still the magick, all the devils & the angels, what to heed, what to hurry toward—

himself 41 years old, his wife now 26, his daughter 21, her husband 37, his bandmates further along in their 40s, his cafe's barman a walk from 60, Knickerbocker near 70 or past, Jim Reality near 50—

he senses other old friends will be back around too—Ricky Jensen, X the Space Alien—David Time?—Frere Gregory?—Guy Lemond?

Noisy Children's records are still in print, even on LP, & the band has a following among fans of what lately are called jambands—

Grey talks to the cyberspace fan club kid with the peace sign earring & the excellent homegrown mushrooms—not a tripper very often, the drummer drinks the kid down, lacing his tall tales with the occasional truth or glimmer of one—

“Was Luna T a real person?”

“Nah. Just a figment.”

“Rich made her up?”

“He didn't have to. She came with the place. He inherited her.”

“Then who hired you in 1980 as Luna T's house band?”

“A man named Dr. Jimmy. Smoked rock & watched cartoons.”

“‘Dr. Jimmy’ is a Who song! C'mon!”

“Never knew the shagger's real name. He came & went early on.”

& so on. Rich usually just listens, sips, nods. The kid is scared of him. Grey says Americus fucking **hates** fucking computers.

“Does he like mushrooms? I've got some Amanita—”

Grey taps his empty mug with a frown. The kid desists. Mr. Bob the barman draws two fresh ones.

Americus now plays more purposefully, feeling chords coalesce—& strands of lyric near—Franny is dreaming his music now—she often does—& eventually he notices her smile & purple eyes among his notes—

The endless fecundity of the blue-eyed red-haired specter dancing midst fowl & tree within his being—she pulses—All that is, pulses—Yet she pulses singular—why?—much unknown—

& the blonde woman on the bed pulses—pulses, growls, licks, & roars—giggles, gropes—sighs—his blonde mate—his woman, as much as words can unsheath & tell of matters of light & flow—his mate, now, always—the always of humans, hardly a small bird feeder of years—but their much larger wonderment toward the beyond—hunger to be beyond being—to touch & know what calls always—

the tune is strange—he grasps enough to keep for when he can play it for Pascale—longhaired obscure guitar godd—Ronnie will listen, eyes closed, perhaps ganja pipe in hand—listen, touch, probe—& begin to receive—& eventually his acoustic will come out—

always, always Ronnie Pascale launches work on a new song with acoustic, not electric—
builds from precision to supernova, craft to flash—

& eventually the rest will come in—each mysteriously but surely—Gretta Black’s bass
seeking to cement housing to foundation—her bass fumbling into harmony with Grey’s
drums—each listening to the other—asking questions with strings & sticks—answering in
kind—

& Stephanie Tormé’s keyboards—rarer flowers, wild; country maidens, barelegged,
tumbling, arising; towering spiritual edifices of no known human religion—teaching the song
what it needs—

Americus & his words at some point too—no method, no way, just magick, just danger—

til a shine becomes a song—a strum blooms furiously—new, fuckmiraclenew—each & every
time—

“how does the band come up with great new songs even after all of these years?” Grey is
bluntly asked in a Noisy Children cyberspace chatroom interview.

“how the fuck do I know???” he replies.

Something from the past careens on yet—shimmer—bright & desert-deep—old wounds,
old ways—chiding energy, whipping hunger—dead streetlamps, empty roads—the hard fluid
of awareness & regret—shadows under starlight, silent desert shrines swept clean—damning
greedy nihilistic, a jittering fool, sunk hard into a cave called Creation—but always crawling
out—always sinking—but always crawling out—hope not in the particulars but in the fact of
existence

there—look—there! the She-moment of first light—few catch it every day but most at least
once—thickening at the breach into new day—look! seeping, slurring, sky tickled then
stroked then smiled ‘pon & taken—look!

To write from confusion as much as clarity, both cloud & lark, composing creature
of dismay, cock-bearing freak, shadows & blips of girl energy, anima animus, & beyond,
climbing, crawling, careen & crawl—

To love like a heartbeat, expand, contract, hurry, slow, wonder & certainty, to live
without understanding, without destiny, love a fading light, love a desert fullmoon, love a
feather, love a ton—to love fun-nutty & fierce-fat—

To struggle, to push, to flap, to trick & plead—not an answer but made of powder—
not a truth but damp & hungry—not a mob but peppered with doubts—not a lord beyond a
cutting giggle—

She looks at me, having stopped my hand, raised my face to hers. Smiling but wifely
concerned.

“I’m OK, Reb”

“Sure?”

Nod.

“OK”

“Thank you.”
Nod.

To write in the language of dust, swirl & flow & perseverance, in the language of water, mist & matter, the language of night, growl & hunger & power—

someone advised someone that the next step is to double back—find where the poison began its hustle, & then before, resume a different way, this was in a book, I sit here tonight doubting it, on a train, a mild night, a slightly sheered full moon—joy is flaring now, always has been—sweet & few the days even mud-ugly & shit-nothing—
umm—

Music permeates, music eludes—she sits quietly in half-light listening to soft music—I sleep in our bed nearby but watching her—there are moments like these intense isolated obvious but unconfessing:

clues to distinct puzzles, helpless

rocks shaped by missing watery
fingers, I don’t know

Neither slowing nor hurrying will help,
blessings

Things change reveal both the answers & their questions, things change, the gurus kept & those discarded, things change things with wings names with flames odds & godds though still a hand reaches & may not see reward, the plane may crash, the lover may return.

The art which eludes the clutching man. The truth which eludes the clutching race. The hands which wish to open, wish to learn how, release to night, to claws of want, what keeps coming round sounds like truth, or begins to—

“Cecile, where does he get his ideas?”
“Where else? Pussy. That’s the only idea anyone’s ever had that still counts.”
“Grey, that’s beautiful. I shed me a tear.”
“What? Americus made it for an interview?”
“You’re right. It’s all about shag. Always has been.”
“This kid wants depth & meaning. Beyond shag.”
“Nothing beyond shag. Pointless to look”
“Americus has a good one too—but he could have a dozen good ones if he liked”
“One muse at a time, Grey. Just one.”
“If I was tall as an oak & sang lead in a band I’d have a ring of girlies; one for every mood, every season, one for if I wanted two, or three. One for—”
“You’re drooling, Grey. Wipe up.”
“Yessh mass’r!”

Rebecca bumps into me, purposefully to steal my attention back, hardly difficult at all—

“The power is raised again tonight”
 “Yes”
 “Fierce & running, perpetual, a ton, a blaze”
 “Yes”
 “Draw. Paint. Rebecca.”
 “I am.”
 “Now?”
 “Yes.”
 “Oh. I don’t know.”
 “I’m strumming it, making it buzz & hiss.”
 “Oh!”
 “The kind which does not slow or end”
 “Yes”
 “*That* kind”
 “That kind”

Power shaped & strummed, power summoned, a velocity, a fugue, eyes with the dance of lit gems, stroking til savage, suck her, save her, kiss her, keep her.

“See what I mean? Pussy! Where all the great ideas come from—I know what I’m saying!”

Rebecca nods, continues to draw.

“There! Yr ol lady agrees!”

“We all agree, Cecile”

I stop. Relent, a little. “Holy & tattered world, both”

“What else to do but rock out, eh?” sneers Grey. He’s right. Guitar, thighs, acceleration.
Rock out.

Begin in the mystery of what is, what isn’t, what was, scirrocco & silhouette, canyon & cougar

“Bollocks” growls Grey “Just bollocks”

“A problem, Grey?”

“This is no novel or book! What is it?”

“Long—getting longer”

“Hippy shit—that’s all”

“I suppose so”

“And it’s never going back to what it was”

“Nay, Grey”

His tough blue eyes roam me—“Are you so sure that writing books for a living is so bad? Writing books that people read?”

“I tried too long ago for it to matter—it’s better this way—”

“Is it?”

“Yes. There’s no pressure. No performance to be judged. No money expected. No critics.”

“You’re not man enough to face a few boo-birds?”

“I’m not interested in boo-birds or yayy-birds even.”

“What then?”

“I don’t know.”

“How can you not know? Notebooks & more & you don’t know why?”

“No. Grey. I don’t.”

He quiets.

Rebecca hooks my attention again, smile, love, Art. Yes! Yes.

“Something more” I mumble to her neck, in her hair.

“Yes” she breathes.

“I don’t know what—not now—maybe I did—maybe I will again” my kisses more lavish, Rebecca enjoys, is silent—

“Do I have to know?” Untwined we stare each other.

“No,” she says. “I don’t think so.”

“What then, Grey? What do you want? What should I do?”

“Stop expecting the trees to talk back. Stop believing they care.”

“I *like* believing that they care. I like talking to them.”

“Better than people?”

“Sometimes.”

“Because they don’t talk back? Don’t doubt you, confuse you, make you feel low?”

“Sort of.”

“I just play drums. I don’t have your answers.”

“I know.”

He glares at me. “Work it in then! It might help sometimes.”

Grey & I glare at each other: “I can’t do what *anyone* wants, Grey. Can’t, *won’t*.”

He sips from his pitcher of Guinness—Mr. Bob indulging him this privilege tonight—

“What about the red-haired wench?”

“Merry Muse?”

He sips hard.

“She’s never told me what to do. Just urged & irritated me on.”

“& wifey there?”

“Rebecca. Not wifey!” she yelps.

“I know, kid. Sorry.”

“Say it, then.”

“What?”

“Say my name.”

He sips. “Rebecca.” He sips harder. “Dorothy.” He finishes foamily. “Americus.” Grins goofy.

“Soulard.”

“Eh?”

“I’m married.”

“Yah, heard about that. Condolences.” He seeks Mr. Bob’s attention & taps his empty pitcher. The barman bustles.

“It’s gonna be a long weird story.”

“Already is.”

“Longer, then. Weirder.”

“Occasionally a song? A drink?”

I nod.

“Now? You want a Guinny?”

“No, Grey. I don’t drink alcohol anymore.”

“Do I?” he asks, frowning.

“Sure.”

“Am I going to stop? Take up crafting tie-dye pouches & puffing opium?”

“No, you ass.”

Still frowning he stiffly regards me. “So you’re an ex-drinker writing about a bar?”

“Yah, I guess.”

He nods.

“What?”

“Til you work out the trouble knotted in that situation, nothing here’s going fast anywhere anymore.”

He nods, not looking at me, leaves his pitcher unfinished, leaves.

“He’s right, Reb.”

“He was mad, Ray.”

“Mad & right, though. There is a conflict. A knot.”

“My dad still drinks. & I *never* did. & Mr. Knickerbocker does.”

“The change is me & Cecile is man enough to say it to me.”

Dark blue eyes buzzing now with thought. “So what does it mean, now that, um, you don’t drink anymore?”

“Well, I’m on the outside looking in.”

“Of Luna T’s?”

“Of more than that. In my own world too. Alcohol & coffee are the two titans of adult socializing.”

She nods.

“Alcohol more so because its houses contain entertainment & sex.”

Nods again.

“So I don’t know, Reb. But he’s right about that knot. Maybe the knot is even the second threshold.”

Moving toward immolation, dream leads mind leads body. What matters most is fear-mingled hope. What matters most is to crush it, cut it, know it to be dust, call it illusion, the knot

the knot

a moan & a sigh sum a life end to end, a life, a knot, know it, crush it, cut it, nothing follows nothing, the moan does not beget the sigh, release this thought, the universe is tickless, climb deep enough to observe the flow & the swirl, then climb deeper & observe the—

Rebecca smiles at me & shows me her picture called “Why”

Somewhere Americus strums one just for me, for this moment—

Grey sips & waits—

Just to be holding this ragged sheaf of papers, this bless black pen moving still, 20 years of this story or something resembling this story—

weary, fierce the music everywhere even when I feel—

Rebecca laughs teasing honey onto my lap licking my ear & I broil with life & hope
& love—

I have no music to share tonight, not tonight, not yet—claws unloosed, rage in a box
with no walls, emptiness thick, I love you, marry me, marry me, & again, & again

“Yes,” she says. “Always.”

A white butterfly means yes. A black carriage means no. A red bonnet for Art. A
yellow hate for longing. A pink gown for hunger. A blue suit for embrace.

“You,” she says. “Always.”

We hold hands, transmit music, interior music, open border, infinite smile—
always—no matter the—

“Why this War, Rebbby?”

“I think it has to happen. Too many people have been waiting. It’s been coming for
a long time, I think”

“Is it the beginning of the end?”

“For some people, it’s *always* the beginning of the end”

“And for us?”

“For us, it’s always the beginning. We’re children no matter our ages, no matter our
worries”

“Children?”

“Yes—always beginning—always new—”

“So they will beat us because of this?”

“No—they’ll beat us if we deny it—”

“And so that’s the challenge?”

“Of course—always”

All is grief, so one is told, accept it, bring warm black clothes, expect the rhythms of
mourning, grow used to the ways of the world. This world. A world.

All is grief, perhaps. Some nights frigid with loss, fear, loneliness.

Some crackle with laughter. Some tickle into songs.

Her dark blue eyes play me, shout me, croon me. Croon me.

“Rebecca!” Giggle.

“Raymond!” Giggle.

This world remains, & awaits me. Always.

A page at a time. A minute. An idea.

The power still awakes within my pen, still ready to make or maraud—less a pistol
than a bullet—

a bomb—a breach—

the power raised—be wary—

Power raised a rising sheet of water at night's apex—a verity of musics, a clash & coalescence of myths—

Where now? If the dimensions of possibility are seemingly numberless what to do? & how? & why?

“Why?” I ask her.
She nods.

“What music to share tonight, Rebecca?”

“All of it” she says—

I nod—

“No other way, Ray” she smiles—watches me scribble for my life—as always—
knows I write to love—write to know—write to live—

“My music has been torrent & tepid for so long”

“But still you try”

“I have no choice”

“No—none of us do”

Americus sits in the bandroom listening to a group of musical young flow into & away from coherence—knows they worship playing at Luna T's—how it drives them—how it impedes them—sits at his little table beneath the front window & listens, sips his pint of Guinness—

Cecile Grey mulls a broken-spined paperback of Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*—sitting in his room at the local YMCA—reads, thinks, taps out a rhythm with his left hand—chews some cheese slowly, reads:

“That was the problem—to remain undistracted. Undistracted by the memory of past sins, by imagined pleasure, by the bitter aftertaste of old wrongs and humiliations, by all the fears and hate and cravings that ordinarily eclipse the light. What those Buddhist monks did for the dying and the dead, might not the modern psychiatrist do for the insane? Let there be a voice to assure them, by day and even while they are asleep, that in spite of all the terror, all the bewilderment and confusion, the ultimate Reality remains unshakably itself and is of the same substance as the inner light of even the most cruelly tormented mind.”

What music to share tonight? What colors to eat? What voices to dance? Memories to burn? Gurus to plunder? Mysteries to worship?

What phreaks to follow tomorrow? What scriptures to crush under boots?

Which love to win anew? Which loyalty to release?

She looks at me all blue eyes so dark, lifting, hers, mine—

“Just write” she says

“Just write”

“Yes—begin there always—begin among your pens & pages—it's how you do everything else—by beginning there. Here.”

I nod.
 “Let’s go,” she says. “We have to get along, Raymond.”
 I nod.

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer a dream at all—per se—
 We leave Luna T’s Cafe—there is briefly a different door—opens into a desert—
 I nod again—there’s the city—the only one on the planet that matters—
 but as important as it is, it merely points to what’s greater—

“You are the most beautiful creature in the universe”

“You are, too”

“You are my muse, true love”

“You are mine”

Rebecca & I face each other—the night is cool calm full moon—

“We make a stand by committing as we do, Reb”

“Yes”

“Love the strong & fragile”

She nods.

We sit facing each other, cross-legged—the city is bright & thumping in the distance—we
 touch at the knees— begin to dream— eyes awake— enter each other— soak each other’s
 souls— yes— & carry further along— somewhere, Rebecca, Raymond, neither me nor
 you— yes— a voyage— yes, no, both, a voyage—

toward us the city’s energies flow— rhythms wavy & slow— a drop, a trickle, a wave—
 pattern, then no-pattern—

dream— dance— Rebecca, Raymond, much more— Black Rock City— & beyond— before
 between beyond—

a dance? call it that— call it something— growl, glow, call it new, old, dance? I don’t
 know— wiggle with the mystery— enjoy— remember, forget, it doesn’t matter, does it? I
 don’t know— keep trying, or don’t. Keep trying.

The waves continue & lick over us as we sit open-eyed dreaming beneath the full
 moon & the sky’s royalty of stars—

Voices arrive, one, a few, many,
 a few, hungry & laughing, undulating—

this universe a mist, a light, a shimmer

hunger, laughter, praise everything—
 do.

Franny Emily Renee Salinger-Americus joins Rich her husband at his table, settles in
 his lap, arms around his neck, head against his chest—

“Such a fierce story this is,” she whispers—

“He won’t let up—”

“No—”

“He wants it to be about us again soon—”

“I think it will be—”

“I do too—”

He hugs her tighter. She returns in kind.

Cecile Grey knows where he’s bound, drumsticks in hand, all he can do is keep time
& toss in a few rhythmic explosions when needed—
he hurries—

“Back to Luna T’s or into the City, Rebbby?”

She smiles full moon gorgeous.

For a moment I am roughened patches of oil on her canvas, she is black ink alone
on my lined pages, we disappear into each other’s bursting fancies,
a cry, a moan
yes there is more

dancing, licking, giggling, *resume*—
continue—

O . . . fuck . . . yes . . . look into the tavern’s gloom . . . look toward him, feared,
admired . . . listen

a shaky finger pointing me down—

**“Art thou power, magick, beauty? Art thou hope? Can thou say aught of
thine beginning muchless of thine demise!?”**

standing now—upheld by emotion more than actual gravity & balance

**“Doth thee think thou art blessed with reservoirs bottomless of time?
Doth thee thinkst anything?”**

**“Rise up, pilgrim! Sinner! Maker! Rise, now! Give an hour’s work to each
hour’s life, neither more nor less! Dream with open eyes & busy hands!
Make & show thine makings that others may learn from thine craft &
care!**

**“Hesitate little but hurryeth not! Heed well: an hour’s work for each
hour’s life. Neither less nor more.”**

He sits back down, for just a moment at rest.

I nod, not knowing what else would show honor & agreement both—Rebecca hurries over to him—she listens peculiar, unique to him—& ministers singularly unto his woe—uniquely, where others neither try nor dare—

Loving her but wishing to be alone—a note handed to Mr. Bob:

“Beloved—
I need an hour alone—
All good between us—as ever—
Yours, Ray”

I leave with none a look back—walk out Luna T’s thinking: yes, an hour alone—or ever—I walk out not fully knowing—

To have come this far urges continuing—yet doubts & doubts—
Reckoning Rd gives way to Main Street—a right-hand turn—street crossed & steps climbed:

Cement Park. Ever & on—

I sit & wonder bluntly what matters anymore—

I sit & decide not to leave without some answer—

In my hand a sheaf of nocturnes hurried secretly along w/me—I page through them & read:

“Choose to be clear.”

& I think: yes I wish this—long have I wished this but not known how—

So: how?

Cement Park is as ever & I suppose in a way so am I—the round cement benches from whose center trees grow—taller now than our shared years ago—yes—as am I—

a pen I wield in ways unknown back then—a life come to be unlike any I dreamt—any I was capable of dreaming—

I long for friends, family, yet how often have I run from all these! & why? What blackness, what demons?

My muse presses me on no matter the twists & rebounds of the road: ever she urges me on—

the gone-green Puritan family statue—when I am 3000 miles from here still will I hold an image of it—

years & miles, years & miles—I do not wish to succumb to the might of either—no, I wish to wield the power I have by letting it sing me true—

I ask the Universe: help me.

I pray: let me help myself.

A turn of direction & back to Luna T's where I await myself—where Rebecca awaits her Raymond—

I hurry—

Hurry—& the thickness of this paragraph as it descends word by word line by line down the white sheet-lined blue, hurrying down Reckoning Road, wind & noise, from a tape player? from the skies? she mulls the mirror, what the images tell her, which she chooses to near, listen to, hurry: yes, back, into Luna T's Cafe again & realizing these stories & I are blood-bound for life come what—

yes—hurry—

To she I serve who serves me we serve all serves us none upon knees or lowered eyes but creatures hungry for the buzzing air of live touch, hungry for the raging invisible—

caressing her music, warm, sinewy, because this evergoing silence is cold & dry, not empty, no, not quite that word, nothing is truly empty, not quite

lapping about her curves & colors, what remains after a crescendo wanes

balance & beauty, pain harnessed to look ahead, she brings me hot bread, eyes lick me pleased as I chew, as I *pay attention* to chewing—

meaning & truth, for as long as necessary, til laughter & flight, she is ready for any kind of go I propose, or stay, or writhe

regard her hands & whirl a faith & flame about them, what they may touch, magick, what they may hold, mystery

what are they? nearing, diminishing

“Thou barketh & barketh & barketh upon thine blank texts until all seems a howl to divert from their continued emptiness no matter the strain & savage of thine pen!

“Thou canst prove there is water, hold up a slopping vessel to each querying eye! Canst thee also prove there is hope? What bloom serves thine metaphor? What hero, what quest? Shall any unending howl succeed thine test & fill thine countless sheets with their first true word?” bellows Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker as he hurls his cane & himself at my scribbling form seated at the bar.

Atop me his breath whiskey-fouled & desparately weary, he speaks anew in sorrowful puffs of words:

“Go, thou. Go. Leave here but a finger or a swatch of skin but go.”

“Where?” I grunt, more interested than I can understand.

“Where the charts & scriptures leave off. What they cannot or do not speak of. What they cannot or do not speak of. Dreams, sand, ocean. Falling space. Thrusting light. A pen writing its man”

I wake up & raise my head from bar to the cries & cheers of the gathered crowd.

“We’re going to the Super Bowl!” he hears different voices chortle. On the TV the New England football Patriots have beaten 24-17 the Pittsburgh Steelers & are bound for Super Bowl XXXVI in New Orleans.

I get hugged & several pints slop my way from sunny drunken souls who don’t know I’ve left behind my taste for alcohol.

No matter: I see Jim Reality & he knows & he smiles & he glints

“May I present humble liquid refreshment offerings to mine lord King Thirst the First?”

“You may” he gleams merrily—

Rebecca returns from seeing Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker to his nap on the couch of the old manager’s office in back.

She sits next to me sometimes hugged jolly by the revelers, her laughter bespeaking her delight—

“We keep going, Reb”

“We come back too. Remember that. It’s important.” I nod honestly.

“He told me to go beyond the charts & scriptures. To where they leave off.”

“Told *us* to go beyond”

“Yes”

“I’m going with you, Ray, wherever & always.”

I nod. Ever & always.

“Never was a choice.”

Something from a book once held, lived: “it was scary to have someone to love, but it was also very fine”—

how complex it has become to serve my Art, my Muse—

how scary, how very fine—

live among the tatters & glows of my own mind, & here is a painting of a man & woman dancing, very fine, & it becomes my emblem, raises my words into broad melodies

live among others in what resembles right now my native world & here too a muse, a wife, a soulmate, arrived to queen that which has always awaited her—

live among pages & here yet another, yet the same, a girlgodd, an artist, muse, delicious, very fine, yes

suddenly, a scene:

Jim Reality's broad figure leads the whooping assemblage onto Reckoning Road,
 "New England Patriots, your 2002 Super Bowl XXXVI Champeens!"

cops dunna get afeared but simple block both ends of the street & blare their
 sirens—

Knickerbocker remains alone in the bar, a Patriots baseball cap askew on his head, a fist
 drunkenly shaking at a God who'd forgotten today to punish New England for her "City
 pon the Hill" arrogance

Godd the Little Pink Bear floats along the merry parade, neither vengeful nor forgetting,
 slightly drunk, singing "We are the Champeens" with the rest of the frosted tramps—

yes, there it is, narrative, & on it could go—sugarhugging, lips damp & giggling—

then wander from there, off the page, out of the notebook, to an else, configuration of
 cloud, dirge, & much-loved toy pup—

No rules. No game. No fear.

More & more, hurry without really ever having moved—

"Hello—I love you—
 won't you tell me your name
 Hello—I love you—
 let me jump in your game!"

cries the jukebox later on at Luna T's Cafe as the crowd rears ever higher—

Suck the world, suck it hard, drink it in, scary, very fine,

Knickerbocker interrupts me, & I agree—cue rant:

**"Drinketh thine world down! Fear, fantasy, fineness of
 distinction between the pilgrim & the sinner! Drinketh! as
 weary artisan his dwelling's nocturnal rest! Drinketh! as the
 woman her baby's suckling need! Drinketh! As woe, darkness,
 & devilry do their cornered human prey!"**

he nods at me & I continue: yes, suck the bastard down, the trees, the vigils, the dull eyes
 behind gun barrels, the scurrying creatures & departing wings—suck the hard delicious
 fucker down & grow with every lash of liberation, & preach deeper as humility & silence
 settle in—

Back to Knickerbocker:

“Bellow & howl thine praise however misbegotten or foolishly placed! Hands will ever hunger for a prayer to conjure, a cheek to stroke! Call it all wicked & laugh furiously or call it all holy & suffer relentlessly. Burn & disintegrate & refuse, finally to account to thine lord for aught a blemish or twig! Be what scriptures warn & wail about! Be unto the heights & depths of grandest majesty & when all trembles & doth indeed fall, remember! Fix up myths & texts of remembrance! Send a message of greatest hope even if it must be cloaked most hidden in words of despair & denial!”

We clink glasses, bourbon to soda, & what drunkards remain yet roused about us raised a weak but sincere cheer—

To go beyond charts & scriptures, beyond where they leave off—question & embrace language—doubt love & doubt doubt—trust, fall, continue—growl & explain—

To know a face newly seen—suddenly connect starlight to fingers to a remembered cry to some dissipating wish—

Carry one’s cup of thirst high—fingers trembling, fingers true—

To remember everything—o yes remember it all—but what she sees—here, now—what she sees cannot be remembered, known, heard—what do you see, Rebecca, that I cannot ask, do not ask?

I don’t remember what you see—nor do I know for what I’m asking—yet this missing thing cornered, even a moment, even to throw a thumb toward its absence, is some looking toward all—

I want to remember what you see—to jimmy a crack in my rust—what scurries beneath, riddles beyond?

I want to remember what you see now & snap time’s lingual grip—

possible to remember in colors or rhythms unclad in words, in consciousness?

Remember what you see now, what’s missing, or seems to be—

beyond charts, beyond scriptures—

& yet know that remembering is not enough, bares a toothy lie about it, a presumption that what’s to come’s already been seen, been tried, been done—

a tenet of the old, scratched into their dust, & if no other hunger they still bear the one to deny a novel beam anywhere, to build a world stoutly around this denial, yes, this one lastly go if at all—

the novel barks at us in the night, strange melodies bleeding unnamed colors—

the novel rarely arrives at noon bowing to the frumpery of the day’s fattest king—
nay, it seeps in, crawls in, a strange, a note, a glint at a time—

arrives, arrived, been here all along—proof before the theory's been written out—

Ever you must pose for me, your muse, your artist, ever you run along my blood,
heat & hurry it, ever what I know of novel I learn from you, what you make me make—ever
pose for me—

your muse, my artist
my muse, your artist

symbiosis, white butterfly, strawberry ice cream, world-blurring sacraments, cups of smolder,
novel ideas brewed in tea—

“Beyond charts & scriptures”
She nods.
“Aren't we beyond them already?”
She nods again. Smirking.
“Then . . . what?”

We sit at my Rich's our little table neath the front window in Luna T's Cafe's bandroom &
watch Noisy Children rehearse. I hadn't noticed that Rich had summoned his bandmates—

“It was time”
“I'm sorry”
“The world you began keeps going. At some point you weren't needed for that”
“What then?”

Americus glares at me, holding his guitar tightly. “For what we can't imagine. We can
keep living, growing, filling up our world within its borders. But we can't trespass them.”

“Are you sure?”
“I know we can't do it like you can.”
“Beyond chart & scriptures?”

Americus says nothing. Beckah, sitting near where he stands, takes his hand & kisses
it. Smirking anew, says “That's his new phrase, Dad. He's wrestling with it right now.”

Americus smiles at her, his forever daughter. Without looking back at me, returns to
rehearsing.

Amazing when Knickerbocker toddles in helped & hindered both by his cane. Rebecca flies
from her chair to accompany him over to our table. Noisy Children, in a rare moment of
deference, unplugs their instruments & plays acoustic.

She sits the old man down in her chair & hurries off to fetch him his drink.

Knickerbocker stares bluntly at me. & on. & on. “OK. What?” I snap.

He says nothing until Rebecca has set his cup of coffee laced with whiskey before him &
gotten herself a chair & sat down. She looks at him adoringly as always.

“When wilt thou at last choose life?” he hisses. I expect more but nothing
comes. He sips his drink. Then shakily rises & slowly departs.

Fuck this all. I get up, fetch Rebecca from barroom after she has re-installed the old fuck at his seat & say “We’re going.” I leave; she hurries to follow. Probably smirking & pleased.

Beyond charts & scriptures. I don’t fucking know how.

All I want to do is write. Write & love my wife & try to do good by the world. Fuck all else. Anyway—what else matters?

I take her hand in mine & she smiles within me, nothing between us different now than ever save she now resembles she who in my own world—*back there*—I now rightly call true love—

“Her name is Lisa”

She nods.

“She & you are similar but not the same”

“Equivalent?”

“In relation to me, yes. She is a bit younger, we’re not married yet. Similar is best I can call it. As this world is similar to my own”

“Would she ever come here?”

“I think if she did—” I stop.

“Yes?”

“I don’t know. My meeting her connects to my knowing you, you from my knowing Merry Muse. There are connections I cannot discern yet. I choose the work of accommodating all.”

Rebecca nods. There is nothing around us save the barroom entrance to Luna T’s Cafe behind us, nothing else yet—

“There’s more”

“OK”

“For me to write this story meaningfully again I have to take it seriously again”

“You don’t”

“I don’t care any less but I can’t say that I care more—or I can say that I’m beginning to but slowly. Beyond charts & scriptures—it’s already been beyond for a long time—”

“And?”

“And the sense of—more than urgency—*necessity* is better—has recurred less often—til recently”

“And?”

Now I smirk. “I missed it—I finally felt its lack for a long enough time to awaken—to remember—I don’t know—here I am—that’s all” I smile & am smiled.

We remain vaguely located awhile longer—there is a rosiness to where we are—rosy pinkness perhaps—swirls vaporous & damp about us—Rebecca in my arms & my true love is whom I feel—they are similar yes but more so—to love one is to love the other—leaves of one tree?—berries? flowers? shadows? sunlight?

to hold her hand is to hold hers as well—

I do not know what this means—

Beyond charts & scriptures with the muse/wife who companions & haunts me in every world I travel, a girl, a goddess, an artist, daughter of a man I more discovered than contrived over 20 years ago

She is light, she is music, she is stone
Her blood parents lost forever it seems
She bears her beloved father's adoration
& agreed ago to be my wife—

She looks at me curious & smirking, always more confident of me than I am of late—

“Let it happen. Be here now. Be Here Now. Be Here NOW.”

I climb within her heart & settle in with my pen & notebook & into the book called *Why?* I write: “There can be no lasting bliss in this mortal life til nearly everything ever known, ever felt, ever lived, ever chased, ever bitten, ever touched, ever, ever, is gone, til one's cell is the air, one's scripture the bees, til one brushes with sun's light moon's light candle's light, til one's body reserves just a little golden moisture, til memory is nonsense, dreams bunk, play obvious, polity fool, all truth & future apparent in a lick, a fallen leaf, a snapping breeze—”

I stop.

She's gone. Did I hear her say “goodbye”? I don't know.
She's gone, rumbling within me. “Let it be. Await.”
& gone. Silence. Let it be. Await.
I disappear too but not very long.

Let it be. Await. What is immutable phalanx, ka-tet, twined now always, sugar & water, my pen moves with difficulty, slowly, but indeed it moves, await, let it be, make Art for world to come, speak directly & know that these words do go:

I love you, my wife & muse & forever
love, toward you ever I careen,
for you my pen staggers on, with you
my heart ever resides, I love
you, muse, wife, glory, goddess, tonight
I near you, as ever, & we ever
create our own world, our coming world.

She has disappeared within me as I approach her, days left now, mere days, til the cataclysmic moment, the timeless immolation of touch on touch, breath in breath, what cannot be named once but an infinite times

All my worlds will come together at this moment of faith exploding, new life joined, & Rebecca will not return before then, she will return with the explosion—

“Barkeep”
“Yes?”

“What’s wrong with him in the corner? He’s writing something & moaning. He OK?”

“He will be. Another?”

“Sure, thanks.”

“This one’s gratis.”

“Why?”

“So we can toast him being OK”

“Ahh”

“Cheers, bud”

“Cheers, barkeep”

The raw confession these stories have always been will become rawer still in the coming days. I don’t care if they’re read or understood, if they survive me—

I am nearing my profoundest moment yet of being—April 2, 2002 at the Greyhound bus station in Portland, Oregon. Meeting my true love, wife, muse, twin flame

I can tell no other story til that moment—I can only tell of going there & what happens—

fixtion is for now truth unprettied—the pen is steady & hopeful—my heart is true—my Art is devoted to her—

What comes next few days each hour a surprise, a hunger, a star briefly mortal & grounded before passing on—

Months, & this page stayed blank. Now, & continue. The mingling of my lives until a gridlock, pen mute, sheets thirsty—

Now, & movement—

“Rebecca”

“Raymond”

“You can hear me?”

“Yes”

“Where are you?”

“Here, with you”

“I feel you, & don’t”

“Yes”

“I’ve not lost you?”

“No. Nor her!”

“I haven’t been able to go until now”

“I know”

“Do you resent her?”

“She’s no threat to me. You & I go on no matter what.”

“Yes, we do”

“Yes. We do”

“Where are you?”

“I’m here”

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker rears up & listen choiceless

“What lord we doth possess hath not an ethereal face but a hued & contoured one! What lord we doth possess rings variously in our souls as the voice of a beloved child, the great green of a powerful oak, fruit shared with one who sees within our laughter & anguish! What lord we doth possess sprawls gorgeously across a thousand remembered night skies, rolls in thunderously toward a hundred separate shores, dances miraculously, weightlessly among numberless caressing dreams! What lord we doth possess knows no constant nor exclusive home in any tome no matter its croaking bulging-eyed disciples! Heed not he who would answer thine heartstruck query with a citation rather than weep & crawl beside you along your long hours among woe! What lord we doth possess stands bone & muscle, strand & sinew alongside each creature enflamed with animation, likewise rising nearly to freedom, likewise sinking nigh unto extinguishment! When confronted with alleged representatives of alleged manifestations of the divine, frown plainly thy heart’s doubt, challenge bluntly the gathering of submissive samely faces!

“Saloon-keeper! Tis with ill humor that I cast my gaze down to my vessel’s unhappy dregs!”

On a bus passing swiftly through nowhere, carrying muse-wishes & wife-longings, writhing yet cracks in my formerly unbroken sweep of sadness—

This world I carry with me, a fierce thing between many covers—& I wonder how to learn not to learn, how to release without hurry nor expectation, how to cuddle hope within my palms that it may form & reform without my press & prejudice—

“Rebecca!”

“I’m here! She is too”

“I’m scared. I’m on a bus riding thousands of miles toward a home I have not claimed yet.”

“Yes. You’re brave. You’re hopeful when it’s hardest.”

“What’s to come no more than shadows. Yet I dug this notebook out. I have to try.”

“Nobody gets you, Ray. Even *she* doesn’t totally. She doesn’t know what it’s like to dog a dream high & low. She lets fantasies loose where her life thins. What you are she cannot fully imagine. You are the most dangerous & wonderful person in her life & don’t deny this, nothing else makes sense.”

“I won’t deny it. But what good will it do if she doesn’t act?”

“She will, in her time. Not just from love, but from admiration, even envy. She wants you to be proud of her but she also wants to be like you. She truly admires few & none as she does you.”

“So what do I do?”

“You do what you will & let her curiosity do the rest. Knowing you’re near will work at her, already is.”

“Am I making things worse with my stress?”

“Only for your own peace of mind. The trip yr on says much more. Yr courage however withering speaks loudest. She can’t imagine your level of braveness. It arouses her in ways untellable.”

“Will she be brave too?”

“Yes. She is readying. It’s not easy for her but she’s doing it. She senses how little you are leaving in reserve. The time for games is done.”

“*Will she come to me?*”

“Yes *but that is not the issue.*”

It’s: how will you handle it?

Will you prove stronger than last time?”

Americus turns to Jim Reality next to him at the bar. “Remember when Soulard used to write in sentences?”

Reality smiles, soft with sentiment. “The old days” he murmurs.

Americus sips hard at his pint. Jim is right to glow with remembrance. But what of now? Is there one?

“Rebecca”

“Raymond”

“It’s going to get more lonely, isn’t it? This continental trek . . .”

“Then after that it will get crazier with questions. Let it happen. No way out but through.”

“You got to go through it to get to it.”

“Exactly. You’ve uprooted a withering home to replant it in a far, greener clime. Here you are traveling it there. Home is this bus. For the next several days home is the road. You’ve never done this before.”

“Kerouac & his crowd did. Kept home bases here & there but didn’t really settle down.”

“You get them better?”

“& Rilke too. Always on the move to the next.”

“You’re finally doing it like them.”

It gets more lonely yes along a day on buses, fractured sleep, tries at connection—

“She loves you, Raymond, very much”

“I’m coming to offer her me. I don’t know what or how else”

“She knows. Stop worrying!”

“I can’t. I don’t know how.”

“Raymond she feels what you feel. Like I do. She would absorb your every pain if she could.”

“I want her in my arms. I want her to feel me, my love entirely for her.”

“Soon. Soon. Soon.”

“Thank you”

“Keep on.”
 “I am trying”

The one-eyed man amused regards Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker.
 “All is grief because we must have it so. So I learned this & now I understand. All is grief. Simple, eh?”

“Thine unocular vision, sir, besets thee with a view too unwieldy to be credible. If one believed you openly the river would need not bend, the cradle would need not be checked!”

The one-eyed man laughs delightedly. “My friend! Have wine with me! Here, take some of this good bread!”

Knickerbocker persists with but his mug of bourbon-drenched coffee.

The one-eyed man lights a cigarette, rubs his knuckle against his moustache. “Perhaps a choice, as you imply. Yes, room for thought. Perhaps you don’t need to decide tonight. Leave it in doubt, eh? Yes! Good!”

Knickerbocker says nothing awhile. Then he looks at me writing these words. He nods, almost cordially. He approves my struggle it seems.

A life’s anguish. An apex. A dream.

Rebecca sits with me quietly.
 Her quiet awareness has always
 gladdened me.

I summon it up now, wherever, a dusky roar of power to protect she I approach, to fill her with my love & receive hers that we both will believe as hours approach us.

Rebecca looks at me &
 smiles, her dark blue eyes great with intelligence
 “Raymond, there is more good
 reaching for you than you can
 imagine. Love remembers. Deep love
 needs no continual spark to road.”
 “Why do I doubt myself, Rebecca?”

She smiles naked at me. “Chasing angels, Raymond.”

I nod. She holds me, if only in our joined minds tonight. She holds me for the other who awaits me too.

I haven’t found my home yet so
 I keep looking harder & the more
 it eludes me the more it seems
 I am nearing it

I feel all sorts gathered near me kind curious loving—the mystery of the night upon me—haven’t found my home yet so—touch laces with touch—I keep looking harder—the whizzing brush along my heart of prayers offered for me

protect her, Universe, protect them all, loved ones scattered far, as I've been crying & limping many have touched me

Rebecca points at the bus window:
 "Don't forget these views—grey skies
 pulling at you—relieve you can't
 accept at least yet—manless fields
 of crop & tilled soil—keep remembering
 contour & color—low, distant horizon"

"No doubts. Say yes."

"Yes."

She looks at me smiling. "Expect the best."

I nod. "Three days on the road among notebooks & strangers."

She says nothing.

"There's more."

"No way out but through, Raymond."

"What to burn down, what to preserve, what to renew."

"Expect the best."

She pats my hands. Love kisses in many ways.

"Rebecca, I've been waiting this day so long. The sun's up, the sky is blue. Simple."

She smiles.

"Five hundred miles left, I don't know exactly. Fate, truth, answers crawling into my hands."

She nods. "She'll come. Don't worry."

I look you complete. "Rebecca, you've companioned me this trip. Thank you."

She giggles. Familiarly. "Always."

She giggles again, two days later. "Toldja she'd come."

"She kisses like lips to water."

"She adores you, Raymond. She's going to be with you all the time soon. She can't abide waiting much longer."

"I know. So what do I do?"

Rebecca sketches idly, says nothing.

"I wait?"

"Just a little bit. Give her the space she needs. It's less & less now. She's nearly ready." Reb fixes me still with dark blue eyes. "You know all this."

"I . . . do"

"You're not at ease with your newer ways of knowing"

"No"

Rebecca's sketch deepens; I can't tell of its form though.

"Why have you been pursuing deeper ways of knowing?"

"For her. To protect her & understand her."

"Are you usually right?"

"Yeah, right or close."

"And?"

“And what?”
 “You still doubt?”
 “Yes. I have to.”
 “Why?”
 “I don’t know!” we both laugh.

“Now it’s 19 days later & she’s been to Seattle & fled me twice—”
 “Yes”
 “And?”
 “You know more than you did”
 “I guess so”
 “Again, Ray: what if it’s not over? It isn’t. A few days apart in the bigger picture adds to nothing. She’s gone nowhere. You know that. Why do you feel such stress & anguish?”
 “She ran twice!”
 “& she’ll run again!”
 “How do I even know—”
 “You do. You know better than anyone whose advice you seek”
 “Reunion & run”
 “Yes”
 “Why?”
 Rebecca looks at me multiply—an endless curving stretch of faces
 “Pain—fear—confusion—blah blah blah”
 “What can I do?”
 “Be your best righteous self—but do it for you & her—”
 “Faith til it hurts—til it feels cartoonish”
 “& beyond that”

Gretta Black, Noisy Children’s bassist, sips her coffee & snickers at me. “Here we are in my own hometown & look at the glum puss on you.”

Rebecca giggles. I nod.
 “& for what? A girl so in love with you she can’t stay or leave too long?”
 Now they’re hugging & laughing.
 “Thanks.”
 “He doesn’t get it? I mean he really has no sense of it?”
 “No. You’d think he was the one who’s 18 not 38”

I glower.

Gretta kisses my cheek. “You’ve nothing to worry about. She’s hooked. It’s you but it’s also her. She has not the least idea how to be with you. But she wants to very much.”

“Oh”

Gretta grins. “Yes! Oh! She hasn’t begun to figure you out yet. You’re her deepest obsession. Nothing else really matters to her. She runs thinking maybe she can lessen the whole thing, have some of her former life back, even if it was bad. But it doesn’t work. *It’s not working tonight, right now*, While you sit moping she’s fiercely wanting you. If you only knew.”

“I don’t”
 Both women shake their head.
 “How long do I have to wait?”
 “Not long. You know that”

“Then what?”

“Resist being weak.”

“I don’t know how.”

“Learn. Fast.”

I sit up straight. “Riddle me this, then. How do I defend against the daylight? Nighttime hope laps me up, easily. But come a thrashing sleep’s finish I awake empty & nothing.”

They look at my pen. They look around at the grand-windowed coffeeshouse we sit in.

“When she calls you, the only thing on her mind will be: does he still love me? She’ll only believe it or not believe it by your voice, & she’ll need to see you to confirm this. She’ll need your touch, your kiss, your vow, & repeatedly. No less, & of course more.”

“You’re so frankly certain.”

“Of course. We’re part of your greater self, Raymond, who you squirm against no matter how many times proven accurate & real.”

“She’s got ideas of me visiting Portland”

“Yes. Many.”

“As a buddy?”

They break up laughing

“So how do I deal?”

Gretta takes my hand. “By standing up straighter than you have in a long time.”

“Now what? Two weeks pass & suddenly word. She misses me despite her recent nastiness. Is marrying, again claims so, & then he’s off to join the military. *Now what?*”

“Now you do what we advised. You stand straight. Let the dust clear. Wait.”

“Fuck it.”

“No way out but through, Raymond. You know that.”

A choice, as always. Belief in sequence or flow. Dream or polity. Gut or gutter.

“Vanilla or butter pecan” & two girls laughing.

Follow her while she watches you. Sing, listen. Believe. Flex but do not break from the pain.

“She loves you, Raymond. As serious & vital as anything ever in your life, she loves you. This matters. It simply does not end.”

I look from one to the other. “I keep failing to surrender.” They nod. “What next?”

“Reunion”

“Then she runs again?”

“Maybe. Maybe not as hard.”

“Why?”

“Your eyes. Face. Your laugh. Your singing. Your unbreakable intensity. Your voice. The terror of your absence.”

“Terror”

“She’s tried life without you. She can’t do it. She dresses for you. She giggles for you. She sings for you.”

I sign.

Rebecca grasps & upholds me with her dark blue eyes. “You wanted this girl. You want a love whole & holy. It is happening now. You can have it if you don’t give up. This is the crossroads. Believe nothing but her kiss”

What was it you saw? What was it she felt? Laughter. Plummeting.
I love you. Tell me again.
You love me. I keep saying it.

Unroot the inky engines, wrench, wriggle, hurry. I love you what truth this is the civilization launches from. Wrench, wriggle, hurry.

Laughter. Plummeting.

Gretta touches her bass guitar lightly, deepening me, encouraging. Rebecca conjures a pink friend & together they fill the air about me with puffs of magick—

Unrust the inky engines, hold nothing at bay anymore—no reason to save, secure—burn every memory past & hence—a coldly scalding few will remain, lay within—

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker turns aside his first morning drink of the day—

“Nay, Saloon-keeper! Keep me not dully supped in liquid numbness a moment longer! Nay! I roar!”

He raises his stick toward the ceiling & then swings it about—

“What lord dares reside in these smokey downtrodden environs! What lord challenges for lead hungerer in this world’s mass spiritual starvation?”

He slips clumsily off his stool & throws his hat & coat away—

“Must I rend every button & thread from my beskinned bones before any rightly crowned holiness will appear?”

Off his shirt & tie—off his black shoes & dark trousers—he stands garbed only in white boxers covered in red bloody heart—

“We demand a simple answer from thee, o lord! Nay, we thine slaves command it!”

Learn neither to begin nor end. All that was, is. All that is, or ever shall be, is.

I think: can this story still matter? Nearly two years in the writing & not even half-done? Who cares? Why carry this notebook? Why tumble forth another few pages between weeks of silence? Fiction? What does that mean anymore?

Wrench, wriggle. Believe.

“She wrote to me, Rebecca. She misses me. She is deeply unhappy. How can I turn away from her?”

“Don’t.”

“I alone believe. Look at me. Look through my face. She is my muse in this broken world my home.”

“I know.”

“All I can do is love her & sing to her from afar. My Art belongs to her.”

“Yes.”

Dr. Knickerbocker, sits in his bloody hearts boxers on his stool, sipping a mug of water. **“Charles!”** he calls.

Mr. Bob the bartender stumbles over, nonchalantly.

“I’m sorry.” Sad voice.

“For what Arnold?”

“You are man such as I’ve not been in years, if ever.”

“Don’t be foolish. You’re a warrior. I just keep you, er, supped with drink.”

A pink friend settles on the stool next to Dr. Knickerbocker. He picks up this friend & holds it close. Tears.

Wrench. Wriggle. Believe.

She queries. She twists in light. She looks around in time & eternity, dream & touch. She says my name softly when alone, holds it closely to her heart. She smiles. Hears a noise. Turns the other way.

Yes, she thinks, despite all. Yes.

This threshold, what it might be, heavy glass tank, water filled with depths unrevealing, black glass, black water, a shrug each for what when why—these words found & writ again—how longing longs to perpetuate—either coast I sit with black pen—

he sings “How the heart approaches what it yearns . . .” smiles at me—it’s OK, all OK, all will be well & all will be well

she loves me tonight a double hundred miles away—admires, desires, what else I do not know—admires—desires—

push on toward morning. resurrection. the least thought matters. push on. no way out but through—admires, desires—

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer a dream at all. So I’ve lived these many months. Now learn to fly in this grumbling earthbound turmoil—learning to fly—learning to fly—

“She’s teaching me, I don’t know exactly how.”

“Flying hurts at first. Feels almost unnatural. Awkward, perhaps unlucky & unable.”

Universe, a naked prayer tonight: I long for reunion with my true love, her a double hundred miles away. I belong with her, learning to fly even as I teach her as well. Help me, help us, to better reunion, soon as possible. Help us to enact our love’s faith despite impediment. I pray to thee, Universe, for help & guidance & blessing, for strength, for endurance during these struggling times, & for what must be possessed to claim & keep our victory. Thus I pray.

Rebecca looks fierce upon me & says she’s not gone fear not she twists as often as ever for the press of your hand look at me

I look
 good she says now let your heart swirl around her like ever openly & freely & rawly

there is nothing but love breathe
 this simply in & out

love shivers & glows when molded into
 Art

Art makes the Universe look
 at me, Raymond!

Hello, Lisa Marie
 Hello
 so you're here on my pages at last
 Yes I am
 Are you OK?
 No but I'm trying now
 That's good.
 It's going to be slow this time.
 I know.
 If you love me you will understand.
 Yes.
 I want you to love me without pain. I want us to be happy.
 I wanted you to call me before I left.
 I'm sorry I didn't.
 What's between us?
 You don't have to ask. You already know. I love you. I've never stopped. But I'm
 not ready. Will you wait for me?
 You know I will.
 Nobody's ever loved me like you do. They always hurt me. I don't think you will.
 No I wont.
 Be patient. You have my heart. Nobody will take me away from you again.
 I still want you to call.
 I know, Raymond.
 I don't know what kind of writing this is, Lisa. I called it fixtion like it seeks to fix.
 You're still doing that. You're trying to fix me.
 I'm going to Burning Man again with you in my heart.
 I know. Next year I'll be with you. I promise. I'm going slow. I'm going to get you. I
 promise with all I have.
 I see eyes within eyes within eyes, those of so many beloved people & they begin &
 end with yours
 soul like smoke within me—like aura around me—thus I carry you & emit our love
 by dance & pen—by the love I give to others what I offer you is greater—

I want to love you without pain, Raymond, please let me learn how, help me, let me go, keep
 me—

Dr Knickerbocker shouts **By love's flaming thrust are we shaped, do we rise, do we crumble! By love's corrosive stroke do we stumble & crescendo!**

Someone rests her head against my shoulder & watches this page as I fill it with words that begin there can be no lasting bliss in this mortal life til nearly everything ever known is gone, til one's cells is the air, one's scripture the bees

bark for absent master, cry for faraway muse, dream for home's nearing

til one's body reserves just a little golden moisture, til memory is nonsense, dreams bunk, all truth & future apparent in a candle's winking eye

hold sunlight in hand, bounce her like a ball, flick & wiggle til a cloud joking passes

waiting for me to defend this precious yet indefensible existence one says I love you & I will carry you & I will not give up on you & there's more! wait don't go yet!

The desert waits I carry to there my cluster of muse, an unbroken pocket stitched from pain & empty beds

she tickles me briefly & giggles—

& I turn to my shamans the trees & they nod by leaf to my entreaties & prayers. Love: Only love. There is only love. The rest falls away.

You keep sending me butterflies by wind & wheel, each one I love you & I cannot count how many & you know & you smirk & I rarely do & you giggle & you approach music I once thought but now music approaches you—music approaches you—music approaches you—

music approaches you—

approaches you—

music approaches you—

approaches you—

you – you – you – you – you –

Gretta looks at Rebecca—they nod—closer, I guess—

Rebecca sits in my lap, I think it's Rebecca—two giggles the same—they know it—they/she know it—

Dr. Knickerbocker glares at me: **“Serve thine muse! No less! Protect & sing! Thou has't no other path! Thine instrument smoting, serve!”** Sips lightly from an unlabelled pint bottle.

I look at him you said go beyond charts & scriptures **yes** he replies I'm trying he said **try deeper** he growls do you know how hard this is? I say **no** he replies they are

the same now Rebecca & Lisa I groan **they always were** he says advise me I beg
keep saying I love you keep singing he says I look at him he grimaces
 at me is that all? **yes that's all—keep saying I love you keep**
singing

I nod he sips—

I feel you dream of death, I feel you dream of me, all is vulnerable sweetness & jackal alike,
 my touch in these lately silent days has tossed torrent toward you, protecting you loving you
 dreaming you, at moments becoming limbs of light shifting heatedly among your limbs of
 light, you awaken still dead, still dreaming of me, thus hope, remembering a kiss to come,
 remembering time a great fake of loops in empty space, I'm crying, I'm crying, all that is
 pulses, thinking: all that is pulses, thinking: all that is pulses thinking ALL THAT IS
 PULSES we hidden in the leaves proclaim the truth of need, of beauty, of pain, of mystery,
 truth & no-truth

She looks at me quietly, now smiling bites my shoulder lightly by way of—

She dances slowly around me in a music fool with love

We travel nearer each other something that fingers twist among fingers feels like
 yes—

I watched a couple dancing around each other earlier, humming, there were drums &
 mountains nearby,

thud thud watching thud thud

thud thud beating thud thud

thud thud beauty thud beauty thud

thud thud

Tides & artillery—we watch the beams crisscross our floors & think: foul & think:
 perfection. Our meaning is a raw lash of beauty against a pressing hide of control

mmmmmm drums & mountains drool incandescence nocturnal breathing all is
 vulnerable. I found that collecting hours of belief in love enhanced—

she sits quietly writing me new with pen some hundreds miles away & I sat writing
 her those in between received—

Looks at me: “Waiting”

Looks at me: “Mine”

Looks at me: “Truth”

Conjures & makes.

Dance of dreaming, dance of death, the news today is that there is no news—

dust accumulates—

Dream of dancing dream of death we near each other to finish joining

finish joining

finish joining?

Something furious with its own existence loosed every night to roam the soft corridors
 looking for a way out, pretzel of words fashioned as a key, panicked blood tainted with
 powerful aboriginal symbols, so close, seems so close to carrying a full heart of unsubdued
 love into the daylight. So close.

Peyote. New-washed cherries. Beams riddle the sky bright faceless coins lasers & fires & blowing up gases & breasts reckon dust devils & pages turn to fire to begin better lives—

You cry out. I settle you with fuzzy music flung to you by way of moonlight, conjuration, & helplessness—

Neath the grope, between the beams, within the currents, what tis? Are all doors open, some? what tis? Deep in the night I regard a woman singing softly, loosed of her pain, then later deeper more helplessly deep in the night I lie twisted wondering at this turn & that— some other day I jump up & down in a public restroom with frustration, what tis? what tis?

Rebecca looks at me says desist or pursue. Nods. Either will hurt, yes.

Day flakes away from glint to rose to onyx the wind within lifts & falls me: she dreams reinvention of the world: help her: I try: the miles slick past: help her: I try: All is maya: Perhaps: Dream Illusion Art Play: Help her: I try: rose petals & butterfly wings: Help her!: I try: I love you: Touch me anew beyond my dreams: Help me: Try.

What burns in you is beauty, what burns in me is you. All alone, all suffering, yes. I feel it. Your soft empty hands. Your eyes misdirecting your watchers. Your buzz in my chest saying why & when & soon.

The persistent & samely shaped stains in things: beauty burns in all creation, bright & painful. You sip water, smile, say a word, watch the sun come & go. You think, once, twice. You suffer & I call this my world.

A nymph. A maiden. A muse. A goddess. Marry me & finally bury your grief in my heart. First & last flower of the world, marry me. Plunge your grief within me, deliver it within coldest steel. I will rock you to dreaming.

All is grief so one grieves, revives crushed heart each new day until colors vibrate with endless struggle, until music wilds loosely within, beastly pagan roaring music bite me for all those who've bitten you, near me with no words & stare, our love become a magick smoking from a thousand miles of flaming woods. I have nothing left so I can heal you better. I have nothing left plunge your hunger for death into my chest I will receive it gladly I will crush it gladly I will save you gladly there is nothing to my world but the sounds of your songs to come. Love shatters the world every day with a faith bullets & buildings & treatises can neither annihilate nor elude.

I have nothing left. I love you. I do not wish to disappear along the path home. Bark bark regard the clear untouched sky. Bark bark sing to the darkling heroes they will snicker sing greater. Bark Bark become the gift sought, the light the language the love. My love you are missing days now what world notices? I do. Both vast & mere I know & wonder, ache beneath & about your aches. I notice. I know.

Always a choice: safety or symbiosis. Quiet upon these cement steps I choiceless choose symbiosis. I freely love you & thus the world. You approached my music from unknown far within: here you are: still: I notice: I wait. I suffer. OK.

Still, all that is, flows. Still, sugar & willows, many musics, evermore. Still, I love you. Mate in joy & grief, my pages moan to you. Marry me. Envelop my world forever.

Everything ends, & a beat, & all begins again. I have nothing & carry on. I have nothing. I love you.

Dusk accumulates as a bus awaits its moment to run. Nothing between us lessens, my love, my light, my Lisa Marie. Fixtion fierces into confession. All begins again.

No modesty in my pen neither spikes jutting toward pain.

The bus moves, nothing's lost, my love, not ever, I kneel my life before you & wait.

Bark bark dream awake!
Bark bark heed the tides!
Bark bark pray the moon!
Bark bark Art the savior!
Bark bark kiss & believe!
Bark bark our hands will touch again.

Part Three

“Because the world is round
it turns me on . . .”

“One-thing-I-can-tell-you-is-
you-got-to-be-free . . .”

—The Beatles, *Abbey Road*, 1969.

My words become stained with your love, I moan nightly, you occupy everything, you occupy everything, I moan month after month, knowing no other way anymore—help me—a word—help me—a word—

A word arrives from you—several—love—happiness—suffering—longing—desire—& tonight I sleep & wake both alone tonight tomorrow—hands touch only pillow—face kisses but only dream-wives

page 201—lookee lookee—September 22, 2002—hey this story is two years old in about 19 hours—long ago I gave up its public possibilities—I’m 17 again & the audience wields the pen—I have 9 dollars to my name, live in another’s home—3000 miles & 21 years variously intervene—but here I am—

Part three as though it matters—yes—it matters—the future laughs quietly at me—yes all of this matters—someone reads or hears these pages in a later hour I cannot know—
who are you who listens or reads? do you love me truly or vulnerably? where were you tonight as I sat alone on a green bed listening best I could to Police’s “Roxanne” on Seattle radio?

who are you & how did you come to read or hear these words? Are you protecting the man I have become? Do you believe that I am strong enough to dance alone? I can’t imagine you’d ever be shown these words if you did.

I don’t want to dance alone anymore.

Tonight hurts me, hurts me down good. I sat at a computer reading how Artists always writhe & rarely reap & go on making because they have no other defense against their hearts much less the world—

moan. cry. love hurts. I make pretty words out of it all I make pretty words someone told me that long ago, someone else told me that recently—

Part 3. 2 years. 203 pages now. Growl. Yip.

I love you, Lisa in Portland, I’ll marry you before this story finishes—I’ll try—

I beg ye, Universe, grant me my true love, bring her to me, I accept what good & pain to come from this. Bring her to me. This prayer of mine persists.

I sit in a room not my own. You sleep in a bed without me.

Who are you who reads or hears this?

Look at me. Where were you tonight?

Kindness seems important as ever, the free, intended gestures, eye needfully aware & seeking,

“Yes,” says Rebecca, pulling at my hand—“Come into the story again—come on—you don’t have to be alone—”

I come because she takes me—into Luna T’s Cafe—there are my friends—kindness waits everywhere—one offers, one receives—yes, tis true—

More colors, wilder music, the beginning of a new freedom—the drinkers at the bar laugh & roar—some nod toward me where I sit by Rebecca—I’m strange but familiar—a want to tell of this place anew—“yes” says Rebecca—confident, surging—“yes” says I reply softly—“maybe yes”—maybe really—

the days crackle open to mystery more & more—help me—I say this to anyone—help me as I try days gallop around me with least sense of order—

I look at Rebecca hard: “Is she gone?” “No, Raymond” “What do I do?” “Plan & prepare” “I’m scared” “Of course that’s why you turn to this page” “Help me” “I am” “Help me!” “I will” “Please” “Yes”

Days waning, others accelerating
I can do this—I can—I will—
yes—I will—

“Yes, you will”

“What does any of it mean?”

“Not yet—keep trudging—no way out but through”

A gleam. A way. Nothing explained, nothing fruited with obvious meaning. I resume writing in a different city, one returned to after months, one I am alone in. Rented room. Black & white TV. Mickey Mouse comforter. Telemarketing job, no, no.

“She’s thinking of you, Raymond.” “No, she’s not.” “She is. More & more. She tries to ignore the wrong she lets go on. She can’t” “No.” “Yes.” “Why should I believe anymore? It does me no good.” “Just allow for what you don’t know.”

I don’t know what to believe, why, or to what end, if any. This is just a pen moving because it does not know quit. I open the notebook containing these pages wishing some other work revealed itself. None does, ever. I’m bonded to myself, here I am. No answers, just quitless.

“She feels you, wishes about you.” “Does it matter? Tonight again I sleep alone, writhing, wracked.” “She is unhappy with her choices. She remembers everything too well.” “What do I do but stumble fucking on?” “Allow for what you don’t know.”

I was supposed to write “All that is, is kin” but tonight I feel nothing or little like that.

Wanting to feel again without cringing, without avoiding this shadow or that one—

I look at Rebecca. “Things aren’t what they seem” “Are they ever?”
This story can become a story again,
can try, not easy, no way out but

through, no way out but thro o o o o o

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer a dream at all. Breathe it, believe it, lose it, & again, & again.

How the world builds & rebuilds & burns & explains nothing & offers everything
& what choice but to make?

& what choice but to seek

the most dangerous dance?

& where is anything to begin but here, from here, dubious, but a song can be found in any air, any soil so
yes begin here & thrust out anywhere

til something somewhere catches, that's how someone said is the way things work—

Did I forget how to write fiction or did it cease to matter? I did it because I had to, but now what? Is it
optional?

Is there a crisis? I don't know.

No. I suppose not. Unless crisis was a substantially inspiring plotline—

“ha.”

“another”

“ha”

“another”

“ha”

“another?”

“ha”

“OK no more”

“ha”

the jukebox would be gone, or perhaps a jungle-born beast, something like that—the bar wouldn't serve
alcohol anymore—no—it's gone by that—the music would tend both toward the electronic & the tribal—with
rock still at its heart—would Luna T's still be in Hartford? Well, as much as it ever was—a Hartford I was born
in, briefly dwelled as a child, found refuge in as a young pilgrim or whatever I was then—

Or maybe it would be what it always was—a rough cut bar from some other time, or several—

I don't know.

Beauty is summoned, crowds, & chants deeper within. Beauty is guerilla, power swung about with music's
flow & endangering

no better answers than these, & walking the streets undenounced

“allow for what you don't know”

& to keep pushing, yes, by savage & twist, by fool & whatever falls inkly 'pon the page, push it on, out, in,
further, one day I et some mushrooms & fell slowly dark, the next I raised up & said liberation & danger,
creatures of the mind too tall to be tamed & surrounded for long, creatures of flame & wave, creatures that
roar & revel best by night, yes, to keep pushing, a hoary bitch sheet at a time, a word, a line, help me, I'm
drowning & swimming better than ever, to push on with fewer reasons than ever, til none, but not quite, always
the shiny one among the shades, fast as a blink, a pretty bastard, knows better than I do what I want & what I
must, knows there is no choice but to 'keep swingin' & immolatin'—

“Rebecca, do something”

lights, darks, I've several clues but to different mysteries—

“Rebecca!”

Gimmee another, one more, an extra pretty one, can she please stay this time?

“OK, but he won’t really listen”

She grabs my pen but for a word or two I keep writing—oh yes fuck pens I’ll write with my fingers & dirty city air if that’s what’s left—

“Raymond”

“No”

“Raymond”

“They always fucking leave!”

“Raymond”

“Why? Tell me—it’s not my fists—it’s not my shouts—it’s not my fucking lack of laughs—& what do they leave for? Someone simpler, saner, something?”

She says nothing. I stop. Silence does what words cannot do—leash & subdue me—

“Rebecca, just tell me why—that’s all—”

She says nothing I lean into her why will the next one leave too? No matter what I’ll do she’ll leave

Beauty is guerilla I keep thinking this—three words what comfort I possess—

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker looks at me, near & nearer. **“We contrive neither our making nor our demise. Our wills unleash haphazardly with results neither more likely happy than not. At best we flutter briefly in discontinuous outbursts of ecstasy.**

“Gather not disparate bright signs & call them a township of joy’s founding! Call not this day’s yawp of visceral immolation meaningful kindred to that day’s exceeding tide of dancing possibilities!”

“Rebecca! Now it’s the old man!”

“How can we do any peaceable imbibing here with all this yelling!”

She shrugs. “They won’t stop. It’s what they like to do best.”

Butterflies from fire, I made many of them; poems, kisses, they resembled one thing or another—songs in the forest’s native alphabet, thumping & creaking, words wrought from chips of bark, slivers of moonlight

“Raymond”

“This is what I do best, Rebbly, how I praise & mourn, how I find what matters & cradle it.”

Butterflies from fire, kisses familiar from within, I don’t remember who you are at the moment, muse disguised as girl, freaks, blinks, bombs of pain land lightly, boom when the soul is hushed, wishfully smiling—

I suppose this story could care on some other way or cease now, it wouldn’t matter—yet see it shamble on, remembrance, hope—

Strange how loneliness & hunger return together—that’s how it’s happened, & again—the feeling of wanting fiction again—a little, then a little more

all the muse within wishes is for pen blazing alone—

The muse never leaves & perpetually changes & moments clung together when her image hovers sately
are trickery—

& either learn this or not—

I think: for this story to matter again I have to write it like now & to even learn that much is big how to
write it like now—another beginning's beginning—

“Rebecca”

“Raymond”

“Why does she linger?”

“She does”

“Does it matter?”

“You’re asking?”

I don’t know it seems foolish—
yet something—something—

“Raymond”

“Rebecca”

“No. It’s Lisa.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Yes. Keep writing.”

“I can’t do it like this. It’s hard enough being in your city.”

“I’m with you. I dream you.”

“Stop. No. Too many weeks. Weeks becoming months.”

“Allow for what you don’t know.”

*I—WANT—MY—FUCKING—LIFE—BACK
IF—YOU—DON’T—WANT—ME—GET
OUT—OF—MY—FUCKING—HEAD*

“Things are not simple. They never were.”

“Lisa, if you want me to keep you in mind something needs to pass from you to me. You’ve been silent
for nearly two months.”

“You’ve felt me. You feel me now.”

“I wanted you for my wife. All of you. I was ready. But not for perpetual silence. No.”

“Just wait.”

I wouldn’t save without choice.

All is maya. Dream. Art. Play. Illusion.
Ice cream. Flavored smoke. Pathways
of Love filled with strangeness. Acceleration,
diminishment, writhing.

Few words of men impress me anymore.
 I listen little, then less if possible.
 Revelations trail empty down
 streets not worth walking.

For this story to matter its doors must need fall open, its doors must need disintegrate—

The back of Luna T's doesn't end, there is no back wall, woods, jungle, fields, on & on, it trails in & through dreamland, Dreamland, & beyond, to places neither waking nor dream, spaces that cluster into being & then drift apart as clouds do

I am in Portland, Oregon but there is no real distance between me & Luna T's all space is one place all time is now

Cement Park 1981 Hartford, Connecticut
 Coffee Time Coffeehouse 2002 Portland, Oregon

the lesson is how nothing comes or goes but changes. Things change. If even that.

The drinkers at the bar rage on merrily, always will. Mr. Bob the barman knows what has opened up, out, & can go there whenever he would—when & where the toy ideas of doll minds—but still he chooses to pour the drinks, play the radio, follow baseball or whatever happens to be going—

“Why?”

“I'm a comfort to you”

“Pain”

“I know, son.”

“*Pain*”

“I know. But you elect to eschew the bottle. That's hope any thinking mind can see”

Sometimes I'm sitting with him long imaginary afternoons & then some rhythm lingers about me with a tap, a thrum, & I turn away to listen, turn again & again, yes & then I'm somewhere else, & I play my body's dancing delights through & beyond, the drums roar choicelessly, the fire fills the sky

Rebecca is with me my truest muse I suppose shining I cannot know her save as one knows a window's view of a flying cosmos

Merry Muse draws along my wiggling torso my truest muse I suppose sometimes a red haired woman sometimes the full moon I cannot know her save as one knows the sliding within of one's desires

Others & their names accumulate my truest muse I suppose vibrating near far & I cannot know them by taste nor touch love is filled with strangeness

“Pain”

“Dance, son, & harder”

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker in war pain & skins raises a flaming spear high & cries **“Nothing less than everything to come beckons! Annihilation is a beggar's cup in a cosmic library of ideas walled by stars! Give over & up & out! Relinquish**

thine life's overflowing bounty! Call faith a damaged cup along an empty street!"

The hunger does not diminish, no matter, I sit empty alone maps too crumbled to advise

Americus looks to Grey. Nearly a nod between them not quite—nearly—

"It almost feels real again. I keep pushing at it. Something to light up this scattering living ragged, but moments—"

Faith the hard motherfucker's refuge, his hidden bauble, his something put away safely in whatever bed chamber, whatever shit job, whatever fuckedup romance

Grey laughs. "The boy has a little something still!"

I'm in another city of strangers, wiggling, sidewalks & streetlights a city's alphabets, money its blood, desire its breath

to walk a thin pathway between the Atlantic & Pacific Oceans & call this time both forgotten & pending—

All is maya. Eat some acid & find out. There are no spaces between. There is no between at all—

Rebecca smiles over at me & sketches more rapidly—

What could this story possibly fucking mean anymore? So much come & gone while it's been leafing out—what's left? What isn't?

Someone asked me for a word to sum it all up & I knew the word, my question:

Why?

And:

"So you write to me offering half friendship"

"It's what I have to give to you"

"It's what you want?"

"No"

"What do you want, Lisa?"

"I WANT YOU"

"But?"

"I don't know anymore. I feel you all the time. I want you so badly it makes me cry & I cry so hard it hurts"

"But you offer half friendship?"

"I couldn't say more"

"Why?"

"What if you said no? What if you hate me?"

"I won't reply to your note. You'll have to do better"

"Do you love me?"

"You seem to think so"

"Do you?"

"I don't know, Lisa. It doesn't matter"

"IT DOES! I NEED TO KNOW"

“NO”
 “TELL ME”
 “When you offer half friendship, I don’t give you back much”
 “Please, Raymond ☹”
 “If this matters you’ll do better.”
 “It does. It’s my whole world like it always was.”
 “Then do better. Don’t reply now. Just do better.”

I look at Rebecca. She nods.
 “What now?”
 “Wait”
 “Still”
 “Yes”
 “And? Then? What?”
 “Wait. She’ll say more.”
 “Raymond, it’s Lisa, talk to me.”
 “I don’t know what to say”
 “Be honest with me like always”
 “I don’t know what to say.”
 “Do you love me?”
 “Do you?”
 “Yes.”
 “I won’t let you hurt me again, Lisa.”
 “I know.”
 “But I won’t lie or be cruel”
 “I know”

I look at Rebecca. She says nothing.
 “What do I do?”
 “Wait.”
 “For what?”
 “She dreams you, Raymond. It’s not going away. She belongs to you but you can’t claim her yet.”
 “I’ve been waiting a long time”
 “She knows. She has too.”
 “True love waits”
 “Yes. It’s not been for nothing.”

“Raymond”
 “I love you”
 “I love you too”
 “We have to stop hurting each other”
 “I know”
 “Is it possible?”
 “I think so”
 “Do you want to be with me?”
 “Always”
 “You’re dreaming me?”
 “I always do. There isn’t anything else.”

“This is still the path from the Underworld?”
 “Yes”

I look at Rebecca.
 “She needs me still”
 “Yes.”
 “She tried not to”
 “Yes”
 “But the dreams came harder”
 “Yes”
 “So now she’s allowing them a little”
 “Yes”
 “Scared as fuck about what will happen”
 “Yes.”
 “And so I wait”
 “A little longer.”
 “Does it stay this hard perpetually?”
 “No. You’ll be surprised”

This universe a mist, a light, a shimmer. Evocation, sometimes blind. She sways & eludes, dreams harder in the nights fiercer, til need to move again overwhelms fear. Music’s dream of manifestation, sometimes harder than dancing’s best, sometimes perfect.

Fingers of fire, thighs wet for brighter kinds of knowing yet her true lover slows & slows

Love a mist, a light, a shimmer, swings near & away & a heart must keep beating despite, must wait for return, dodge the million ways of doubt,

“Yes, Raymond.”
 “I’m waiting”
 “Wait”
 “I’ve never been this deep in before”
 “Me neither. Don’t worry. I’ll protect you now”

I look at Rebecca. “Yes” she says. Yes.

I know nothing but love anymore, the rest is cracks & noise—I wait for you to arrive where I am, where you are bound—all that matters—all that ever is—you’ll get here soon—nothing else ever really mattered—just love—how it shakes wildly, grieves, persists—how its bastards within know no scripture but yes & more—

I want more. A light, a shimmer. Danger, delight. No plan, no alphabet. I watch your cheeks trance into shadows & know nothing but love. But love. Nothing but love. Love. Tonight love of you is home, want of you is cage. Other nights perhaps but tonight you bend no grass about me, you rowdy my griefs with your elsewhere, hard, soft, bitch, love. Nothing but love. Love. But love. Love. Nothing but love. Hard, soft, bitch, love.

Surrender like grey patches across a dream’s withdrawal, there is no other way, none other path toward softness, through liberation. Surrender. Do you know this yet?

“I know”

“Act”
 “I am”

Walk toward where Luna T’s Cafe used to end & discover how it does no longer. Extends on as far as one is able to perceive & possibly beyond & on.

Where & when it began no longer matters or at least does not gesture toward where tis bound. A psychedelic dream, more. I can no longer write in the same way am learning to write beyond & on, the music of else, I nod simply, what words? None, & yet always more.

Hard, soft, bitch, love.

I breathe you tonight call it fire death love—

or not know what to call it, or what it is, or who you are, or how I accelerate or stumble—

Dream simple: a rushing raving pen, a beloved to curl arms & dreams with, an ongoing task to gift the Universe from within—let flow rush giggling mad each way—

the drinkers at Luna T’s bar in near-unison toast me—at least I mean well or something like it—

A day or two pass & a vision while journeying, purging, & again she manifests—

now what, Rebecca?
 things will happen fast
 I hope so I’m tired
 don’t worry
 does she love me?
 you know the answer
 tell me
 yes she does she never stopped
 what do I do now?
 Just wait. She’s letting herself hope again.
 So what do I do?
 Write, Raymond. Do what the world demands but mostly write. Stay true.
 Are things really going to get better?

You know they are. The psychedelic vision you had was a gift & a promise. She knows how true you’ve been.

Lisa.

Raymond.

I love you.

I love you too.

I never stopped.

Neither did I.

She pulls me deeper into embrace, her teeth gleaming with hunger & fear, forgotten the where & when, we fall continuously as her fingers etch my back with possession & we lose light & lingua, I love you, I love you, love you, love you, love, love, you, you, breasts, touch, acceleration, symbiosis, bite, lick, what to do next, love you, you, love you, every day, every hour, heal, love, heal, love, hope the open hand fist, what to do next

Just wait. Hope shimmers, arises.

Nears.

More days pass.

“Rebecca”

“Yes?”

“You were right, things are going faster”

“I know. You’re scared”

“Yes. Hopeful & scared.”

“She is too but she’s clearer now. She knows she wants you, that her happiness is with you.”

“How far can my honesty go?”

“She’s waiting now but it’s OK. She’ll wait for you. She knows you’re coming, that’s all that matters to her.”

“Why am I scared?”

“This is the heart of things for you. No going back. This is why you moved 3000 miles. Your dream is coming alive.”

“How is she?”

“Better than a few days ago. She knows it’s as real for you still as it is for her. She knows.”

“It can work?”

“Yes!”

“What do I do?”

“Oblige the world when you have to. But save your core for Lisa Marie & your Art & hers. She wants to be an Artist, she means it. She’s started writing again. Raymond just be true. That’s what she believes with all her being you are, that’s what’s keeping her hopeful & going. You’re being true to her & her seeing this is where she is starting anew, building her world.”

“Lisa Marie, I love you so much!”

“Raymond ☺ I love you!”

“We build our world together again.”

“Yes. Always.”

“Every moment I think of you. There’s nothing else really.”

“I know. I’m waiting. I’m very impatient but I don’t care. I’ll wait for you. You waited for me. You never stopped.”

“I want to marry you.”

“You already did.”

“Again.”

“Yes.”

“I LOVE YOU SO MUCH ☺”

“I LOVE YOU” ☺

Luna T’s toasts & cheers again. In my own world it rains & I have to go back to job. In both I am nearing happiness.

She pulls me deeper into embrace a sudden whirl of wings outward from a bench where we lean kissing & I keep reading the word faith in my notebooks on nights now & then wheezy coinurse silly slumping bed she pulls me deeper into embrace I read the words & think: power? magick? prayer? She’s pulling me back from the flutter’s leap & here is the bench again

oh, hello

she’s smiling at me from that
direction, oh hurry oh patience

I walked into a bookstore tonight & laughed how I don’t belong—laughed how many bound there don’t belong as well

send every other page fluttering up in a desert flame smiling flickers of song

the band joins in Noisy Children since 1981 strumming percussive humming to my words another bus
we're riding another dream opened up for its deepest cries

organ, bass, guitars, drum I feel them corrode the page another bus we approach the poor part of the city
another city

she told me as I hurried wet staggering patience Raymond, remember?

Yes I will

I look at Rebecca, another day has passed.

"She's still with another but now she wants to meet me for lunch"

"Yes"

"& signs her notes 'Love Always'"

"Yes"

"Tell me"

"You know"

"Patience?"

"More than that"

"No way out but through?"

"More"

"I don't know"

"The door is open between you but it's up to you to decide how & when & if to walk through."

"I want to, but not to be crushed again."

"Why do you want to?"

"I don't know. I'm very lonely. I miss her. We built up a dream I've never forsaken."

"You need to know why it still lingers?"

"Yes. Why."

Rebecca resembles Lisa, is older by 5 years but it hardly matters. I don't know which one I'm talking to.

"Raymond"

"Yes."

"Do you love me?"

"Yes. Always."

"I love you too"

"I don't know what you want, Lisa."

"To see you. Everything."

"Me too. But you could hurt me very bad."

I stop. "But I suppose I could you too. I don't think of that."

"It's true."

"But I haven't"

"That's even worse. That's what I can't get over, you haven't hurt me ever. You love me. I don't deserve it
but I want it so badly again."

"That's work & difficulty. You'll have to decide, & I will too—"

"I think we'll decide yes"

"I hope so."

"I have more faith than you, Raymond"

"I suppose you do"

“That’s funny.”

“I’ll get you back, Raymond. I will. Nobody will stop me. I want you with me. My life is wrong. I want to be happy again. I’ll do what I have to do.

“I want you so much. My heart hurts so badly. I have to be with you. I have to do this. No more waiting.”

One day you disappeared into a dream & for a moment I stood watching then followed then ran then flew then I learned it was more than any of this it was necessary to reinvent myself & the world & I ran & then flew—

later on in another dream we met & several after that we didn’t wake, waking didn’t catch & hold & you kept disappearing & I kept following then running then flying trying to reinvent but not quite til it seemed there was nothing but dreams dreaming dreamers dreaming dreams but no you finally said

No & NO! & **NO!** you finally screamed you had no choice you had to be real again

now we look upon each other through a reality still riffing with dreams but waking in pieces & patches a new kiss burst like first dawn & then this & that Lisa Marie my wife mate muse best friend

“Yes, Raymond”

“There is no world we can live in that does not begin with us twined & true”

“Yes”

“I want & worry but you are learning how to be true in a way that will not falter”

“Yes”

“I’m scared still”

“I know. I’ll take care of that. You’ll see.”

“I love you so much.”

“I know. You’ve won me. Don’t worry. I am with you forever. Nobody could take me away again. I’m your girl. That’s all that matters.”

I look at Rebecca. She nods.

“What do I do, Reb?”

“She’s doing it. Right now. She’s making things ready for you & her to be together.”

“What do I do?”

“Trust. Be happy.”

“I’m trying.”

“She knows. She’s a shaman, Raymond. You’ve known that all along. When two shamen meet & bond no force living or otherwise can keep them divided.”

“I wasn’t sure.”

“You were, the better part of you, but you were scared.”

“I still am.”

“There’s no real reason anymore. She’s chosen you as her mate. You are both two & one now.”

“Can I help at all doing what she has to?”

“Think of her. She feels it. She feels everything between you now. Sometimes she’s dizzy in love with you. Sometimes she’s quiet & deep. It’s all the same, though, & it’s a constant.”

“Dizzy?”

“Yes. She’s a girl after all. You have no idea how deep her attraction is to you is. The other had to pretty much keep her hostage to ward you off?”

“Meaning?”

“He mesmerized her into building her own cage, stepping in it, locking it. His own power is dark & potent.”

“And now?”

“It’s broken. Never again.”

“How did it break?”

“Love. True love. She knows you never gave up. She knows you kept her better image in your heart, saved it for her to return to & retrieve.”

“What do we do?”

“For awhile not so much. Sending him away will tire her deeply. She is more tired than she will say. But she will do this. This is her fight for her soul back, that’s foremost. She will win. She knows her first reward is being with you. But she’s saving herself.”

“I just love her as I have & do?”

“Yes. That’s all she wants. She has to be her own person & win this battle for herself. But she feels you within too & that keeps her strong. He knows he’s lost, but he won’t let it not be nasty. His taste for the fight is over though. Days, a couple of weeks at the most. She’ll tell you as she wishes. Just listen.”

“Then?”

“She wants to live with you & make a sacred space. She sees already the home you & she will share. She could draw it if she wanted to.”

“What else?”

“She has strong desires for you but isn’t sure how best to pursue them. She wants to heal, to hold hands, to be safe. But she also wants your child. She also wants things so primordially erotic she can’t name them. They have no names. She yearns for a shared private place with you.”

“And the other?”

“She has withdrawn from him. There’s relief, for both of them. A part of him once loved her but he knows she can’t be what he needs. He’s tired of pushing as much as she’s tired of being pushed. There will be better days for all when he’s moved on. He took out on her his anger & bitterness. Then she refused it anymore. Now there’s little left. She let herself be hurt for hurting you.”

“Me?”

“Yes. There never was a reason she left you. She knew she had blown it, & let him & life punish her. But now she wears the green & orange bracelet you gave her & she hopes & she works on this new life she’ll have with you. She’s waking up to you like she’s always wanted.”

“Lisa”

“Raymond”

“Are you there?”

“Yes”

“Is all this true?”

“Yes”

“All this is deeper & stranger than anything previous in my life”

“I know. It’s OK. I love you.”

“I love you.”

“Good. Cuz I’m yours & you’re mine. That’s it, Raymen. Forever.”

“Yes”

“So be happy!”

“I am.”

“Good ☺”

“Yes ☺”

To play one true note. To play her very own, play it from sweat & desire, from dreams of trees acres unbound by names & borders, play it like his sudden kiss natural & righteous

play her one true note then watch it spike & spider into several, ache o yes like always but more too tonight she feels clarity flow through her, sugar & magick of freedom, she looks at me across hours & miles

you are my one true note I am yours feel this how it beats feel this how it warms quickly feel this how we curl ever among each other feel this within me you see best

one true note, feel it blow up, feel it madden, feel its glee, she increases, not hurrying, expands with knowing's ease, she looks toward me with glow & hunger what we are

greatens, call it miracle, ocean, the still bright dance of full moon, I love you, I love you, a plain kiss's ecstasy, wherefrom its roots? whereto its leaves? I love you. Plain & golden.

Freckles & soft hands, a smile that whirls around the setting square, hazel eyes, explosion of love for you a thousand times a day, marry me, marry me, we married so so long ago, every day, forever, yes, my love, yes, yes,

I want to wake in your arms
I want to name stars after your laughter
I want to watch you climb higher
 lead me leading you

This love cannot stop its rushes with the force of a being thrust from egg or womb

I worship you as resembling sacred & silly things both marry me marry me marry me marry me

Luna T's Cafe shakes as the several DJs mixing from various quadrants in the bandroom synch, synch deeper, a shift, a click, now beyond synch the stage falls away into jungle into mountain into sky

how I love you how you touch me tonight as this armchair & that voice & that lampshade wish to—how we blend like a chorus, I love you see us hurry in our thinking slowness, feel what blows up brighter carrying us whirling in song

I love you & yes & please &
 divinity & you near me
 & take me along & I watch
 you from within

& you feel this ink burning
 & you feel my heart simple
 as life wanting & wishinhg

marry me marry me marry me
 we did this moment
 again & forever

To play one true note she holds her pen doubtfully I say trust, sing. I say: be true. Be true to yourself, Lisa Marie, the gold & artist within. Be true. Trust. Sing.

Her pen dips within & commences I recede into blur into deep quiet she writes a little, now more, now seeks deeper, finds, plunges & surfaces, rises making's heat, a shiver, two, she presses long harder, yes, she remembers, this is what it's like, what she is, one true note blowing up into a thousand, yes, one true note, she's playing her one true note, ha ha ha this is what it means

too many DJs & drummers to count, a flourish & more of stars, & courting & upholding her words as they scorch forth Noisy Children licking guitars & organ & bass before & around her

I said: this woman queens my Art, muse & Artist, the Universe's gift to me & challenge, let all lift up as she rises

tribal beats, electronic pathways & tunnels, rock rhythms & muscle, & my pen a black comet weaving & tickling—serve her, companion her, learn as her words unfurl, learn, listen

human suns swerve & move into latent spaces—another word, another—serve her, love her—another, another—

In my greatest acceleration, as I push harder, deeper, whisper's touch, roar's thrust, will I ever wholly uplift you, protect you invisibly, thrill even your dream of me, enough, will it ever be enough?

light soft as flaming wax, these words scrawled harshly into fog, I approach you, through madness & magick, anguish & anticipation, shedding sinews & blue fancies, approach you toward a better dance to be, our love gleaming & crackling with liberation's happy rage, forgetting your name, my own, the whatever of human history, grey tales of heave & hunger

better to know nothing but love with you, to know nothing else at all, you keep writing, words let forth in flourish & squeak, I approach you love as you approach me, questions hung from dripping branches, answers as many as my dreams of your freckles, beat, beat, beat, many's many, approach you with words of feathers & chords of glass, nearing you, yes—

“It's OK, Raymen”

“I can't say it's big enough for you, Lisa”

“You do. I feel it. Now. I feel what you're always writing”

“I think I worship you through Art & something more wordless”

“I know. Like spells.”

“Is it OK? I don't know how else to be anymore”

“Yes, it's fine. I want to do it too. I'm still learning.”

“You know it all within, though.”

I look at Rebecca, stumbling.

“It's OK” she says surrounded by her painting now globs of color awaiting her will “You're getting it. She feels how you are getting it. It pleases her, that you won't let up, want to know better.”

I nod a bit.

“Raymond” she says “Be true. Trust. Sing.”

Sitting mere miles from you I feel your movements, tribes them continuous flow, feel your warmth, your blood, my blood, feel what connects us, magick, words, laughter—empathy, music—& I say I love you to fill spaces along the circuit between us—knowing it will return to me in your voice—I send continuously & receive—we speak to each other in song unruptured—I say I love you & it flutters to you & I receive I love you & it whips through me & I know no other way to be this is our joined am, this is what our is is—the words kissing this page each one for you our am this is we are, this is truth and shard of truth for no matter the pages there is more there is what can be spoken of over & over, & other things which do not pass through language on way to truth—

I tell you: I love you, Lisa Marie Zent

You tell me: I love you, Raymond Soulard Jr.

Wiggle, grasp, climb, stand. The Cafe window shows me a wet street on Christmas Eve 2002 & this place is called Heaven. Everywhere, Heaven. The damp street sometimes trafficked & Heaven is on slow grooving waves higher & lower faces come & go & I sit reading a book when not painting these pages in black-colored notes—

I want to bring you to Luna T's Cafe, to Bags End, to the varied places my notebooks have become soil & sun for—I want to see your wedding ring—the one I gave you—within my hand's grasp—you are my mate I am yours—whatever others are there is the am we are, the is we have forged—I believe this—I ask:

Universe protect my Lisa Marie &
 bring our love to greater fruition
 Universe protect my Lisa Marie &
 bring our love to greater fruition
 Universe protect my Lisa Marie &
 bring our love to greater fruition
 Universe protect my Lisa Marie &
 bring our love to greater fruition
 Universe protect my Lisa Marie &
 bring our love to greater fruition
 Universe protect my Lisa Marie &
 bring our love to greater fruition

I say it, I sing it, wondering at what these stories once were & what they've become—how this story 243 pages, 2 years & 3 months along is not who it was when I began it—Noisy Children I've released to live as they will—I have released them all—they stay near because I wish but not will—

there is no book such as this one & it is less than half done—could very easily take years more to compose—years & miles—I only have one necessary reader anymore & I wonder when she will read this—what she will think—what she will say—tonight my longing for you deepens, Lisa, is that possible? Yes, my true love, I feel it—the great green power of love—mmmmmm

Flow just flow teach me how I only know pen & longing, cavern & rhythm, all else I fear, flee, all else opens out & collapses

Her painting follows her as she walks deeper & deeper into Luna T's I follow bodiless & questions, teach me how, flow just flow, not sure who I'm following or why

but always like this way imagining guru shaped in pink flash & curves & pursuit she accelerates & I do too

I don't know how or why just pen & longing, cavern & rhythm, follow her deeper she lets me near cannot help but let me near the pressure to release to me greatens unto yowl

I love you spoke back & forth & how what hardens & how what smooths & slicks I love you spirals back & forth & there is cry for possession for deeper groans of touch I want her to blindly cry my name say it I belong to you SAY IT I BELONG TO YOU SAY IT AGAIN I BELONG TO YOU RAYMOND YOU SHARE ME AS YOU WISH

I'll burn it all down every fucking notebook kill til I am killed die torn several pieces from each other say it again

I LOVE YOU I'M YOURS YOU SHARE ME AS YOU WISH

sometimes a jungle, sometimes a beach, her painting swishes & merges & say it again to every beat of your heart say it new & ever is this how to flow just flow is this how?

A night of rainy talk with a luminous tramp singer & he tells me something that drifts along with me a day later perhaps beyond he says desire hooks remains that one possesses, is possessed, desire blows up within, resonates of its own accelerating energies—

“Raymond”

“Yes”

“You worry too much”

“I worry a lot. Comes of living too close to the margins, sleeping alone night after night, wondering if it will ever cease”

“Your time is due”

“Yes. It is. Are you Rebecca or Lisa?”

“Yes. You knew that.”

“I suppose I did.”

“What can I do?”

“Stop leaving me in silence for days. Stop leaving me with my speculations.”

“I love you. I’m going to be with you. Why are you so worried?”

“I don’t have amnesia”

“Meaning?”

“All these months of pain & rejection, over & over.”

“That’s over. I know I want you. I’m not fighting it anymore”

“You won’t stop me stressing til things are substantially better”

“They already are!”

“I’m still waiting.”

“I am too.”

“Just contact me.”

“I will.”

“Do you feel this between us?”

“Yes. It scares me. We’re crazy, Raymond.”

“I know. I like it.”

“I do too. Be patience please.”

“I want you as my wife. There’s no retreat from that.”

“I know. I remember too.”

“I need your truth.”

“You have it.”

“Now, tonight. Stop making me wait”

“I will.”

“Who do you belong to?”

“You”

“Who claims your heart above all?”

“You.”

“Who calls you wife now and always?”

“You.”

“Say it”

“I am your wife now & always”

“Call me husband”

“Husband”

“Who protects you?”

“You.”

“Who do you belong to?”

“I belong to Raymond.”

“Who have you given your heart?”

“Raymond”

Say it

I've given my heart to Raymond.

Call me.

Yes.

Make gone that which keeps you from me.

Yes. Fuck me.

No.

Fuck me!

No. Not until you are mine in the view of all.

Raymond ☹

Do it. Whose bed do you wish?

Raymond's.

Whose arms do you wish?

Raymond's.

Whose touch?

Raymond's.

Where?

Everywhere.

Get what's between us gone. Now.

I will. I swear.

I love you.

Please don't leave me.

Do what you swear.

I will. Please don't leave me.

Get what's between us gone. *Now*.

I will. I love you.

I love you. But this period ends. Then you sleep in my arms.

Yes. That's what I need. Help me.

It's simple. End it. Now. Then come to me. I'm waiting.

I will.

Who do you belong to?

You.

Who?

YOU!

WHO?

You, Raymond forever.

Yes.

I'll do it. I swear.

Do it or you will lose me.

Raymond ☹

Do you want that?

No ☹

Do what's right. One way or another.

I want you so bad.

Then it's time.

Please don't leave me. Don't say it at all. I'll do it. I swear.

Good.

Open conjugation pen to paper let they & that between us fall away that our path is plain.

None deterring us labors righteously & must stand aside I press & pray the Universe make this so.

To the Universe I pledge my devotion to healing & loving she who is my mate, all Nature as I am able, & this world in its troubles & fortunes. Open conjuration pen to paper: let what wrongly claims cease & pass elsewhere.

I beg thee, Universe: harm nobody in cleansing & opening path between me & my Beloved. Pity ignorance & selfishness thrust it painlessly aside. My pledge is our pledge: to teach, to heal, to love. To sing, greater & greater, to become profounder instrument for Thine goodly Songs.

Universe, we choose to serve by Singing.

Open conjuration I love this woman with all my heart, & she loves me with all hers, we wish to contrive from our shared life, our shared bed. Let us join in love & healing, be greater than our mere separate sufferings. Please, Universe, I humbly ask Thee for our reunion & deepening.

Let us reunite & learn how to heal & love, how to give to others of our great good energy—let me kneel before my Beloved & submit my love to her tending—let her receive my love & pledge my healing—let this be so & true, Universe.

Open conjuration I ask that what interferes be pushed aside to seek other ends, let what impedes find other concerns & goals. Universe I ask thee to bring my Beloved Lisa Marie Zent to me & bless us & keep us that we may serve thine ends & each other. I ask this with my hope & humility both. I ask that my Beloved join me & be my Wife as always desired, & we may begin to begin again. Thank you.

“Rebecca”

“I’m here”

“How do I do better?”

“Just do”

“*How*”

“Faith. Act in faith.”

“Am I OK?”

“You’re trying.”

“I feel stretched to breaking”

“You’re not. Not even close.”

“Does she feel me?”

“More than ever.”

“Silence?”

“It won’t last.”

“Bad things?”

“In a way. Remember: you’ve done nothing wrong. Be true.”

“I’m flailing”

“You’re not.”

“Raymond.”

“Lisa.”

“I need you to believe.”

“It hurts.”

“I know.”

“A friend says see other girls.”

“You won’t”

“No.”

“What do I DO?”

“Be true to me. Like always. Our reunion is pretty close.”

“Rebecca”

“Yes”

“Will things keep getting worse?”

“No.”

“Just like that? No?”

“Right”

“The hours crawl”

“Yes. There’s no point you writing this right now.”

“Why?”

“You have your answers: she loves you, you’re going to see her. Things will begin to obviously improve. You’ll see.”

I nod, & stop writing.

“OK, Rebecca, you were right”

“No, you were”

“And now?”

“Acceleration. You know that.”

“Now?”

“Yes.”

“Raymen”

“Lisa”

“You’re OK?”

“I’m trying.”

“Good. Now most of all. It’s happening & I want to make sure of you. When I jump you have to catch me.”

“Yes.”

“And this time I’m staying with you.”

“Yes. I love you.”

“I’m going to take care of you. Don’t worry. My dream is going to happen.”

“of us?”

“Of course. All that matters. Well, the most important. You’re my husband, I have to take care of you & me first.”

“Yes.”

“Just catch me. I’ll make the rest happen. I’m ready.”

“Rebecca.”

“Raymond”

“ ”

“It’s OK. It’s been hard. Keep riding.”

“ ”

“Yes. I know. Just do what she says: catch her.”

“She tells me to relax.”

“Yes.”

“When she’s in our bed, all the covers pulled over to her side. Making me sing to her.”

“Yes. I know. It’s happening.”

“ ”

“Just catch her. She knows what she’s after. She’s been planning toward this her whole life.”

“ ”

“Just catch her. Say it.”

“Just catch her.”

“Just catch me, Raymen.”

“I will.”

Sitting at Luna T’s Cafe bar, reading *Dens Irae* by Philip K. Dick & Roger Zelazny.

“Dick. Stephen King,” Americus smiles some.

“Neruda too. Books on conspiracy theory. Psychedelics & rock music. The 60s.”

He nods.

“I have to prepare for her. That means money as much as my heart.”

Nods again. Sips his Guinness. I have cola.

Mr. Bob faces us, settles himself, as rarely, on a stool on his side of bar. “It’s hard, son. You invent a life as much from money as dreams.”

I nod.

“She’s worth it. Do you understand this?”

They’re all staring at me.

I nod. “I know.”

“She loves you. She isn’t kidding. Forget her age. Her love is a woman’s.”

“Yes.”

“It scares you.”

“Yes.”

“Yet it’s all you ever wanted. You *asked* for this. You conjured before you knew you could.”

“I did.”

“She loves you no matter what, & she is fast approaching you. But your fear is man’s fear, old, primordial. A man protects his woman, his family.”

“She’s protecting me too, even now in ways I can barely sense.”

“Yes but there is an aspect to all of this you must do. Your worth as a person in your world has been something you’ve long doubted.”

“Yes.”

“She is preparing a nest for you & her. It’s money, part of it, she accepts this more easily than you. But she knows it’s more.”

“What then?”

“There’s a place within her only you have seen, & only in glimpses. Not a garden but . . . a wilderland. Hunger, wound, joy, want. When a woman prepares this for a man he is her chosen one. Our kind of words lessen, diminish nearer this place. You have never been so chosen before, none of your previous women, each of them eventually withdrew. This woman . . . she tried too . . . unlike the others, it failed. She learned this. She chooses you by will & compulsion both. Likewise, you have chosen her. The two of you are already mates. All that you will ever share has begun to flourish.”

I look around the bar. Rebecca—Lisa Marie that is—each, both—sits next to me—listening too—

“I woke at dawn yestermorn & prayed to be forgiven my life that I could freely & fully love my mate. Forgiveness was granted—I was told to go love her—give her everything—try to be happy—”

Listening.

“My humility has—my lack of it rather—has kept me from doing what I must. My father struggled with this too but he provided for his family. My mother stoozy by him & helped—they succeeded—but together—”

I look at Lisa Marie—you, tonight, my love, so near—

“Once I nearly married a woman who was like my mother but wrongly—she was my mother’s fear, bitterness—”

“I vowed to triumph on my escape—& prayed for a different kind of woman—a partner, a lover, a friend, a muse—”

I look deeper at you. “I wanted the best of my parents’ union—the refusal to quit, the loyalty—”

“What I longed for was to have a woman who would inspire me to keep swinging as my mother inspired my father—to free myself of the pain of their lives but not the lesson of what they accomplished—

“That’s why you. I feel in us power hardly yet unleashed, love wild & furious to manifest, joy, laughter, hunger—

“We have what is needed to survive it all”

“Yes, Raymond”

“I’ve never had a woman like that”

“I know. I’m her. You belong to me. The rest don’t matter. For either of us.”

“I need you.”

“I need you.”

“Come to me.”

“I am.”

Serve the muse, teach her, elude her, be hers, lay out the beasts of if & maybe & let her slay them, serve her by saying: dance for my music alone or I will cease playing.

Nod to the band & they roar upwards swirl by trigger, now point upward & the moon drips down from overhead, this is what it means to possess power, to conjure openly

dance for me alone or dance for nothing—

Paint to the stars & they detonate at my word . . .

LOVE!

I can’t write as I used to & I don’t know how I’ll write soon—know nothing—

Dance for me alone, dance wild, submit to my song to blow it up greater, submit to my song to have it, have my song, become it, become me,

Dance for me, dance for my fingers & eyes, dance for this hungry soul within your own

Approach me with love & submission as I approach you with need & humility

I’m scared, Raymond. I’m scared of everything.

Cross the line, Lisa. Jump it I will catch you. Jump toward your life as you’ve tried to jump to your death.

I’m afraid.

You have no choice.

Dance for me alone & see how this dance manifests you, see how your beauty supernova surreality how the shine stella mania is your soul new, uncovered, go, yes, say yes

Noise Children: Rock harder!

Moon: Tremble!

Stars: Be True!

I’m scared.

Do you trust me?

Yes. I don't know. Yes.

I'm waiting. My arms are out for you. Your life awaits. You know it does.

You'll catch me? You swear?

With all I am, with all I will ever be.

I want you so badly.

I'm waiting.

Serve the muse another level here as I strive to know, love the trees shaking by hands unseen, the trust we call wind.

The coins I lack, the woman my bed lacks, & my pen growls & hurries on, the knowing I strive toward in rhythm & chime—

mercy & release, the dream toward a nearing day, a bed of sunlight, a woman golden repose in dreaming I sit here now in a plastic Cafe & etch & awl onward

I compose songs from questions & lack

Love sticks hard. We need to keep breathing.

“Yes” She says

“Tonight I am desperate. There's no reason left for me to write. None. I'm empty.”

“No, you're not. I'm with you more than ever. Your faith is true & right”

“I am lost”

“I am coming to you”

“Help me, Lisa”

“I will”

“Are you happy?”

“No. I will be.”

“How?”

“You. Me. Us.”

“I don't know what or how.”

“Keep breathing. Be true.”

Keep breathing. Be true. Love sticks hard. I want to marry you. I don't know how to stop loving you.

“Don't stop. Ever.”

“I don't know anything.”

“I love you. I know things seem bad but I love you. Nothing has changed in my heart, Raymond.”

“Where are you?”

“I don't know.”

“Find me.”

“I know. I have to.”

Love sticks hard. Faith, furious to make the world right at last.

“I will find you. I swear.”

“Rebecca”

“It’s all true. The hurt & the hope. All of it. The ready to jump. The hesitation. The good presses toward you.”

“No.”

“Yes. There’s nothing left but submission. This your dream. Here it’s coming”

What burns in you is beauty, Americus nods, the band lifts off seamlessly, I can’t cry for what I do not mourn, lifts off & the sound so heavy the audience raises up with them, what lives broadens & greens, the drinkers listening from the Cafe’s bar through propped open door nod & sip harder, I burn more confessions partway to paper than I’ll ever be able to reckon, the drinkers ignore the TV & radio & jukebox & world beyond that other door upon hearing Noisy Children lift, the world is worth loving but what a cost in doing so!

No song yet just a rock conflagration rising on a slow & slow bass & beat, a gyrating float through green & brown & black

She looks across me within me & smiles, I call it possession but this word whimpers & slips away

Rebecca nods at me: a happenstance of knowing.

Americus suddenly at the microphone sings fist opening out:

“Here comes old Flattop he comes
grooving up slowly he got juju
eyeballs he want holy roller
he got hair . . . down . . . to his knees
got to be a joker he just do
what he please . . . ”

Steps back, something else happens, some other song or way, it’s easy, a jam invisibly tight arriving lustrous constant

I love you charred figure changing goldensong love you / and / and / is 3 boom shakalaka boom shakalaka she squeezes me again & listens—

what burns in you is beauty &
I submit again in a new way—
always another new way exists—

*“The nature of things is in the habit
of concealing itself”
Heraclitus, Fragment 54*

Philip K. Dick asks: if time can turn into space, can space turn into time?

Americus nods again & the music hovers suddenly in space I feel her wedding bond about me tonight as despair sits near me dank coffeehouse again

I look at Rebecca, she sighs, there's nothing she can add to the hope she's offered—we walk deeper into Luna T's Cafe, holding hands—

“Where is she?”

“Returning from a familiar dark place”

“When?”

“Soon”

“How will I know?”

“You feel it already”

“What can I do?”

“Work. Wait. Stay near. She'll find you. She always does.”

A field, night, full moon, surrounded by trees—dancers around a fire, drummers—we all ate sacraments, smoked others—

Rebecca sways, leading me, I let her diminish—I know this place & time—years & miles away yet near still—nearer lately—

I died here, Lisa, danced & died & was reborn with the light—my travels to the dark place passed through here—

I know you can hear me within you—calling for you, saying I love you over & over—

I feel you, how you cry & hurt, struggle, wonder where you are, wonder where I am—lately I've felt like you are returning again too—like you once more feel my presence—

my days have been difficult too but I say to you: faith love hope, love most of all—you're alive, you're returning—

I am waiting.

Someone I loved & relinquished long ago came to me & said: don't let it go this time, & again regret infinitely—& you came to me another day & said our story is bigger than this moment—

two weeks now silence—a month since I've seen you—

I am true.

“I envisioned her at dawn, instructed her to banish the intruder & come to me after”

“She heard”

“Will she?”

“Yes.”

“The world tempts me to leave my suffering”

“The world is less”

“I know.”

“You suffer for the love you've always sought”

“When?”

“Soon”

“Rebecca—”
 “This is Lisa Marie”
 “Come to me”
 “I am”
 “Please”
 “Yes”
 “No more waiting”
 “I know.”

Mostly the dread of a late night room, no face nearby, voice’s rhythm & music, smoking TV dope til I near passing out, sometimes a book if pages found crazy enough to understand—no phone messages—no friendly sounds—how I run to this room from the strange city & how I feel choked nearly upon arrival—

chanting hope’s choiceless spell—day by day by day—with no answers, chanting—

less & less able to talk to faces even as I desire them—what would I say? I am suffering for a love unending? who does that? what for? I do.

in a crowded bus breathe the loneliness—feel empathy in silence—stumble on—do the work—chant hope’s choiceless spell—

chant hope’s choiceless spell—believe while scarring despair worsens—believe while faces about me diminish to things—believe as affliction, as peril, as remaining hope

when the heart is breaking & the dream tattered annihilation murmurs its luring music—

I resist—

By steps taken one two a dozen by fool’s work for a pittance done, by pen’s fitful long-lived prayer

by ragged sleep—by roaring dream

last night smoke filled the kitchen, upstairs, Mrs. Freeman’s boarding house, I dealt with it, held open a door, waited, checked, checked again—

I resist—I believe—it hurts—

this story begs for more—a beagle sits in my lap quietly—a wheelchaired man waits—the band plays quietly—

Rebecca nods “Believe. You have no choice. You have no other hope.”

I offer you again & always my freakish heart & you again & always accept & offer your freakish heart to me in return & again tonight I sleep alone with our love shit fuck it’s true you love me do

Rebecca giggles.

“Lisa Marie”
 “Raymen Marie”
 “Wife”
 “Husband”
 “I believe tonight”
 “I do too”

“I feel your witchy presence”

“I feel yours”

“Me a witch?”

“As much as me. Our spell is mutual, Raymond.”

“I didn’t think of it that way”

“It’s true. You know me deep down, I feel you. That’s why I’m yours forever.”

“What now?”

“It’s time for me to claim you. I’m more free that I was but until I am with you I am not totally free.”

“Being with me.”

“I choose you.”

“I choose you.”

“All that matters is this, Raymond. I had to leave home to start getting free, but I’m not totally free yet.”

“I’m part of your freedom.”

“Yes, of course. Your love doesn’t hurt me. Everybody else had. You’re the one. I found you by staying alive. Now I want to keep you.”

“I didn’t give up, Lisa. It was hard but I just couldn’t.”

“I know. You love me totally like I love you.”

“What do I do?”

“Don’t stop loving me totally. Ever but especially now. Stay in Portland. Be as patient as you can be. I’m taking care of all this, Raymond. Just be ready for me. I’m going to make it good for us again.”

“And him?”

“I knew you would ask. He’s pathetic, Raymond. It won’t be long. I want my true Valentine with me.”

“You mean all this?”

“Yes. I love you, nobody else. Let me do all this the way I have to.”

I offer you always & again my freakish heart & you always & again accept & offer me your freakish heart in return & again tonight I sleep alone swathed in our love as you near me hungrier than ever.

I don’t know if anyone will read these pages, make anything of them at all. Once this was a story, part of a series of stories I’d been writing since about 1981, that’s 22 years ago now. I can’t regard it as much of anything anymore save that on it goes for I have little else left. Fiction can near fact til it crosses over, is, in fact, fact.

Somewhere there is still a story here—of a bar, a group of people, some ideas about human living & reality, but mostly no. Mostly it’s just me now, approaching 39 years old the hard way, stubborn & struggling. Unwilling to let go my dignity or dreams.

I sat here watching a father & his daughter, she about 4, talking & laughing, & I know I can’t have that now maybe ever, someone dependent on me.

All I really have, that’s mine, that matters, are my notebooks, the press of pen to paper. A project called *6 x 36 Nocturnes*, nearing 3 years in the making, nearing done. More difficult because nearing done, heavy with its history, its thrust. Will be 360 poems when done, is now just 26 short of that goal. Nothing else concretely keeps me alive.

This story twines with that poetry book—but this story is no story & does not keep me alive; it doesn’t matter.

I am dead. Not yet. But I feel its tug. Once people held me back, a few years ago, the thought of loved ones grieving me. Now they don’t. I’m near my end of believing in human love. Not that I deserve what I want or need. But I do; everyone does.

I’m lost yet on I walk. A dream got me, has me yet. I believed; I still do. I still believe.

Loved ones have done what they could; it’s not enough. My mind cogitates how to keep going anyway; it’s what minds do. To finish my poetry book.

Who would read 271 pages of this junk to arrive at this paragraph?

I came here for you, Lisa, my true love, my angel, & these many days near but not with you have corroded me, sheared my faith, what remains bright & small, a tangled remain of hope & diminishment

I fight the dwindling—I weaken—I fight more—

a buzz, a spark, hesitant notes on a piano—

a world, of land sea & sky, beyond that of men & women

breathe slow, slower, glimpse it, its velvet moments & chanting rain, keep breathing, for release, & connection, keep breathing

More colors. Wilder music. The beginning of a new freedom. Near me, true love. Bells within ringing of fear & freedom, near me. Let our pending world begin.

Universe I pray you give her the trust she needs, let her cross deeply enough into faith, let her hope flare—

Universe, I pray you press me on however hurtfully into deeper faith—I stagger about its margins—I long not for the dull of capitulation but the fierce of vigil

Universe let us let this new world begin—the heart is its own most fell haunting—no more—let the worst diminish just enough

Noisy Children strums & taps softly—
was I speaking?

This faith let it nudge greater, enough & slightly more—Universe I pray for enough & slightly more

a pause, awhile, a rusty drunken Native American hiccups & mourns his mother, & something further, I listen then lose into old poems, pain so fueling aliveness so much our loves we grant its honored dwelling within, among, & between us—

It continues, Lisa, I don't know how or why—we—continue—

Rebecca

No, it's Lisa Marie. Talk to me.

The man who took you finally harmed you enough for authorities to move in.

Yes.

What can I do for you?

Stay in Portland. Love me like you always do. Like you want to. Like I want.

What do you want?

You. Us.

If you reject me I'm leaving.

I won't ever. I swear.

I want a life again.

I do too.

Lisa,

Raymond, it's OK. You waited, you believed in me. I'm coming back finally. You better take care of me.

Find me, Lisa, tonight.

I will.

Make me believe. I want to.

I will.

I want to.

I know.

Rebecca

"Yes"

Do I keep believing?

"What do you think?"

I have no choice.

Rebecca

Raymond

Who's this?

Me (giggle)

Me who?

Yes.

What next?

You know.

I don't.

Yes you do.

We meet?

Yes.

We kiss?

Maybe (giggle)

Sigh.

What's wrong?

I want this Real. I love you. Why aren't we in touch???

We are. Don't worry.

There had better be nobody else.

There isn't. I won't do that again. I hated it.

Valentine's day is two days away.

I know.

Don't forget me.

Raymen! I'm not forgetting you. I love you

I need to hear it. Lisa. I mean this

I know. I'm sorry it's slow. Things are hard. I'm not giving up though. I will have you & Destiny both.

Still both?

Yes. That's what I want.

—

What?

When is our time? When does the good finally happen for us??

It will. It is. Don't worry. I love you ☺
 I love you too.
 I love you more, Raymen. I always have.

"What can faith offer to no money for rent, & no word from beloved"
 "Love what & who you can't help"
 "& suffer on & on"
 "There are things at work for you, Raymond. All's not as it seems"
 "When do I see this bluntly?"
 "When you are not looking, as always"

A rampage. A gleam. A way. Words again but no truths, no answers. Life busts forth many world. I call none home save pen on paper.

Rebecca says Don't look back; I think of someone dreaming me, or someone else. I think my pen will only continue if I let go & love forth.

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker looks at me. **"You have no filled cup of truth to mull. You scramble from blackness to blackness."**

I nod. He doesn't continue.

Rebecca says Nothing is over though it might seem so—remember but don't look back—

"Paint—let me watch you"

Something perhaps coalesces, I feel tentative, barely able. A rampage stumbling. A gleam distracted. A way but invisible.

She paints slowly, nothing yet assembling.
 "Maya" I say. She nods; that helps.

"Nothing ends in this moment or the next."
 she accelerates, now two hands painting.

Talk to me, Raymond.
 Say what, Lisa?
 What you feel.
 Lost. Empty. Angry. Wishing I could take you away.
 Why can't you?
 You'd say no.
 Would I?
 Engaged again?
 Do you believe it's real?
 Not really.
 You're right.
 Lisa, I can't trust anything anymore.
 If you want to say it, do.

I will.
 I know.
 Don't kill yourself, Lisa.
 Don't you either.
 I love you.
 I love you, too. I'll let you know.
 Nothing's over. You know that.

Serve the muse third level. Hard as fuck choiceless how to persevere. My path points back to origins. My path passes through these again. My path goes elsewhere thereafter. Serve the muse. I don't know how. On it goes.

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer a dream at all.

If someone else loves me—
 “No, Raymond”
 If someone else dreams of me—
 “No. Please.”
 I'll not suffer like this unending, Lisa. Near a year of it.
 “I'll find you. Promise. I will.”
 Time dwindles, Lisa. Relief wails higher.
 “I'll find you.”
 I want to be happy again.
 “I do too!”
 Choose me bluntly or lose me to another who will.

I sleep lately so hard dreams don't crack open. Sleep is medicine. Travel. The oblivion of nature, mulled.

“Wait for me, Raymond”

Choose me bluntly & soon. Choose the world still firing between us. Your own healing. Love that does not crush.
 “I know.”
 This time I will go.
 “NO!”
 Realize what you're doing.
 “I do. I'm scared.”
 I'm going. You can come. That's all I can say. Or stay. Build your life from what you have.
 “Raymond! ☺”
 There's no length left for indecision.
 “I want you!”
 Act, Lisa.

New dream, bigger dream, no longer a dream at all. A novel, a confession, a mess. On it goes, as I have nothing else.
 “I've always been in love with you
 I guess you've always known it's true
 You took my love for granted

Why oh why?
 The show is over
 Say goodbye . . .
 Say goodbye . . .
 Say goodbye . . .”

—a woman’s smooth melancholia as I sit here wondering how nothing ends but I can’t keep being so utterly grimily sad—

Tonight has happened before. Running on rims in some quiet desperate plastic joint
 the hustle to keep the sacred wildly live within—balance coins & hearts & the freaks many moments
 explode with—
 to believe without a shrine easily kneeled before
 trees women music
 feelings resembling ideas
 full moon met again & again

hope blasts through me—I was singing & writing & suddenly a ragged group of thoughts shined singly
 within toward elsewhat—when—where—I don’t know—

Nothing ends in this moment, yes, & everything widens illogically but OK pretty pretty pretty—

Someone someday may read these words—I hope so—I hope these pages travel on to impossible places
 & moments, to hardly imagined hands—

keep turning the corners—keep slaving for news of the how & why—sometimes hurry sometimes slow

A new being, rising. I call it love, the word familiar, but this not, this thing in me before me, what is it? It
 afflicts me, but claims to teach, to know.

A generosity at times angry, furious with the world for its cower, its insistence on the mythologizing of
 wounds, called history. Celebration of wounds, called religion. Tradition of wounds, called politics.

You were real, weren’t you? You loved me, yes? You remember me? You’ll remember me? I keep asking
 these kinds of questions but they aren’t the right ones. Remembrance is wound too. The new being rising
 within demands more of me. Demands I remember, & hope, work but not expect. Demands I gather &
 cohere.

Work but not expect. Remember & hope.

The new being within is power I hardly know. Music, silence, generosity, wonder.

“Rebecca”

“No. It’s Lisa. Talk to me.”

“I have to go. I want you to come with me.”

“I will. Do you still want me?”

“Yes. Why?”

“I feel like shit. I hate life. I hate everything.”

“I love you.”

“I hurt you. I hurt my beautiful Raymond.”

“Be with me now. We can save everything”

“I love you so much.”

“Lisa, it can be good again.”

“You swear?”

“Yes. But we have to start somewhere.”

“Connecticut?”

“Yes. I think it’s a good idea. A way from all the drama.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Pack your bags. Call me. Take the bus to Seattle. We’ll go from here.”

“You promise?”

“Yes. I’m true. You know that.”

“I’m so tired. I want to sleep in your arms, Raymond. I want happiness. I want you.”

“Pack. Call. Bus. Come with me. Stay with me as long as you can. Want.”

“Forever, Raymond. That’s what I want.”

“Me too. Now is time.”

Rebecca.

She wants you, Raymond. Nothing will stop her. Nothing. You’ve told her what you have to. Let her do the rest.

Real this time?

Yes.

I hope so.

It is real, Raymond. This is Lisa Marie using your pen. It’s real. I will come with you. I have to. I can’t live like this anymore. I love you. I’m coming.

This universe a mist, a light, a shimmer, wish resembling remembrance, hunger ever by blood’s chant & fingers’ chasings, help me, help me, I see trees everywhere & they encourage, call me neither the fool nor the guru.

help me, help me, I keep feeling as I do, love for this pen scurrying, for a freckle faced woman-child who carries the best of me about, whose small hands I long for more than my own ceaseless continuance

help me, Universe, bring me her & all it will weight in my life ever after—bring me that I may vow fidelity in bringing her soup & chocolate, pledge faith in kisses small & embraces at the ready

She is my Art, who my Art has become she breathes my Art is moved into rhythms & melodies, songs of & for her. This love afflicts me without solve, door, else.

A mist, a light, a shimmer, & my hereon unimagined, my wish toward pathless wood

help me Universe she possesses me I no longer know how or why to live otherwise.

I cannot stop singing, the melodies keep bursting out, the rhythms persistent play me, hooks of making contrived as well from my pain as my delight—more & more, Art fuels my animation striding equal with bread blood & breath. Answers to my pining firm as stars but sometimes meteors, comets, sometimes craft metallic or poesy derived—day follows day follows day—the nights consume me at one end, new birth me at the other—

is it love anymore, Lisa, or myth? Is it mine or still ours? I cannot know certainly & the world drags me perpetually across its rutted scape, & how can I deny it drags you too? Would that you could say: I love you or I don’t or save me or let me go—but you don’t know, do you? All chorus badly in your gaze toward me—

I cannot stop singing as our sky does not clear, as I think: am I alone here? Is she beside me even now?

“Hey, man, are you against the War?”

“Young pup, there is nothing but war on this befouled mortal rock”

“How does it feel to have a president who is a lunatic?”

“Our Lord’s myriad ways constitute greater lunacy than all else”

“Would you sign our petition to bring war crime charges against the American leaders?”

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker raises his cane meaningfully toward the slim youth crusted in rings & ink designs. Said youth retreats agreeably, & quickly.

I call now a path, this brightly greet joint a path, the music strums the air with sugar, shaped laughter, & I think of you what of me you possess still, what remains beyond this, & love, a new being risen says I cannot tick or doodle my way to answers, that ticking & doodling leaves many unhappy they know not why, that I am gifted with the wish to do otherwise but the way I must make from my days, memories, dreams, where I scatter my love, on & on—

I look at old poems & how like a puppet I loved—like a puppet—I don’t know what I know now that is better but the ticking & doodling is no longer enough, not a way, not even a hint—

how to live, how to live, how to live & why—leaving its time as a question behind, & now elsewhere—

Things change? Yes and no and both and neither and both or neither and yes or no and and and

I loved like a puppet—now something else—somewhere else—here, hereon—a new being, arisen, rising—

I say: I no longer know, am slipping away from what I was but I don’t know what comes—the blankness fills every moment & I try to keep along—

something like a revelation or more in shards: moving me? with me?

I cannot see love possessing as failure even as it evolves—expand, diminish, change, & again, & again—I loved like a puppet, ticking & doodling—

Perhaps I’ll not sit here after tonight for years—so I should say goodbye—this night its laughing female voices & questing chessgames & endless lovely rocksong air—but I cannot think goodbye it’s not enough—feels like ticking & doodling—like a puppet’s stupid great gesture—

new being, rising, is taking me through here & the lesson is not goodbye—again I watch the blankness fill up each moment—tap my foot, pay close mind, but—nothing further—as much of this moment, & this one, & this one, & on as I can—I fail to doodle & tick—at least that much—other than puppet, OK—

some mushrooms et a week ago & I saw all as illusion, again, something constructed by every creature in every form animate & inanimate: we all participate in making the world. We all touch all the time, affect each other all the time. The world is what we make it in our clashes & our harmonies. Nothing more or less than this. The world is one & many, a live infinite mist shaping & shaped-time & space given no order or examination—each connected to all, sizeless, ceaseless—

What use to think this way? I don’t know. Beyond ticking & doodling, not a puppet, at least something other, but where & what & why? I feel myself falling back, clunk. From somewhere else to then. Clunk. Ouch.

submission release acceptance
 liberation resistance etc etc
 words: shed them, burn them, muzzle
 them, mute them, la la la la

truth radiates—can be felt, received
but neither grasped nor kept—

Many eyes have passed leaving streaks of memory—eyes, trees, music, pain—& now
newer things, wild & green—

one dreams of my scarred cheek
one poses as I brush
one shows me her shoulder beneath a dark blanket
one years me deepest in silence

I don't know what to give, what I wish, what the streaks of memory mean if anything
at all—I don't know

Kindness & eros wrangle my will between them—urges to open out, to bloom, to
blow the fuck up—urges to diminish, to still, to mourn alone & acknowledge alone &
say all alone. all suffering. yes.

My bus travels east tomorrow by noon—my fave possessions traveling with me
toward my many—my future receding, my past awaits—

time & space screwy ideas—wild swings at explaining the perpetually elusive—

Awhile sitting at the bar at Luna T's Cafe, a Sunday night, the place open & peopled
on my behalf—the anger toward me—toward how I no longer write—it's gone—I'll
find our way somewhere—

The TV shows grim American leaders unliked, unwell, paternal, authoritarian—
clinging to the diminishing grey world as a greater, greener one bursts forth
everywhere—many watch the TV—I observe little real faith in these faces toward the
leaders speaking one after another—& maybe even a sadness—

she sits beside me—a new thing, wild & green—& awhile I do not know her name—
she is young, burns with beauty & thriving heart—I do not recognize her in the easy
ways—maybe this is OK for now—she approaches music, passing through me & I
blow out with words & rhythms—serve the muse, this level's teaching—how bitterly
hard, how choicelessly the path behind & ahead—

She looks at me a smile I suck softly at—more, I need more, more self, more world,
more love, more spirit now—

“A lot of pain” I say to her she nods knows—

Sitting in a coffeehouse Seattle I met months ago & now departing for months again—a sense of home as verb something one experiences, now lesser, now greater—

leaving tomorrow by noon—home as travel, pursuit—the ancient in my life raised visibly again—what in them lives still strongly, what agreeably rests—

Lone figure fishing from a rowboat lake somewhere in central Washington State. Water blue beneath arch of blue. Bus passes on steadily. Fiction travels, 22 years of it, & today still yet. My notebooks & I bound not for home but for origin. My heart is exhausted, nine months of sloppy Western rampage, tracking a gleam, forging a way. Soon to walk again where I've walked before yet I think maybe more to loosen old ties than renew them. Let go: create, continue.

To kneel before nothing, begin again, again, by any means necessary, fire, forgetfulness, every sacrifice freedom summons—

Art rules my land, all land, every why & every where, the only sure fuel & safety I have known—

Luna T's Cafe those who sip beer at its bar, those who puff cannabis, those who dwell inly, those who look about for an old or new friend—more than what it was, different, its life & lives roar again & newly—pages will still fill with crude stumblings but in this moment of afternoon shade & cloud & gleam a hope crushed within so long perhaps it uncrumples a patch here, & here—

I loved you with all my heart unto questing thousands of miles to see your face, present my vow—whatever comes, I was true to you, true to my faith—my heart is exhausted but will find its rhythm again, its accelerating heat—I did not falter or fail—my quest is completing what comes hereafter your response, whether I know it or not—

Embrace it all, let it go, see what remains: this one of my favorite thoughts, an instruction I believe in & try to live.

More colors. Wilder music. The beginnings of a new freedom. These words I love too how they gesture brightly toward hope & purpose, mysteries happy to exist & in time resolve. I'm hardly 200 miles & several hours into a journey 3000 miles & several days big. Why does hope greet me now, a child's birthday morning, a swirl of calling bodies inside a desert music frenzy?

Heart exhausted but hand busy, in time the two will join again. Twelve dollars to my name in this world, a loaf of homemade bread, chocolate, soda, a jar of peanut

butter. Notebooks & clothes & music. Friends to my fore & aft, & elsewhere. Above, within.

I carry this story & my sheaf of *Nocturnes*, companions now for several years & likely several more. We've traveled & suffered & loved. A beagle awaits my mind's turn as well. A man wheelchaired. Other kinds of things.

Returning to origin to embrace, let go, see what remains.

You'll pose for me, again & again, arch, stretch, cup, shape, together we will strum & stroke your power, raise your blush & your heat, madden your hunger & deeply feed it—

you'll pose for me & the worlds will implode & you'll laugh, tease & play, revealing more what growls dirty & potent among the shades of your desire—you'll seek to please me & I will let you in ways contrived to crazy you greater

you'll pose for me in lace, in colors, in bare skin, move about, let tongue or cheek or breast sing most & always watching my eyes, my hands, which thought next perhaps better or stranger or both

you'll pose for me until there is no one else until what you do most truly is pose for me, the world as is & to come, a way ours fired into life by your beauty & my music & our power

love . . . possession . . . mystery

dream . . . release . . .

She sits next to me at Luna T's Cafe's bar, dressed in pink halter top & blue jeans, sipping cherry cola to amuse me. Her hair down against her shoulders, her thoughts mild & focus flitting watches me writing & looking at her intensely, poses, relaxes, this is what I wish, I amuse her, I turn her on fiercely, she more accepts what I am doing that I do—

the TV news comes on & those with hookahs & those with steins alike turn to it

war days away—the Amerikan Empire ruled by a man & minions bloody roused for their fanatical mission—there is no ease in the reporting, no usual mainstream media disdain & cynicism—the King of Amerika waves a fist, & an obsessed countenance rakes his face—

Mr. Bob the barman turns off the TV & soon the jukebox is going—Rolling Stones awhile, *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers*—music to grapple despair by—

She's now in my lap where she belongs, resting against my chest, legs wrapped around my waist—I hold her, strum her, stroke her, the world matters so much but this matters too—

this imagining—this anticipation—this need for her to be with me & none else to say—

the bus cautiously runs along icy Montana roads, nearing midnight, still 2½ days journey & no doubt better than 2,000 miles—

I hold you—you belong to me—my girl—it is my work to please you, sing to you, lighten your path—it is yours to pose for me, laugh, blush, stay hours & days & years & long long fucking beautiful centuries in my arms where all desired between us arrives—

my exhausted heart will not quit this dream—crushed & crushed again, it revives, & rages forth again—I know little better now than before but you will come to me—my box & beyond will wait—wait a long time—I will have you in my arms & my music will become the fullest it can be at last—I will manifest, become our smiling we—you & my music shall make me new—

I sit alone in Billings, Montana Greyhound bus station—small, functional—grey lockers, old vending machines—a PacMan Galaga video game—I scored 80,000 on Galaga maybe first time ever since I played it 20 or so years ago—worn tile floors—snacks counter, ticket counter—many metal benches—soda machine—ads telling you to take the bus even as you likely are—

I think of you, traveling with you, like candy in hand versus this empty pocket—I've been alone far too much, it does not seem liberating or romantic to me often much anymore—mostly it feels like waiting which is no way to truly live—

20 hours traveled—52 remaining—they do pass—reading, scribbling, junkfood, *USA Today*—outside a hard cold, snowy scape, uninteresting streets—

have had no conversations on route yet—they'll come, maybe—what do I say when asked where I'm from? or bound?

from a dream, bound to Her, via my pen & notebooks—saying else is talk but no truth—

Sunken with some dream came the words: Ask the trees & I thought: that's the next level. Waiting in a few pages.

Luna T's Cafe opens out in back toward woods & mountains & further. To wherever I am even as I near it tonight. I have to leave the smiling girl to walk on my own where Luna T's goes. I need to ask the trees.

North Dakota ripples brownly hundreds of miles. Took over as Montana's snowy rock scape gave way. Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois to come in the next 24 hours. I live on this bus right now & into tomorrow—

Soon: Ask the trees. But still now: Serve the muse. Ever changes how, & its rewards, & its pains. Nearly as difficult simply to explain. Maybe more so sometimes.

Arched back rises in dimly lit vault & I pray with fingers, lips, tongue. Black pen. The muse opens up to me, a blossoming within, but also what is beyond this, what I seek just as dearly. What I've not hardly viewed in a lifetime of try. Toward which I fly tonight with a map of songs, few coins, cascading black pen—

Devolve to a trio of remaining pages & a bad joke: I am sitting in the bus station in Hartford, Connecticut, nine months after I departed the East Coast for good.

Nothing jumps within or springs up from this circumstance, bus station on a cold snowy day. I've spent nearly 4 days getting here. Again: nothing. Soon to settle awhile into living here after 10½ years elsewhere. Nothing.

I don't know. Noise without melody. Nothing. Twice more & greater. Pen stupid stills.

We sit at the Peoples Donutshop first time in years, 5 6 7 years? I look at her, she nods, yes, she says, you're here, no, she says, it's not 1988 or 1992 or the 20th century

Another time. Another field of greens.
Another girl. Every time.

Here I am. Rebecca nods. My wife of six years. She blushes, for me. 23 going on 17, like me.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what remains. Nothing? That would be too easy. Everything? That wouldn't be hard enough.

Full moons & new rhapsodies. Yes, of course. What else?

My pen much slumber last three weeks. Connecticut: origin. Home as yes & no as elsewhere.

something still, more words, more shine, boom blue fancy boom, a game, a cosmos, this one, that one, a dream, a somewhere, a crawling drunken man begs, begs, goes, gone—

They'll feed me here, give me a bed, listen. The memories bear no greater fist than I allow.

I walked around New Britain, Connecticut in spreading vision, a dumb shock, secret dismay, boiling noise this pen prosecutes to page

“Raymond”

“Who”

“Me”

“Why?”

“Nothing ever ends. You know that”

“What then”

“You never really understood the good or the bad”

“OK. Reason to break me?”

“You're not broken & I'm not gone.”

“What next?”

“Nobody ever knows.”

Less than a page & whatever any of this meant. Everything, nothing. The truth: something.

She kisses my cheek I no longer know who—a kiss, young lips, a carrot, a stick. Carrot, a stick.

A store yonder called Dollar Dreams
yes OK that's all most are.

A few pound harder, a deeper chasm,
greater fill.

I haven't written here in years.
It was an all night session last,
some other life.

Press on, faith & fury. Press on,
dance & dream. Press on, thwart
the gathering bastards.

Press on, fingers wild among the stars. Full moons & rhapsodies. Death a fake ending til it happens, & especially then.

Part Four

“No Way Out But Through”

—Robert Frost

Dwindle into one's work, become one's work again, how it defines, how it breaches, how it sustains—

Sustains—

She who brought me here sustains me still—

Sitting near a tree long known ever loved thinking home is making the music, loving many creatures, resistance & renewal—

Alive tonight, a vessel of water, a beloved place.

Service ever to her, to green, to all—

To the small & the greater

I vow fidelity, pray it matters, work to sustain meaning.

Adoration, laughter, grit

Get along—

Sometimes a pen's scratchings no more than small wild barks for reassurance, someone, anyone, some dreamt toward moment blossoms with touch, cease hunger's futile suck pon the wind, this time she will stay, this time she will stay, she will stay

or something else, fidelity, work, grit, some other creature's or kind's example when mine own fails—

I can't stop. I don't know how.

What next keeps happening.

Hurry & limp toward shifting something, a life of songs & squander

life glows with radiant possibility
crossed by paths of ache

Flashes of joy & her useless soft tap

songs conjure toward something & somewhere

this morning found me strumming again

To love you is to forbid you nothing, to cup light while it dances, watch, sing, kept, released, love of the nest's kind, a safety between flights, the way tide swings to shore & away, love you & love the world & love you more, I'm trying to learn, to be enough, break blankness within finally—

love's aching puzzle, endless rule,
 love the supreme noise rhythms deeper the heart, love the pool of flicking maybes,
 the curing smoke—
 love the birthing pyre—blow out, fall, return
 singing for you is what I am.

Luna T's Cafe 2003. Nowadays a business, a culture, a dream. Like love, people go as far into it as they may, some see a bar with Hendrix & Wilco posters on the wall, a number of fine beers on tap, a kickass house chili for cheap. Some see further in & dance helpless ecstasy to Noisy Children rock music on Friday & Saturday nights, & some further notice the hookah pipes, the baskets of azurescence mushrooms, the pitchers of Electric Koolaid freely offered on a strangely glowing oak table in a corner of the bandroom.

Deeper in there is to see if sought a tall cavemouth & unhindered one may enter its tunnel opens out to a fullmoon field surrounded by hills of trees, at one end a natural ampitheatre, tall bonfire, many drummers & dancers, & Noisy Children now a participation rather than event, the night sweeping ever towards dawn—

more still, places I've not yet imagine, without scapes or bodies, places beyond becoming or memory

long has Luna T's been calling me back, insisting on my place & it being filled by me

Reluctant because unsure I notice my broken heart still beating & nod to this paradox

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, aware of most everything Luna T's offers nonetheless most times maintains his place on a barroom stool & his grip on a mug of black coffee laced with bourbon.

“The Lord & I no longer grapple over our conflicting ends” he announces in a somewhat quiet voice.

“I say: I demand more than thee can account for much less offer. The Lord replies: you are free to flee my bosom as to return. The Universe is a place of eternal rhythm. I say: I hate thee no longer. The Lord replies: for this I am grateful.”

He sips, shaky cup. I wait. He continues to cease.

Rebecca Dorothy Americus Soulard sits in my lap, all of 22 years old now, resting her head against my chest, our fingers twined.

“I knew there would be more. She loves you unending.”

“I hardly know.”

“You're getting better. She sees that.”

Noisy Children no longer concern with together or apart. By agreement each lives a dual life, none questioning how Gretta lives in Seattle, Stephanie in DC, Ronnie in Westport, all join local dwellers Grey & Americus even weekend without plane travel. I grant them fiction's gift to come & go Luna T's Cafe from anywhere with the immediacy of two steps. They've taken to calling me the Magician & threatened to call their next album by that name.

Spring, it's May 2003, I am 39 years old, this story has accompanied me for over two years. I am nearing greater ease with it. Most of its pages have never been seen by anyone.

The green & the sunshine sing hope to me as I greater again sing to her, singing to her what I am.

True love squeezes, releases, & again,
& ever again.

& squeezes & releases again I surely do not know why yet choose life or death I can't keep avoiding this—

I've said "I don't know" for too long & lived that way for too long—

I look at Knickerbocker. "Why did you stop fighting?"

"The ground was no longer worth the winning. It became beneath my toils."

"How did you know?"

He says nothing. Americus looks at me: "Who are you fighting? What are you fighting for? What is the prize?"

"Vindication."

"The only things worth seeking or defending—"

I shake my head. Taking Rebecca's hand, I leave the barroom into the bandroom to its rear down the cave tunnel into the Amphitheatre. Rebecca knows we always end up here sooner or later.

We sit far from the tall fire & its dancers & drummers. Its? Her. Of course.

Rebecca does not speak but moves onto my legs, wraps hers 'round me, head against my chest.

I think about years past, thousands of days, millions of moments perhaps, most of them forgotten yet not a one less vital for all that, & one day the near last one, & then the last one, & if an after none now may wholly tell.

Finally she speaks to me, softly. "They need your Magick. Sometimes you don't feel it or see proof of it, but it's truer than ever. Power is going to be wielded in this world, in every

possible world. Even if you left here you would not escape this truth. You can no more completely wield the world than it can completely wield you. The music you make is the collaboration. When the world weakens you must give more. It will shift back & forth. It always does.”

“I wield poorly. I have for a long time.”

“You wield in pain, not poorly, they are not the same. Everyone has this wound. Rent from the cosmos to dwell briefly in it before returned.”

“No agreed on reason. I don’t believe the easy answers. Men-shaped gods or mathematical chance.”

She looks at me dark blue eyes throbbing intensely. “You are robbing yourself of so much & so others too.”

“I don’t what to do, what the right thing is.”

She looks at me even fiercer. “There is only better & worse, not right.”

A moment, then another. Another.

Rouse things greater from the diminishing cripple, crackling spring, electrical universe, hands toward service & its greater, thrust & its coil, beauty & its release—

the future of colors a white rose eschews—

happiness in the rhythm & the beat—

I look for myth’s higher ground—
wish to provoke within harder—

Safety not in anger nor mourning—
nearer in singing—

& again I walk into her wall of hooks—no cry of pain this time—plod & silence—my Art threatened I do not submit. What she offers now I do not become its capture—

She nears me one way then another, I feel the press & poke in dreams in others her darkness wields her & response is blankness

You can’t have me as you are, as you live.

Rebecca nods.

I’m going to get you, Raymond.
Not if I don’t wish you to.
You’re mine.

You're not capable of claiming me.
 Why don't you love me??
 My silence expresses my feelings.
 What do I have to do.
 Whatever you want.
 I want YOU
 Because I resist?
 Because I can't do this anymore without you. When are you coming back to Portland?
 No.
 You're mine.
 When yr ready to stop drowning.
 I am.

Raymond?
 Raymond?
 Are you there?

I don't know where I am or who I am seeking or calling—I only know this pen in my hand & the way of life gestating this kind of moment's greater frequency is my guide & my wish—

candlelight writing shadowy porch among tall magick trees drizzley night 4 a.m. or whatever

this music of else & how to live in it or near it—

there is no option in this—
 life otherwise does not matter—

She who would sit near with her own art going is who I wish—

if none, more candles, more pens & paper, music, if not happiness of one kind, another

Luna T's Cafe shall not be neglected again—

I'm trying like once ago
 I will only try more
 hope embedded in work

mystery bring it on again—

Luna T's Cafe in a city long past its meaning. I cannot give back whatever art or truth it had save somehow these pages where a resistance to its mechanical throb strums. Where there is a darkened space I ignite music & its people, commune of needful souls, the icy relief of sentiment's absence, my every throb toward hardest need's songs

"Buy him a beer!" cries a bigbellied trucker near me at the bar. He smiles at me with sodden lips. "You tink too much! I know. I was like you." Mr. Bob placed an ices cola before me.

“*Nab!*” the trucker bellows. “No sody pop for this gen’lman. You are going to have a drink with me & toast our brotherhood & our life! Our good life!”

“No. I’ll toast with this.” He looks at my cola. At me. At me closer for signs of rust, capitulation. Little. He roars assent & our glasses & many others raise in cheer.

The drinking fires out & roars on, & I remember other days when I sought sodden relief too—& they are long gone now, I suppose because drink failed me in the end, failed to be other than drink, fool comment yet true—all I found at the end of every rousing night was my heavy figure fell to bed—it gave me what it was til I could not find a thirst n’more

the music meant more, means more, does not empty with a glass or a night, suck off my last dollar & a tip, flatulate my mind into sleep—the music raises power, strokes & strums it higher, returns to me in new forms, a sky translucent with colorless light, where perches & hides the chirp & tweet of nocturnal observers—

sometimes the music even moreso than the muse, none stay, & sadness, yet see this pen carry along—

“I understand your sayings” my blurry truckerdriver friend observes. “Sometimes on the road I’m not missing her body or her meals . . . Just something stupid like the way she laughs at *I Love Lucy* on TVLand when I gotta be up early. I bitch her out but good but then later I remember. And it hurts.” He stares watery at me. “You know what I mean when I say it. *It hurts.*”

Another time in bed with Rebecca & she lays across me somehow it feels OK, her artpad out & her lost in a complex of pencils & pastels. I’m reading a labyrinthine novel, again, & keep drifting into other versions of it til I wake again.

I remember a cafe, Heaven Cafe, in Portland, Oregon, how often I went there to write, sometimes no money, I think even Christmas Day. I was so alone & hopeless but on I trod, looking for work, reading books, writing poems, hoping she would call. How I wanted her to call. How it lessens when I never believed it could.

Rebecca twists as only a 22-year-old girl could & lands on my lips in a praise & a promise both—

When I returned to Connecticut it felt like failure, & I’ve squirmed with this feeling since—now I’ve gotten to feeling toward good things again

“Now I stand in sympathy
not for her but for me”

the Jayhawks tune “Better Days” slouching acoustic sweet from Luna T’s jukebox—

I live stained by you less who you are than who I once collaborated toward you becoming—now others do that—it hurts to be left out—

“Wait til you have kids” slurs my friend. “See em break ‘or heart like no woman could. Mark my words.”

How my pen can still go, how I can sit here determined to keep pages filling, how I can hope toward returning West, or getting a desired job, or anything at all, I don’t know. I’m zipped back into my own body again, no woman shares me with the world, none, a few think of me but none sit on my lap holding my wheel, her wheel, steering

I choose to remember but not as manacle, to look forward with little clue, choose to feel I am loved, I affect, ripples hit me and change as I release them—

Little knowing next & still I will not shirk—fear to shirk—measure hours by bottles—by the warm grooves of old trystings, blown, broken, buried

another night, another row—

Seventeen years ago I got my first fulltime job in Hartford, Connecticut, & just a few hours ago, eleven years since last I worked here, I scored work again, a part-time temporary copy editor at the *Hartford Advocate*—& see this lead to odd thoughts—

I remember running late to that or some later job, passing through this park—Wildfire Park in my fiction, Bushnell Park on a map of Hartford—

How years & more ago all that was! My life til I was 28 & I left Connecticut in 1992—eleven years later I move back—

no answers, I can’t even summon questions right now—history leaves strange marks in the mud of one’s soul—

Several at Luna T’s bar, from where I’ve strayed, drink to that sentiment—I nod

Summer 2003 & this story nearing three years in the writing & barely halfway—

fountain springs water into the air & cascade down—kinetic, delicious—

Being in my hometown, born here, became an artist here, worked here, a few kisses here, & what now? What’s left to this story, this city, that needs telling, refuses otherwise?

Cement Park. Is it lack of sleep or thinning of connection? I truly don’t know.

Part of leaving cleanly in good time is clarity on this matter—

The bar empties toward 2 a.m. when local law bids tavern doors be shut & beertaps stilled. I keep my seat, no mug in my grip in any case, & wonder about loves old & new, & how the yearn hardly slows, & wonder if I am least ways wiser & think a little—

New green eyes bid me near, known awhile but now further & can it be another girlpath is beginning to select my steps?

fear hunger hope yearn yearn yearn

nothing to do but check black pen's progress for signs of my well-being—

and—

Again a push to learn & cohere, & eventually do better than these, to respond ahhh & gosh to sudden bursts of sunshine, to feel presence & absence as a sum of one part, to elude metaphors when possible & smack kissy love them when not—

write more boldly toward invisibility, toward carnality, toward earth & sweat, set flame to blankness as not a native human way, to kiss her afar, now, this brawling heart moment, kiss her & someone loves her, & when your hope deserts keep breathing. Relax. Keep breathing. Candy & splendor will surely appear soon.

Some days I am sadder but not by sentiment's weak lean, more a wishing that my own edges groped out farther, release & content the sum of one part, how I yearn! I find I love more of everything no matter I am as ever toothless of understanding—

Mr. Bob the bartender is wiping down the counter near me. "Did you sleep at all, son?"

"It's morning?"

"I took your missus home. She wasn't sure but I said it was OK. She trusts me well enough to listen."

"Thank you."

"Mind the radio?"

I smile & shake my head.

He looks at me again. "I think your music is closer to the truth than your dread."

I nod.

Muse on the blood, green eyes, wiggle, her squeeze, her breath. Mind swings through the leaves & brush, hours of restless light & stroking darkness, & return to her, music & dread not near to summing to one part but see this pen moving it is my most muscular bid—

Braver to fill blank pages or leave them? I keep filling, hundreds, thousands by now, & I keep track, account my days in music then account the accounting, nothing summed just sleep eventually, dreams of cats, each a singly-stamped being

where once I chased human masters & gurus none interest me now

"Trailing off again, bud" Mr. Bob says softly—

"I keep going dark & dry"

He nods. This more comforting than words.

Mostly I don't know what to say anymore. I've forgotten how fiction works, how it's a different order from walking daylight. I have a hard go reading anything that exalts humanity above anything, yet I do not think I hate men so much as my heart has decades to catch up in loving everything else—

I tried to read Emerson's *Nature* essay but he preached light above music, which idea I struggled to exist with. Then he said men are exalted enough to claim the world if they but try—& I could not continue. Many parts, yes, & perhaps many wholes too, but men own nothing & do not take even breath with them into the earth.

I watch people & often become sad, a feeling nature rarely induces in me.

These burnt cities & towns I abide in these days, places not obsessed with the mistier yearnings—I know some in them may be—I was long before I left—but how many leave?

My old acid guru Hartley would have called it entropy. Curiosity toward the common til tired & out.

My stories aimed me out & then chronicled that & now I'm back in yet hung over the borders.

Cecile Grey regards me. "Just one pint, mate." He swills his down & calls for two—Mr. Bob brings his Guinness & my iced water. That door is shut, & gone.

Luna T's no longer needs my chronicles. I need them. Passing wild green on local buses I hardly say. I want to. Where the connection between the wild green, human caterwaul, the music of everything & machines grown ever nearer the mystical?

Wonder through the wild green more & more, no chaos, no order, kin to music conjured as made, the roar contained in a sudden kiss, through flail & flow—

greedy for a new language of the wild green, a human beginning toward wild green knowing, & whatever human thing may interest in return—

I don't know if it can or would—

"Love stretches from readiness to regret" I write wondering what
Look around morning Hartford & think: here I am again
employed for the moment
loved completely
well & a bed to sleep in too

Mr. Bob nods. "Keep it moving, Son. That pen of yours." The bar is lined with greenery more than ever before. Digital breezes balance here & there. A TV screen into other realities hums. The music in words will help me find the way.

deep enough into Luna T's Cafe & arrive in the desert city, the continuing festival, the jungle space of whoops, mountains, seaside sky toward which hands dance, earth wherefrom feet launch & rest, & sometimes this story comes along half-pages at a time

knowing dreaming from waking as hard as fiction from not—too many gradients, exceptions, relativities—

a city, a festival, moreover, less, hurry,

what's passing? what's ever really gone?

No security, no assurance, little promised but slowing & demise, & this endless fucking story, post-story, & just the wish to write again madly, & thinking soon, eventually, but no, now thinking: why the fuck not now? The mind pushed responds, & pushed again responds better so soon, eventually, but no, *now*—

Maybe I'm in love again, always, I
and,
 how those words stumble pen

What I won't do is become old and boring with a few pocked bitternesses to tell of—that's why I stumble & rave onward, this fear inspires & paralyzes me

& a desire to reach beyond denying this story's lacks toward its treasure—its wild greens & lights

the power in me yet resides & I will work it up until it shines & swings about with no cricks—days of angry try, of teetering assault

I want my fucking faith back

 nothing else matters.

But how. Can revived faith really root in another person, or people at all?
 If not people then what?

A beat. A beat. Three. Sitting in this city where I began & eager to depart it again—

the words come with difficulty these days but they do come—they will come even better in later days—I dwindled for so long—rising again in stumbles—

One looks to one's kind for empathy—I can't think of any other reason to persist—

Someone I like with green eyes I haven't talked to her in nearly a week, she swore & hung up on me & it shouldn't matter but it does, another betrayal, disappointment, I shouldn't care but I do, & how anybody can harm someone who's showed them love & kindness—

blah fucking blah—

what seems more likely is that no answer is ever enough, life is now as good as it will ever be, praise should happen more often,

I want to leave this city & not return but as a visitor—the better to love it—

Please, Universe, help me to do better.

It this shaggy Art thing becomes a deeper necessity, not a thing I can reason about or discuss much with anyone, a response to sadness, a riffing on sadness, what could I possibly tell anyone anyway, storytelling makes no sense to me anymore, nor does confession, maybe all which remains is a sort of imaginative recording of events, maybe that's all fiction ever is or was—I feel sad very often & it bears no sweetness about it, tis morbid, tis maudlin, & I can hardly say

language—music—singing—comfort
the perpetual rhythm & run of nature—I don't even know if it teaches though I watch, I listen—

the sadness wants me to be obsessed with it—not green, not music, no whatever comfort there can be in people—memories, hopes—no, just sadness—

sitting in an unfamiliar corner of Luna T's Cafe for tweak & twinge of the strange, I see how further greed it is becoming—& rhythms & melodies unceasing—& will it disappear, & the city around it? Is this what this story tugs me toward?

Well, then, so be it, each page adds & I don't know to or toward what—

the crowd at the bar grumbles about the 2nd-place Red Sox & the gruesome political quagmire in Iraq—

“We should bomb the fucking White House & get our boys home”

“Hey now!”

“That AWOL motherfucker isn't going to stop. He's a hero in his own mind. I say six or seven bullets to six or seven criminal heads, deal with the murder & the aftermath, then wake up from this shit”

“That's not how democracy works”

“No, but it's how this damned country has worked from time to time. It's called coup d'état. The CIA & the Mafia took out Kennedy in '63 that way. He was going to pull out of Vietnam. He wouldn't invade Cuba. Forty years later, we need another one.”

“How many have you had?”

“Four. They're called sody pop. Used to be I could suck bourbon down clean & pretty as a college girl's left nipple. Then one night it got ugly, & the next day uglier. Later I stopped. Never read a book in my life. So I had time & I started. You wanna know the lesson of books? People lie & they always have. Kings arrive on thrones bloody from their climb. Women are exalted as prizes when they're not beaten to shit. Children have some good ideas but no power. Nature has all the answers to our questions but most of us only talk to each other.”

“Why are you here?”

“I don't know. It's been 20 years since I walked through that door; tonight I did.”

“No bourbon, though?”

“Not in this lifetime.”

I listen, write it down. The sadness waits me out, sees what I can build up.

Noisy Children plays Friday & Saturday nights. Again the houseband, but far more cultish. Guitarist Ronnie Pascale keeps a Weblog on NoisyChildren.com. He tends to a simple kind of entry: set lists, odd song choices, band schemes when any occur. He leaves a lot alone, unjournalled. Fans maintain the site communally—discussion forum, chatroom, music downloads. Rebecca writes a check once a month to pay the site's host.

O, is this fiction? Oops—thought I forgot how. The bus I'm on is nearly arrived. 45-minute trip; didn't sleep as I intended.

Feel pen's sometime revived shimmer.

Maybe it's learning to think severally again—the sadness is grey & does not divide into ideas, characters, stories—more than weakness, tis a nada, a negation, a passive dribbling out of days—it is one hurt or several become a way of life—a such inward-looking til nothing is seen new anymore—

tis a vision encrypted—

Lately my pen sometimes blows up again—like old—& I feel continuity not nostalgia—the sadness, compelled to dance, dances—

Rebecca joins me wherever I sit—ever friend, ever wife-muse—muse but no mock in her—

“They keep coming & going”

“Both, yes”

“I don't know how to better”

“Nobody really does”

“Why don't you?”

“You don't make me”

“Is that what I don't know?”

“Is it?”

“Will Burning Man help?”

“Let it”

A few weeks of stability then some more. Home, job, woman.

We walk into the bar to let some noisy jolly air clean us out—

“Some rely on horses, some on carriages. The truly insane, however, lean upon man-erected gods, man-erected symbols, man erected institutions, man-erected contrivances claiming refuge & certainty.”

“I rely on cold beer. & warm pussy when it's offered,” cracks one of the grizzles at the bar to a raucous return.

“Glad the establishment is that you do. Drink it, guzzle it, buy a dozen kegs, break into the local YMCA pool, fill it up, & go right in & drown in it.” His remark produces a more uneasy laugh from a few.

Someone asks Rebecca who the guy is. Knickerbocker's long-lost son maybe? She smiles.

Later as she commences to seduce me, lightly, slowly, she says "OK, where did he come from?"

"Knickerbocker's long lost son?" She grins & keeps at her task.

Knickerbocker listens to the newcomer's rants in silence. I ask Rebecca if he's OK—she says he's no different than he's been for awhile.

Rebecca looks at me & nods. "You're into another one, I was hoping."

"Not jealous as usual?"

"Never, none of them ever threaten me. They make things better."

"How?"

She's quiet. Thinking. Maybe listening. I wait. She's taught me.

"They fuel & drive you in ways my world & I can't. Complementary."

I nod. "She loves me. I think she means it. Not just a whim or a mood or a lustful pulse."

"And you're doubting & scared."

"At least."

"You're saying 'help.'"

"Help."

She's in my lap, easily, familiarly. Arms twined, skins meld, years of this long-firing wish, help me, she sleeps in my right hand, waiting for black pen, more, dancing whip of light in a sky dusted past emotions, help me, past the best or subtlest of human containers, help me, eat me kiss me, own me, know me, trill of moans, sparks bang from miles traveled yet to be, help me, color me, fool me with less that more will always wait—

burn me, dig me, bring me to new bells chiming songs I can still learn from—

to drums ever more twisting & baby post-lingual, drummers more & more a feast of rhythmic arcing fire—

"Trust" she says lips along my arms & lashes "Trust" she continues, dabs & drawls, fuck words, fuck language, let's eat berries, let's get high, let's climb steeper stonier trails, let's do better, help me, "I will"

I make Art to remember how to tell the truth, sometimes it hurts, this story 3 years already in the making & little flicker it will find friends, I don't know. It's crisscrossed America with me, learning deeper our unknowing, & whatever its root far gone now & sad that & hope too of course—

I await her taking my hand in a glaring Midwestern town—touch melding, smile, begin—

X the Space Alien flings darts as I notice his return. He's pretty good. "If it didn't matter you wouldn't keep trying" someone says. That's the sharpest comfort available.

Seattle today, the road east again soon, then Hartford, it never fucking ends.

I need something new please.

Something new. Revived? Novel?

OK, maybe simply not old, the idiot snap of one clothed brute to another—

“Fuck em all til they learn some empathy”

I don’t know if that’s learned or even can be

“Humiliate the bastards & cunts. Hard. Fast. Make it hurt. Make it stick.”

The world’s usual way. Everything else called fairyland.

Nods. “True. Like I said, gather em up, make ‘em dance for your blessed tough ideals. Make it hurt.”

X laughs, jagged, musical. “Civilizations collapse like that. Planets.”

When?

“When I & we cease their open flow. When it’s long past time they’ve ceased.”

I look at Rebecca. She nods. We leave. “There are other ways to empathy, Raymond.” “How?” “The green strength of nature.” “The pink strength of feminine beauty?” She smiles familiarly. We’re walking deeper into Luna T’s Cafe, woods never the same, hills elsewhere, ocean’s shore endless, walking toward floating, not quite dream, not quite not, now maybe drifting, maybe toward bodiless save closely held hands, is there music now? the kind of loose gestating instrument or capturing ear, something like perhaps, slipping side to side on air currents colored by speed & direction, she doesn’t let go, never, empathy begins somewhere, eruption from gesture, something, sometimes I think I do know—

Well at some point Rebecca is next to me on this bus & we are traveling eastward just past Bismarck, North Dakota, my worlds again coalesce, she leans against me & smiles, very Rebecca, & her eyes say keep at it & I do, she smells like clean morning light would, she kisses me cheek and naps against my shoulder—

Now what? Rename this fiction *Solipsist Funnies*? What now?

One presses pen to paper & something spreads across the page, I’ve been doing this for decades, & it changes over time, how it feels, what becomes on paper—

The changes run across & through the soul until—

this. This page. Its earnest, paltry explanation, standing here in front of some tattered inn, Rebecca asleep on the bus, are we still somewhere deep inside Luna T’s Cafe? The sky a pressing herd of grey hands, the air thrummed by passing train, its chug & whistle.

Well—

It feels like a long-yearned still point—where strange things are at least on plain view—

OK.

I’m writing beneath an outside light affixed to wall next to inn’s entrance—people all about chattering—bored locals & tired bus travelers—

Rebecca is hard asleep—married to me 6 years, 23 years old, & can be eventually exhausted by my freakish paths we walk—

Someone said if it didn’t matter I wouldn’t persist & it does matter—for an admitted shifting parcel of reasons—because my ancient readers are all gone, & none new have yet arrived—because it’s a world that matters & should continue—because my heart’s blood & its ink have commingled, we now share some wounds that remain—

because this story has told some truths along its way—

& I suppose it can't be like past fixtions anymore than each of them could possibly interchange—

142 miles to Fargo, North Dakota traveling east on Interstate 94—listening on my walkman to Traveling Wilburys sing “End of the Line”:

Well it's alright
 Even when push comes to shove
 Well it's alright
 If you got someone to love
 Well it's alright
 Even if the sun don't shine
 Well it's alright
 We're going to the end of the line

a bright chorus of bemused singers—voices, changing lead vocals, dandelion sweet coven of acoustic guitars—yes music salves & sillies, a miracle our gift lightest deepest toy—

Still point. Now mobile, diminishing miles to the large bus station shack in Fargo where I'll call my latest baby, she in Omaha, Nebraska—

my fixation now comes with me, we go together & so the structure & form it bears knocks about in the winds of my phasing dramas—sure & no fixation cannot but trouble by this way—even as it both matters & persists—

129 miles to Fargo—see how it is?

& I skid to Connecticut its doors lay open sullen & indifferent—

& here I am days later feeling trapped & trashed trying to fight my way out with pen & guts—

& I beseech my Merry Muse to help me—

“Ha!” she snaps—muses dislike neglect soundly—

but love attention—I won't stop trying—

There is no truth that does not give way to another, no love with neither beginning nor end, no pain that reigns then diminishes, no gesture of an open hand that, once offered, can be retrieved—

“Man, he needs a drink”

“I think that would put him out for good”

The door between bar & band room swings open & Noisy Children rehearsal blows through: electric & acoustic guitar twisted high, bass guitar & drums upholding their soar, keyboards loose & tumbling among the jam—

**“Great good lordly absence of justification! Explanation’s gape!
A world full of hints & tricks & deceptions disguised as guru,
philosophy, sea & oak! How we cry for masters without knees to crack, loins
to fell, faiths to delude, hands to purchase in night’s secret shades! Something
lasting, a bloom, a song, a moment! Something save loss & its increase, sin, regret, harm,
poverty, tears, the wealth ever greater of decay & entropy!”** Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker speaks
softer & softer til his last words are cried into their own nested silence.

Truths perhaps linked & building not toppling game-pieces. Love perhaps untellable by
time’s manacles, pain a push toward some greater sensation it poorly intimates.

The band coalesces around me neither bar nor band room just music flooding with light’s
potent as well as its own.

**“Saloon Keeper! Neither its history nor its future shall explicate this
establishment’s splotches & twinkles! I can no longer renounce thee nor
thine tavern as once I mightily did! I submit to thee, to a world with no
true ground by which its heart’s purity may be ascertained nor vain sky
above by which its spirit’s intent may be beheld! I submit! I submit!”**

The crowd cheers & the band takes a break. This story calls tangle its secret noun &
verb.

Truth flies by the train’s window, brushed through by horn’s cry, swamps & ponds tell
plainly through shade & hue, complement to a sky long in cloud & azure, true lays open the
wild green, the twicker of antennae & eye, seed & leaf

Love arcs through absence & immolation, induces yowling song nearer, crumples memory’s
rust with dream’s rowdy nocturnes & daylight’s first portents, confess it all to the heeding
world

Pain teaches what none else can, what kind of enemy the world can be, & perhaps what kind
of friend, & what time does to shape & shape again history & anything it meant, ever nearer
somewhat home, ever, nearer

gesture inks & bloods, witnesses time when will none other, cauterizes love without end,
caresses pain & hopes for better, all there was, will ever be, the truth flies by, love arcs
through absence & immolation, pain teaches what none else can, gesture inks & bloods, a
cry must be louder, she’s tired tonight—

A morning now & I sit at the bar drinking iced water. Mr. Bob the barman regards me
closely. Fondly: “You’ve got the chops, bud. Keep swinging true.”

“Me? Big shot editor?”

“You. About time too”

Rebecca sleeps in my arms every night, sometimes nude, sometimes one of my shirts, tie-dye, & pink underwear, or white, or black, or red, or something she painted herself, these little wearable paintings private to us. Heh.

She's more grounded than I am, comfortable in her world. Her loved ones are near again. Luna T's shimmies & glows with her pictures, & sometimes she takes to figuring up shapes like bits of glass & leaves. I have not fully attended her world in years; it belongs more to her than to me.

She keeps it kinetic, waits for me. She is quiet master of this fixtional world. Does not interfere but rather gestates. The world grows. She watches.

"So I'm doing OK so far?"

"Fine, bud. Keep it positive. Ask many questions. People like that. Humility, humor, confidence. Keep true."

I look at him hard. "I want this editing job at this paper. I want two years plus of job shit to end."

"Stay true, son."

She asked me one night how much her world needed to mirror mine. I said it hardly did anymore. She said she wanted to accelerate things some. I said yes. she said it would be more obvious experiment. I said to her: help it stay true. She said yes.

I've written over a very long toss of years now, nearing 30 years of it. Still, tonight, thinking: how do I do better, make it matter harder? How?

She turns away & I follow, the music clues & confesses, follow past days I can barely & abide, & too many places met & gone, she turns away, I follow, loved ones & lost ones scattered in ten fingers' directions & more, yet always one more nearing, one more possible—

I was doing this a year ago, five, ten, twenty—hundreds of miles away, thousands—a bus, a pen, what new? Me. What new? Each next word. What new? Every night is new, a fresh try from bare ground—

To write more, & more, breach possible—find the danger, hit it, kiss it, make it creak & blow—harder, harder save when softer works better—

"Hearts do not heal." Strum. Strum. & sing again. Words like these stay among the dancing bodies. The band kicks up a little harder, hearts do not heal, a hard truth to move with, yet reckon bodies moving, the light artist gives out something more, maybe a few fire dancers now, call the moon at its fattest above, hearts do not heal, the guarding green does not offer comment, another show this one not going to end, this on leaving the stream entirely—

a touch of blonde hair & starlight, magick in a casual sanctuary, the roundness & call of faraway hills, a few memories in a sack around one's heart—unlovely buildings for manufacture—hidden walls scored with one night's rowdy remain—

brown & white fields full not empty—the man who sees otherwise is still asleep—

Take it slowly, no, tired of that, hit the peddle, go, I'm enough to go further harder now, hereon, & maybe dreams erupt within to point hard to what matters, where to go—

Luna T's Cafe a deeper & deeper, OK, something persists about that, has years now, from what remains to what hails, sentiment to beckon—

from skin to rhythm the world is a texture hardly told in five six or a thousand senses, a wealth of sway & hue, angle & shimmer

help me write on, write forth, write past, write deeper harder laugh laughter help me to jiggle with grateful & flutter with mercy, I know not who I ask or what or how but still help me, & us, body & thing, help & more, ask, ye untellable rushing force in things, ask for more, demand, cajole, sing, there is love waiting a million pending gestures high, & more, ask, pray, offer, receive, nothing need suffer alone, nothing at all, god, man, beast, leaf, one & many & neither—help & aid, feel it good, the ripe & the roaring,

hearts do not heal—they pend painful til everything cracks & a wild beyond flames blooms madly now——

Hearts do not heal but a flash & a word & a task distract their flail & mourn, an hour passes, a day, the world's roof one night covered in pink-hued cloud ruffled as a morning bed— blood keeps coming & going, oxidizing, relieving, & another flash, word, task, another hour, day—

cemetery of the heart alive with unburied wounds but each can & does come here eventually, fills & keeps another space, yet reckon so much yet unfilled, unkept—

reckon other regions as well, where heart plays, where heart yearns, where heart praises—

Others, too, where heart perpetuates its enigmas, its cries to & fro with know not what— reckon the rhythms within rhythms, what undergirds, what protects, what stays blade & pill & dance cut short most hours, most days—

He looks at Rebecca awaiting me & says “The Empire never ended. That's where you begin.”

“Which Empire?”

“Well, all of them really, one to next is an illusion. But call it the Western Empire. That's what's outside those doors. Hey barkeep, another sody pop?”

Rebecca is quiet. “So that's how I begin?”

“That's what you acknowledge. Kings & armies & even nation-states rise & fall but——”

“The Empire never ended.”

He sips his soda, a microbrew root beer, on tap. Mr. Bob the barman cares for every kind of thirst.

“Well, you were looking for a way to put this cafe in a fuller context. What’s outside those doors as well as what magick runs deep inside here, right?” Rebecca nods. “That’s how. You look at what the world is in a different, truer way. To unenlightened eye, it resembles fiction, but the truth of fiction is the truth of the world, not a veering away from it.”

Rebecca drinks milk, chocolate milk. Mr. Bob conjured up a recipe learnt from a friend on the road when they were minor leaguers scraping through.

“You look at the spread of nations as a collective ideology, very little difference among them. Christian-inclined, materialist-bound, patriarchal, hierarchal, militarily-enforced pseudo-democracies. Conformist-worshipping, nature-abhorning, ecstasy-shy, creativity-vampirism. It’s been like this for thousands of years. The machine & scripture dominate & subjugate the freak & the tree. Start there, with those ideas, & then look around. See where they fit.” He sips his root beer through a long red straw with a loop in the middle. Gift from Rebecca. He wouldn’t drink without it.

“Does Art oppose it?”

“Some does.” He sips. “Not much really very much. The Resistance scrapes by with what it can. Sex is a weapon, ungovernable by materialist consciousness. Music.” He waves away another round of root beer. Stands. “Seeya, Becky.” Walks out.

Rebecca winces but allows this one person to use that severely unloved name.

What else? What more? The Empire consumes blindly, constantly, no regard for subtlety or other. Is the Empire all, has it no real nemesis?

She told Mr. Bob she needed some books & would be gone a day or two. He nodded & fetched her a thermos of chocolate milk, a bag of cheese sandwiches, some peanut butter cookies.

Books were a start, hints & clues. Comfort that others had wondered what was going on, & been brave enough to get their answers or shards into published matter.

She did this work alone, put aside her artpads for much of several days, taking them out only at night to doodle & calm.

She missed everyone but trusted they would await her.

Cosmic Early wrote, “To play one true note is to become slave, ever seeking the next, hustling the twilling birds & the midnight skies, believe it lurking in a pair of pink panties, in the silent desert, somewhere in a crowd of swaying faces.”

Rebecca looked up. The bookstore was quiet tho for a moment it seemed suddenly loud. She'd walked in quickly, not noticing the store's name. It been a long time since she'd been in a bookstore, pretty much since the Arcadia had burnt down. Well, years.

The book was paperback, lacked a cover & title page & the binding was partially gone, title gone, Cosmic Early's name listed. It was sitting on the small table next to the old armchair. She didn't know whose it was but she sat, & began reading.

“Even after the pursuit of the next true note, in a voice shiny with bracelets & starlight, in a hand seen as a language Breast confused, mind ransacked, dreams haughty & irregular, to play one true note is bondage. Nothing but the flames are godds thereafter; nothing but orgasm & death worthwhile news. The tongue sliding down throat to belly to bush to buttocks to back ceases if her breathing proves not tuneful, if clouds shroud starlight over the hill—”

Again. Noone. The other chairs & couch in the small room empty. Others in the room to her left—the cafe counter, staircase to book floors, main entrance—& to her right—a deeper room within, more chairs, more couches. But nobody here. Right. Sort of.

“—if she or the cosmos itself seem too or too little willing.”

“How to oppose the Empire, you ask? Go ahead.”

“How?”

“Why too? How & why?”

“Yah, Jack. Both.”

“The how is easier. Assume that what most adults do most of the time is self-motivated. When you find yourself in a crowd, look a different way. Engage your passing moments.”

“That's not much.”

“No, it isn't. More than that runs from hint to instruction.”

“Why then?”

“The Empire encourages sleep with dreams of gruel. Or no dreams at all. A life spent as audience. As component.”

“You're a crackpot. I've got lottery tickets to buy. I'll think of you as I'm engaging my tickets.”

“Can't win if you don't play”

“Damned straight”

“Can't lose neither”

“Oh I know all about that”

“So why bother?”
 “Why not. Three, four bucks a week. No harm done”
 “It could add up if you save it”
 “Add up to what? Listen, I like my pleasures small & frequent”
 “No hangtime?”
 “None.”
 “What about death?”
 “It’ll come when it’s due”
 “That’s all?”
 “What else? When your time’s up, you go.”
 “Where?”
 “The ground, Jack. Maybe Heaven. We’ll both see”
 “What about more?”
 “More isn’t going to gain you anything. The fight’s long over. I’m just playing out the rounds”
 “Why?”
 “Because the only thing worse than failure is failing again & again. Not learning your place.”
 “Does everyone have one?”
 “I don’t know. I ain’t God, just a prole standing in line.”
 “Is that enough?”
 “That’s not the question”
 “What is?”
 “Well?”

 “Are you going to tell me?”

 “How to make it from A to B & back.”

 “That’s it?”

 “No.”

 “What is?”

 “The question is: where’s your A & what’s your B?”

Trying to remember something, she kept trying out books, but few lit her eyes. Annoyed, after her lucky success with *Cosmic Early* she came back to the armchair & looked out for more abandoned tomes.

Funky music played, never anything familiar & not the radio with a DJ to name the songs. The place didn’t seem to close & she kept her diet good—with juices, bagels, odd little salads—once Mr. Bob’s food package had run out.

OK. Here I am. I don’t know why but it’s OK. I need to remember something then I’ll go. Somewhere. It’s like tripping as much as anything else.

What to do when a pamphlet, dark green, thin, yellow viney wordless cover & she read it

“Tonight I let you go. I must walk on. Our blossom was of a season; it will not survive the heat. A thing of frost, a single secret going with spring’s waking. Summer’s press.”

Hmm. She looks around. Whatever watches does not threaten. Curious, fond. Evening time others are about.

“You finally hunger anew, call it my gift. Now I breathe twice & let you go. Walk on. Let you go, tonight, now scrape & fumble my music back.”

Last page reads Q.E. & none else. She returns to text.

“Our blossom was sugar, now melted, now dew. A blessing, a jaguar; fierce, a flu. Gleaming penny in starlight. A persisting greed for love’s secret brew.”

Hm. Not sure if she likes him.

A moment of happiness, several lately, they are strange, lacking slave mind to other & then & maybe—moment of happiness, a surge, trees mourning festive colors, air liquid with chill, a moment riding along dandy, here, on these wheels, this right-now is perfect, it knows me, has waited, oh, shit, fuck, some sort of sloppy bliss—

so much hurt for so long, as though always—but, no, twas not always, & neither will be ever—grateful, happiness, then afraid because of that happiness—

not learned, not kept, don’t know, what tis? maybe learned, unlikely kept, but don’t know, not at all—

afraid but *fuck it*—here it is—happiness—here it is—here goes—

Rebecca finds a park behind her bookstore, the rear door opens out to it, leaves fill its air, benches scatter its woodchip-covered ground. A breeze led her here from her usual armchair, the trees here vibrate red & orange & maroon.

She sits on an empty bench with her book. Buildings on all sides. Black metal fire escapes, walls of windows, a wooden playground. People sit reading, an insect growl rests on the air.

“What is reality? What is nature? What am I doing here? What happens next? *These* are the questions that matter.”

“Nobody fucking knows, mac. That’s why there’s priests & scientists.”

“And what do they do but seek to enforce the validity of their prejudices & institutions? To find truth, everything needs to be tossed on the table. Including the questioner & his tools.”

Someone else says, “You forgot strippers. Don’t forget strippers now.”

Paths sometimes lose their audience, no longer serve from somewhere to somewhere, stall, stop, stay. New paths break, begin, are born. The world is wrinkled in both old & new paths.

But what of no path, no right direction, home a verb, a moment, the map written in dream, the way there not assured by previous accounts.

So. No path. Nothing bids helpful, nothing in the way. Night on all sides. Dawn comes without explanation.

She sits in the grass & begins to draw on napkins & as these accumulate she weaves them together, uses pages from Cosmic Early's tome, selects carefully, then randomly, then blindly. She seeks to weave a path, or at least scrap of direction, if not gestated by her hands then how? She concentrates on remembering in both directions, & others as they appear.

Well. Regard happiness when bitter & broken ranges & rages about. See how the hurt feeds on happiness, won't stop til none left—so happiness backs away, keeps some, insists—that's how it survives—gives away the froth, keeps the veins—the muscle—the heart—the living engine making, being, living happiness—you sucking bastards can't have it—else I become one with nothing too—again—

regard the crimson night from a high hill, celestial chiaroscuro above & keep near the dearer truths of clean moving water & how leaves in autumn tickle down draft & sunlight

disappear into the image of sparks falling, each last flickers alone, no lingual subtlety or blaze, wind down streets other than one walks

a pair of maids squeak youth & unmade desire

A code? A pattern? A maze? What for this story, whereto? Has a plan, an ideology? A trunk toward sky, branches & leaves? Confession, lie? What has it been, what tis?

We've traveled from Malden & Boston & Cambridge to Black Rock City to Seattle & Portland to Plainville & Hartford & New Haven & Black Rock City again, again—through love's agile rise into its disaster—again, again—hope defined by dollars & safe beds when little but this story remaining to assess—& again Art blew the world up happy—& again dollars & bed were beams not the sun—

Still, tis narrative? Tis experiment? Tis song in black ink? Can it be more, can it help or heal?

What part does it play in the resistance, what its blows against the Empire? I want to find out however crazy to do.

Can a story demand its own, stand straight up after months in a hunch, speak through me by my pen & back again what must needs occur?

Dunno. Maybe. I think so. Yes. For this story's ambitions are hard & eager, summon stars, tap into dreams, make peace with its most wounded bedamned page, a whole not of high notes but of how each note mattered to the song—

Nothing can untangle this story from my life or the passing times yet more is wished, more shall be conjured, neither intricate for clever nor simple for cry: more shall be

it will begin to weave with itself, revisit, harmonize, how we've crawled back to standing, how shaky we still are

I convince me to work, to the new push, toward the stranger rhyme, night revealed but not solved, love riled til a lasting glow, memories loved & burned for fuel, wisdom hustled for a little extra,

blows against the Empire? Every last word I write. Every breath.

I don't know how to do this anymore but my blood & my ink both run & no life without them.

Blows against the Empire in every leaf, every sunrise, every orgasm, every calliope of drums rings round fire in forests taut with power. Every word. Every breath.

Empire romances the world's rot,
its fear, its foul prejudices.
Empire tags does not name,
preaches famine not share.

I grow older. I just want to do better.

I don't want to suffer to kin myself with the wounded but salve their wounds, teach them how, & help, & discover what past those wounds, what magick, what renewed knowing.

I will drown with nobody ever again. I will urge swimming on the way to natural flight.

Blows against the Empire in raving every day & surviving the rest & I'm a less likely to say I love you & more to show you how much. Every word. Every breath.

Once I dreamed a man named Richard James Americus who become lesser the more he resembled me for he is a guitarist & musician in ways I am not—he satisfies in a group submersion to ecstatic knowingness I have only ever found alone—but a wish remains—always a wish—

Still—we are not the same & that is better—I'd rather call him brother than mirror—I need more brothers in casting blows against the Empire—

where I most want to do this remains far tonight—& several I love—

but I'm fuckass stronger than I was—the strength of will & body—

my advice to human communities: women nest, men govern, between the two is a community of mercy grown.

Bureacracy is governance without mercy. Terrorism is the society of waking nightmare. Justice only comes when every hand is full & counted.

Brotherhood is not defined by agreement nor challenged by dissension. Brotherhood is made from the bones of days & years involved & caring—

The Empire would have us name therefore to judge—divide & judge—to put ideology before even survival, common sense—the Empire is a blind consumptive & will not cease. Music opposes, & passion & the at times cartoon foolishness of the counterculture—at other times inestimably hopeful—the Empire threatens all—

“FUCK BUSH!” the crowd at Luna T’s bar roars & raises glasses. Yes & more.

Someone urged up on the bar dances & every voice hurrahs. I forget something & hurrah as well.

Everything matters. All which has been leaves its color, texture, melody. We belong to the world. We belong to each other.

Alone & together both.

Dream time & lesser. Never a lasting answer how.

Serve the muse, serve the muse, serve the muse, sans the how. In loving old brick & winter-bare trees, serve the muse. In fooling through familiar streets, the rare gold of a new run of bushes, serve the muse. In slave’s wordless awe toward a marmalade dusk, serve the muse, how it drips windows & common, serve the muse. The whole of the universe something soft-flesh-breathing-rhythm in all, eternity’s simple language—serve the muse.

For the girl with blue eyes & a laugh sugar & cream, learn how, do better, wake fists flying for meaning like this morning, & the many trees royal along tired path, serve the muse, for the rise embedded in every fall, serve the muse, serve the muse.

Four autumns this story has trailed me, never anything like it in time & length. Raw at times, sloppy, embarrassing, ugly, nothing resembling bright melody, or story, little, nothing, pages a cranky few at a time, cries, hurt—

tonight I say thank you, universe, & pray my many muse’s protection, I run the many miles on tracks & tires, I say thank you for so many moments you protected my sorry ass, luck, kindness, it’s been savage—

a hundred, many hundred shacks & dorms & storefronts, trees in the thousands, a sky passing through flesh raw & sweet, help me, heal me, you do, & I want to return something, more than return—

neon & shadow insist the night an old great glory & many more despite men—

People began talking to Rebecca, it was her unwanted quiet & sliding blue eyes that drew them. She lived in the bookstore, as did a few others, & curiosity came about because noone had brought her, as was usual. Her age, 23, did not raise note because there were young & old passing through all the time. She kept her Cosmic Early art nearby, a remembrancing & some sort of promise too—

One girl thought Rebecca some kind of guru, though elusive. Dressed more ragged & skinny, carrying a guitar she would strum for hours then grow shy & stop if a compliment, she asked questions.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“I think so”

“Do you believe in Godd?”

“Believe? I don’t think that’s the right word.”
 “Would you let me braid your hair?”
 Rebecca smiled.

“Where are we, Rebecca?”
 “I’m not sure”
 “You know better than I do.”

Well . . . you’re braiding my hair. It’s very long & takes time to do well but you have educated fingers . . . they like touching my head . . . they suggest touching more but I demur, I belong to something . . . perhaps you can come there too but you’re not ready, I think something within has to snap, & open . . .

“Rebecca?”
 “Thank you.”
 “You look even prettier now.”
 “I have to work, Ozma”
 “Why do you call me that? I like it though”
 “Well in some other world you’re the farmgirl & I’m the great queen.”
 “Why not here?”
 “I don’t know.”

The same confession to the night every time, love me, forgive me, sire me anew. Same feeling part precipice part cage. Another night of stars brightest where civilization calms, shuts the fuck up. Blood & leaves & loss still wild in & around, music the sweet-colored end of a roaring branch, a blind geography, a walk endless when ground never gives, deeper now, summon the magick, to heal, to salve, summon, universe how fragile this beast, how mere my implement to address you, thank you for life & the will to wield it freely, thank you for all that I am.

“Who do you miss?”
 “The same. My father. Luna T’s.”
 “Who else?”
 “The people there. The band. It’s fun.”
 “Who really?”
 “Gnight, Ozma, go home. Your aunt Glinda is waiting.”
 “You could come too. She likes you.”

She turns & looks at me. “When are you returning?”

“When this story is strong enough to sustain my burden”

The girl looks at Rebecca easy adore. “I read that book. You call me Ozma because you like me.” Rebecca nods. “I wish you would let me take care of you. I’m good like that.” Silence. “You’re the best artist I’ve ever met.”

“You should know my dad.” “Is he your role model?” “No. He wouldn’t like that.” “Do you have one?”

“Monet. Lennon. Oak trees.”

They walk through winter lights holding hands. The girl kisses Rebecca’s cheek, good night, Rebecca smiles., no more.

Rebecca begins working more, even giving art lessons of a sort in that people watch her & ask questions. She’s friendly, knows there’s nothing to lose or give away, but sometimes she doesn’t talk awhile.

Word finds its way back to Luna T’s, there is relief but no surprise. She’s her father’s daughter, they do things like this.

Mr. Bob wonders when Rich will visit her.

“They say the Empire Never Ended,” & he sips hard at his spiced root beer “& as the beginning of an explanation I find no flaw. They say that most men slumber awake through their lives. Again, none objection raised. Some even hold to a nearing date or the approach of a retributive figure as pending milestone of irrefutable shift, a final chasm between history & the future.”

Another sip. “What little remains from the past, what residua we call our heritage, our living remain, is fundamentally insufficient to explain *anything*, any now, then, foresee any possible future.

“The past & the future are virtually identical darkneses & we have not even an instinctive brute’s understanding of them. We dismiss what nature, what dreams, what madness may tell us.”

Someone yawns & gently nudges up the TV’s volume using a somewhat concealed remote control. Network news discusses humanity’s return to the Moon.

“What we know as history, as wisdom, has failed us all! Our traditions, our great books, our revered wise men & women all have proven shams! Yet we revere & we thank! We celebrate their deeds & teach children their speeches!”

The TV flickers channel to channel. Glimpse of the Red Sox new manager, of a bearded wizard prominent in a coming film. Singing cartoon excrement & black & white cowboys keeping order.

“We lack the fundamental imagination to see the dead end we lie squalling in, envision instead great civilization, a species undoubtedly this planet’s jewel, some even avow that all creation was conjured by a being resembling us in figure if not in form”

TV lingers on a channel featuring gyrating Christmas whores lip-synching the words to an old holiday song.

“The Empire Never Ended because nobody has come up with any new ideas to replace it. For all the so-called modern talk of liberty & individuality, most human minds suckle lifelong from the same meager tit of clichés & simple mindedness.”

Now a hundred gyrating Christmas whores, now two.

“An original thought is peril, to itself & everything else. Mediocrity will blindly consume & replicate it a thousandfold before its deepest juiciest magick can manifest.

“I foresee in my own lack of solution, or worth insight, that I no more near—”

“Dude, calm down. It’s Christmas time. Here’s a nice red Santa cap to wear. With a little furry puffball on top, see? Here’s a glass of egg nog. Don’t worry, it’s from the non-alky bowl. Come on! Ho ho ho!”

“Ho. Ho. Ho.”

A deep slow inhale & a short burst out, again, once more & write serve the muse. With fiery branch & roaring text, unloose the steam words within, ascend, diminish, extinguish, serve the muse. With belly stiff & eyes fearful, flickering, when it hurts, when it hurts more. I can’t return, yet, maybe ever, maybe not, I have to walk this hard world awhile, snow cascading rock tonight, the old places I long ago tired over, again, serve the muse, in love & restlessness, too much reveals to call any answer, & fragments deeper cloak than clue—

Serve the muse, words to instruct yet oft I ache. Confusing muse & girl, need & love, Art & prickless wail. I try because I try. Holy emptiness in a still pen yet fight off the privacy of my death for one more milky nocturne, one curve, one lash, one giggle, & the snow blows through its power again tonight, I live life best it seems among ten thousand words on a rack, it hurts. Embrace it all, let go, see what remains, life’s times thinning shadows on a walkway, no direction but home, & again the muse a girl, & again the joy a whipping pen, & trees assent, tell me embrace my own kind too, & I become again a new fool in service of her night, wishing hours, holier music, strumming starlight, no death but a different range of rhythms, higher colors, roots deeper than soil but no telling bell, leaf’s blood weaned of grab & grief but nothing concludes, entropy’s wailing smell, but relief in some things fallen, vision rising, coloring bells, serve the muse, she clings sister to willows, she won’t let you not, she is an ancient fire ever brightly kindled, count what is lost, surrender every number, & ever more remains & squeezes you smiling.

new fool every night every fucking night because the first one too safe is death’s little hook, & two & three after that, so a fool every night, twice, whatever clock, whatever clime—

Luna T’s in Hartford still mostly by sentiment, its within more rarely concerned with the not-much outside, & its within so much deeper than once. People entering from elsewhere & exiting too—a nexus, an evolution, a place of crossing as well as underground home. A steam engine against the Empire—

For steam engine it had become, none cohered in its many people & activities, but growing, allied with human & otherwise—

Most still saw only what they were ready to see, & many passed each other unawares, & it is quite possible that Luna T’s not only crossed & joined impossible sizes of space but time too, & not merely both of these—these sentiments, these verities of a kind best be remembered for nearing pages—

Serve her night, no bones nor chords, her truth endless greater neither beginning nor end. Her night, its wailing, no ease, she pulses, all that is, pulses, & call her Art, man, woman, oak, song. Nothing ends but everything moves. A pen on paper on a speeding shell on a planet deep with groove, ahh . . . yes!

Skies clear, building erupt, break down. Burn. Build again.

Love scrambles from every rubble.
Smiles aching with release.

I follow weathered by hunger, eyes knowing by want, heart leaner & abler, & none of this much defense.

Many prayers tonight for those passed elseway to grow green & good. Universe, tend my scattered loves as much as others, bear them some comforting tremble from me. Nobody is forgotten. Blow over them softly with news of my wish. Offer them healing, again, always, but amplified by my own urging tones. Little explains in this world yet answers skulk, flirt & cascade about, at least one for every struggle. Wealth mistaken for confusion, or contrived by the soul atwist into pain, punishment.

Missing my girl most days & years yet tonight Quixote on a bus, in danger, in love—& again—

again—approaching girlish eyes wondering & wanting me—girlish heart part giggle, part conflagration—mine own rhythmic higher & hurtling—she seems some vital part of my home, a throbbing jewel to open more of my doors within as we both pass through them, no other way, a vessel to feed my vessel to feed her vessel, yes, that idea has kept ahold me from some willful place.

the brown winter landscape of middle America, the rodent's squeak of a careening old bus—somewhere last night two aging men discussed fine motorcycles with the brightness of newer days—a woman tended her child with crooning & juice & tickles—some bus drivers seem nearly friends with their soft words, others command order with fistly bluntness—1500 miles or so ago I left an empty cold city bound for more because that seems my quest—often I do not know what more is—electrical devices for breaching space/time, scruffy songs in black ink on white paper, & ever the warm girlish hand I long to be in mine—

Please, Universe, let my hope meet its mate, let the greater days I shamble toward arrive now, more wholly, I'm all at the new doors, one way or another I'll walk in, my wish is not alone—

She looks at me with eyes clean of brutality, no wish to softly punish for punished, her hands are small & seek only knowing & comfort not a weak place to recall, the night bears no resumed shame for an intimacy ever desired, I give to her sweet & fierce, & only more fills me to give

These are her new days & she fills me with them, their promise & amusement, I scrape around for metaphors & wonder that I don't care when few come—

Candle glows within a glass globe candle decorated in snowmen, rests on top of large TV we use once to watch a girl talk to God. Heh.

Bureau of flowers, teddy bear named Mr. Jeremiah Tipples, fruit, earrings, purse, hopes, dark matter at rest.

Our bed for three days, & forever in dreams, is wide, is soft, rests with us, kisses with us, plays with us, sups with us, listens to our talk, protects us from the night's freely stalking creatures.

Armchair where she sits in my lap & I don't know how happiness nudged me here but it did, happiness & history, they did, persistence, she did—

We drink the juicy elixir & watch the night dress up & dance on a screen, & later gallop off to behold fanciful creatures from evocative elsewhere assure that the world *can* be saved & power need not be wielded by crooked merchant overlords bound to iniquitous scions of narrow life-despising ideologies—

she holds my hand in both of hers—she sighs smiles upon—she is woman-child pending to goddess muse healer—I don't kid—

My touch learns her by breathing & contraction, my touch is student of girlflesh & erotic magick—her touch doubts & is shy—yet again & again she would breach & know more—I begin to yield to her my trust, frost to the rising sun—

she stands fine in leather & unbound tresses, her smile power's bauble, her blue eyes leading her along in pixie's come-hither, & I follow & fret to keep pace—

I read “no direction but home” in a sheaf of ragged road songs & look toward Noisy Children to explain a little, Americus & Pascale send back twin acoustic comment something like “the world is fat with miracle & woe,” Gretta's bass & Stephanie's keyboards & Cecile's drums press me, surround me, behold this new dream, bigger dream, no longer a dream at all—

Up the dose, it came to me & I wondered over it awhile, seemed obvious yet open & worth keeping & so I have but still.

What tis. Up the dose. What tis.

The music will smooth, will slick into a single instrument, the lights will merge, dancers crackle, & no time along this path, nothing like time at all, the night is night, no other name, no destination.

Up the dose? Yes & sure, this is how.

Then a slip, a divide, several directions, a cusp, a height, an end again. Truer? Different truth? Up the dose silly & squandering—

into dreams whole & helpless what is this, what can such be? Even waking lingers back, something insists & is carried along—

Jim Reality hoists his drink to his lips & smacks it down. Dr. Emerson rises his & on through. X the Space Alien upends his tankard with a grin. David Time nods through his OJ on ice. Jack Shit joins along. Dr. Knickerbocker quenches. They glance toward me & I look without the bus window at the dark yards speckled in electric reds greens & yellows.

“You’re back?”

“I’m always around”

“Where’s Rebecca?”

“Where she’s been.”

“Go help her!”

“No. She’ll do better free awhile.”

“If you abandon her we’ll drop you like a bad habit.”

“Don’t worry. I’m always hers.”

“Have a drink? You used to like Guinness & Jack.”

“Some other life maybe.”

“We miss you getting loaded at the bar.”

“I miss me in other ways.”

“Just one? A toast to old times?”

“I toasted old times when they were new. There’s nothing else about them to tribute. I look at the fallout, my friends broken & dull, & nothing good seems left from then. But I’m sitting on a bus riding through ghosts & my pen is moving along & I know there’s one good thing. It’s what I’m doing now. What I nearly lost. I don’t know if it’s right anymore how I do it but it’s what I have. It’s plenty enough.”

“Not even one?”

“I never belonged here like any of you. I had my own way which did not resemble anyone else’s. I still do. It costs. I pay.”

“You’re one stubborn bastard but we like you OK.”

“Thanks. I’m learning to like me too.”

Up the dose. Every fucking day possible.

I see affliction all about me & don’t know how to elude it. One friend in a wheelchair, another w/collapsing knees, a third sodden w/his accumulating suicide. My father missing legs entirely. If I look for too long seems like there’s nothing else in the world to see.

But regard the nearing dawn of a new day. Hope in waking, moving about, engaging the world with one’s own hands & voice. I can’t stop. I can’t fall in the ruins of where I began. I won’t.

The men at Luna T’s bar remain & toast me anew. I believe what matters in life is not wholly one’s choosing.

Devils are about & would encroach but at best for now they follow & hover. I stink too much of life to them still. They wait. I’ll beat them every way I can. Those falling whom I love will not compose my continuing tale.

I will find a fucking way.

Labyrinthine. Labyrinth. Maze, puzzle, seek. Play, find, & on. I keep thinking there's more than my tired & stressed is holding.

No more modern brand name brews at Luna T's Cafe. The neon beer signs in the window are touched & torched into lingual symbols without incumbent meanings. The brews are now hand-made, & far more powerful than the preferred dictates abounding without. To drink these tankards is to submit to more than numbness & sloppy eyes. Visions grip, sink in, let not go. More power, raised higher, faces radiate this simple evolution.

Mercy when again we meet, mercy, mercy, she topples me from mine own fists, beauty hard & lasting in her tight mouth on mine, love a stench to solitude & pain, love a messiah among this world's broken churches, love stronger than all which scrambles to oppose or lessen it—

She is Rebecca, She is Kassi, She is many others who've marked my heart's ancient lightless walls—I cannot help but love them all, no retreat, no safety, the hand I hold now connects helplessly to every other hand—

a winter's snowscape stares me bluntly & waits my lingual conjure, & I meet it with my eyes thrusting more awake, rousing greater pitch, dread glory in flying the land & dancing the faith—in scribbling nonsense—in praying for at least a large fool's share in something vastly wide—

Dreams everywhere I wonder how to do with them. What they to do with words. What Dreams & music can, do make together. What sounds dreams when drummed & danced ten thousand words high?

Listen more for the healing prayer at the heart of all creation, its something lingual conjurations, Art makes us to blow up again like truth, wider sky, deeper magick

If I could tonight understand anything, the brilliant star of a soft kiss, the way some memories keep biting, grow snagged with later power

Understand anything, what the cold night means in music, how music plays with history—

I mumble. Mumble more. Consider & scribble. The coffeehouse light & chatty about me. I can't. I won't. Muse wishes more. Blues eyes & pressing fingers. More.

All glory passeth, & again, & more, & new, & ever onward. Glories by field, by skin, by trill & fray & thump.

Sit here like a thousand other nights, other tables, other chatty decorations frill about.

I cannot abide less than this, cannot abide a life partway to climax, work left about like stray tools. Whatever offered, I wish to take, & imbue, fire wildly, transform—

No obedience but to within's imperative—none—& as she transmutes one to next, it's on & it's on & it's on. Whatever clock, whatever clime.

The black pen in my hand like ever, the teeth of its need & its push—

Luna T's Cafe invented & renewed in the electric orange juice pouring from its taps—

asked: on the bus or off the bus, answer: there is no bus. None. Tree branches along the road touch hood & roof, & whatever composes the next music.

Wearing ring or necklace, what bauble catches & keeps a passing day's silhouette, its grazing lovely fancy—

Listen a voice lifts in sadness & empty calm. Call sentences a mechanism only law's righteous fool would create.

From tonight to a past all bears a trailing web to anon awaiting too eager to join & pass on—

All I can think to do is wake up & join the fray once more, carry along my long-time companion questions about dreams & music & nature & desire, & press, press—

It rarely eases up, the struggle, yet on I go, not knowing how else—type, talk, travel—seek to persuade, fail, try again—

the details of human toil do not interest me much anymore—what underlays is fear, a selfish want for more, a generous impulse rarely sprung naked from magnanimity—no—what I see is laziness some call it a civilization while most do not care to address it at all—

Pleasure is rare, called exotic & kept at a viewable distance. Diversion is rife, so much so that it is handmaiden to laziness, if not partner—

Worse yet, these are no unique times nor my culture a singular being. Progress is a sham: death is still helplessly waved away, solitude is still regarded as freak if not enemy, play is for children & drunks, imagination a draught horse to be grunted & thinned of its strange jewels by limitless demand for samely production.

I don't know how to stand against these things. My health will fade, fail or break eventually. My wallet is empty because I refuse whatever place there is or ever was for me. I hang on the margins & call them otherwise. My ideals are the kind best lived not died for.

I cannot conjure a happy world by mine own hands, & lack much of any others to join with—my plan is simply my pen & a place I've briefly known & loved—yet even there I did not succeed but to limp away still flailing—

The days clump in desperate succession—capitulation simply seems worse—

My only comfort from the world are these words: No way out but through. I look at the bent & broken around me & think: this freedom I know is better, I just don't know what better to do with it.

I can only ask of myself: do not give up. & this morning I found some way to again press myself into the world & allow it in me.

My train runs through snowy bare woods & life hugs me to pass the mystery live in again & again—

I want to write til I die very old & spewed empty, romance black & white winter scapes that neither need nor follow—I am fang-hungry not for money, not for beeping baubles but for music, conjured from all about the pink the waving the rhythmic

I walk days unto years without hardly a true word spake. I want to, hard deep want to say lasting something & bump about with what I hear in return—

this is all that matters—all I cannot shed—all I cannot fail to believe in—

A scream through my mind that *this is it*—now—now plastic cafe, some radio chewing candy, some night wiggling blue with snow—

it—this is it—this is it—
 it always has been
 wherever—*this*

The only promise my art seems to wish to keep is to those I have been—it's as though how I would teach & remind myself is found in my own notebooks—pages thick with many heeded in song, book, film—in person—

the connection I seek & advice I'll use is there—

Luna T's Cafe sprawls & more than ever—the storm without somewhat tonight's, somewhat else's—there is a place for me at the bar—Rebecca waits in her seat next to mine—Rich & Franny sit nearby—Mr. Bob cleans glasses & watches sports news on the TV—Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker droops over a bourbon-laced coffee & an old memory—firelight & Spanish guitar—

I watch from afar as I have many years—
 my home not place but rhythm & melody—
 lingual hovel aburst with many rooms—

Accelerating into my work again—times are struggle, familiarly uncertain—& I can only think how always it's like this—

the night is cold, customers few—TV does not last, gives way to radio, then to strumming—
 I will not dwindle because those I was would notice—

It was a hard day, whichever this was, & I write still doubt's bitch, yet I do write, hope passes me to another day—

Rebecca looks at me pleased—I kiss back several of her moles—

This is all I've ever done that matters—& do it now with a crackle would rather break than decline—I radiate the words from a fat little candy in a pitch of possible—

They sing—I listen—I hold Beckah's hand—she's with me again—call her Kassi, Merry Muse, call her whatever the words that leaf beauty's corona about her head—

I sleep before the rest, on the couch in the old manager's office—the shouting & dancing go on in yon fixtional world, loves me, needs me some.

Part Five

*“We have drunk the Soma;
we have become immortal;
we have gone to the light;
we have found the gods.”*
—*Rig Veda*, c. 1000 B.C.

Something, a kind of word, somewhat of shine, winter’s blue steel cold, a game, a cosmos,
time’s fabeling play?

Something, from somewhere, what has not wrecked, faded failed fallen, a kind of word,
hark its shine, endless fancies.

Yes. Now sip from your cup. Again. Rising a ray at a time, test each seeming solid step twice.
This far & urge toward farther. Urge nigh madness toward farther.

Sip, & again. Heating with songs
furies, remember the flow within.
What? Whatever. Some of that too.

Thinking toward what place the many books of this fiction has in this or the many
kinds of worlds. News of it somewhat more broadcast tho still it sits obscure more
often in its crumbly binders.

I am conduit between what is my world & this fiction’s. The two cross but do
not align. I am their conjoin.

Every world is some other world’s fable as much as its own. The essence of a world
is what cannot be strained out by time, religion, polity, even Nature.

To move deeper into this fiction while not ceding what meaningful place I bear in
my own world’s infinitely strandsy fable.

I’m learning to admire gutsy bastards for how they strike out where most cower.
I want to write like that, & again.

Come from the stars & bound there again hereafter? So I keep reading, so many
claim. Is it a thought for comfort to a race lonely at the world’s feast? Not enough
to swallow the world & be pleased, too deep-down uncertain

there is a language in snow clung to cliffs, in overcast dusks, in the strange passage
of something resembling time—

Many worlds rest within & along & inside each other—hugging, clashing—more
& more & question’s roar—

Running hard & difficult with the we-desire—all souls move alone yet—there is
 obscure, deep poem in all things, the sweet chorale of we does not fail to return
 in new guise, what melds deep in the night does not release unchanged into the flicking
 daylight—

Bound seeming mortal in a net of imposed fables, truly no song of the world righter
 than any other. Some conjures for crush, some for flight, some for the deepest fullmoon
 ecstasy—

Crossed against the general grovel brings on a greater bitter with the years, washes
 over papers & through the waves—

No answers in bed or book, the snow falls with cold little nips tonight uninvited,
 unexplained—

“The answer is other” cracks one—
 “All some & none of the above” says another—

Luna T’s Cafe rolls on to the ocean, into the woods, wild through time—a spaceship
 of a kind, a vessel on seas—a sprawl among the kosmos—it contains no single vital
 story anymore—

to find my pen’s way through it demands acquiring ways I do not yet possess—the
 pages add slowly—

I try—try—try more—

Night wet & cold, & funny, & it challenges me to join anew & anew,
 among the many songs, & little can I resist, the more I open out the more pours
 though me, my scattered days & hours & years resemble meaning & this
 fat sheaf of pages matters, & while I cannot be new neither shall I be old,
 something other seems more right, for the rage in my veins is thrashing & unkempt
 like always, & the love for both smooth & burn is ever high—

The night drizzles cool & wet & I think: up the dose & I think: twine
 the many musics & I am willing to service all creation with my pen

if I have to conjure the big night for a hundred pages or more & it takes days
 or weeks I shall—

Big night, oh yah, that idea, perhaps I said it aloud one night at Luna T’s Cafe, some words
 of it went around, I think, it went past me in any respect & I started hearing it told to me like
 some new idea, & I suppose it is, not what I was thinking, not much, it much more now
 even as a few lines & days pass, it’s more as its origins smear & gone, so if you see a poster
 or hear mention you’ll know it began here but has no end yet thought—

I think: some people, some worlds more sugar than others, some creatures languish however served up, pretty & smoking, it's not enough, music doesn't happen because hands & air will them easily,

In an empire gorged of variety, sweet musical moves are the more prized—the jackals conjure for formula & ease, the wide expectation leans back,

a true note rarely comes forth.

A big night will be many things,
I suppose.

at some point I had to notice them playing again—I suppose it was inevitable—I'm sitting more with these pages, the band wants something to do too—

the bar opens its doors again, too, sort of, pouring liquids not commercial or easily high-inducing—

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker sits still at his stool, his coffee at hand, uncertain if it contains bourbon anymore—

“There is no tomorrow left to conjure. The devils themselves artily arrange a perpetual night ever-lit by their mesmerizing craft—

“None too real nor bright the stars above, more an exoticist's fanciful flourish—

“The Lord has come & manifests dully in all things. The lord urges marketplace prosperity as a bane to y'souls!

“Dreams abide in long careful cages & desire is ever herded toward a vanilla familiarity—

“Must we all be sodden to see with unruined eyes the broken splendor about us? Must we concede to the devils the meat of our thinking, the thrust of our prayers, the deeper teeth of our want?

“I beseech no God upon this fair & foul domain. None need be summoned nor hailed. The God our race becomes in breaking into life's essence & distributing unevenly its rewards & revelations. The God our race manifests as cracker & shaper & life-&-death-monger!

“None God need try to seize governance of this twisted realm. God we are in what small ways we mercy & make, & in what greater ways we harrow & hew!”

Noisy Children will even leave the bandroom door open & play to that rant and its kin sometimes—

Knickerbocker approaches a glowing beast at times, not able to say if he lives ordinary as a man yet since none see him come & go—save Mr. Bob the barman whose word on this matter is none—

Noisy Children want to play again no matter the Cafe’s spinning into other dimensions & realities—their fans keep showing up, too, so rockshows return to the Cafe & when big night, a or the or both, begins if it hasn’t, there will be a very loud soundtrack—

for nothing left to do on these pages but write them stellar fuck nutty again—the times need a press beyond dichotomies, a push for deeper thinking of water & rhythm—

Noisy Children accelerates its music to find again the moment & chase through it to many others—

I sit in the corner writing that’s all I really like to do now or ever—sit there trying to tell the story while figuring what it might be—

the sunsets some nights make it in, cover my table, so bright my page is blind as I fill it—

if must I will sit on the floor to write true notes anymore—sit lie crawl—but I don’t think that true notes wish for submission so much as greater wield of power—show I’m near 40 not 17, show I’m still 17 in ways that matter raw & rootless—

I listen to them jam & figure only more good will come of this—

Mr. Bob the barman has long kept the Cafe running while I was elsewhere & nowhere, Rich, Rebecca, Franny too—he considers his place at the near end of the Cafe’s business yet did not counter the blunt end of commercial liquor selling—

“I gave my piece to the bottle, & I lost a great deal to it. I took behind the bar for the comfort that I can offer when the mug fails. I know what it’s like down there. I still dream about it. Rich hired me to tend bar & he meant it. *Tend bar.*”

So he tends, & I notice Franny helps him. He does the serving & the listening, she does something else. She keeps a few books around, works the jukebox & radio, allows TV in & then ushers it out like a lush enjoyed but nightly vamoosed—

A kind of hard comfort between the two of them—a welcome, provisions, warm words, but more—intuition, laughter, kin making—

Rebecca is returned as am I from other places & doings—she watches her dad’s band play & draws—looking for the deep matter, showing me little but kissing me hard & often—she never remembers we’re 7 years not 7 days married—

“I’ll keep chasing you as hard,” she says. “It doesn’t end for me” pause “but there’s always more to it with you, that’s why we do it—you keep leading me elsewhere”

I nod. She looks at me hard & starts drawing with two hands—it matters—

“it always did” she says—

it always did matter—these pages, their story, my pen—always mattered during the worst days—

always mattered—always hurt—always meant enough to continue—

I think about the cities I’ve lived, hardly one life rightly called, Washington Street in downtown Boston where I was so often running for trains & looking for places to write, & soft hands, few or none found, but ten years I tried—

Pioneer Square in Portland how often I sat on its brick steps & was lonely & grateful—its Christmas tree moved me—I so wanted to be home there forever—I live there now, this moment, don’t know why—but ask me my home I say Portland, Oregon—as once I said Boston—as once I said Hartford—

Hartford too—a place I’ve left & returned to several times—each with diminishing fondness—nothing new here—the hustlers breed & accumulate year by year—bastards holding the levers keep things squeezed tight—city pride measured by numbers—yet once I loved here—I guess what once this place was—

Black Rock City—my other home than Portland, nearly as far—

Where my Art sizzles tis from the love unchoosing I live & the desperateness sometimes constant I endure—the world is fake, a stage, vibrations yet move about in it enough years & its hooks, teeth clasp & claim—

By memory one knows the past, by wish the future—Now, like home & love, is more verb than aught else—light & sound pass, blood & bile work away, dreams thrust & cajole—bits of me recall a thousand moments of sensation I can rarely prove exist—

a coffeeshop north of Boston where I read & wrote in a corner, became a kind of stray welcomed & supped—

a museum in Chicago I romanced for a week—not wanting to leave its many-roomed sweep of visual excitements—

late night buses in Portland, rode them from jobless days at the downtown library—heart crushed yet beating for lack of other task—

moments over years in a restaurant's back room where friends sung & chanted & laughed & renewed—

This story has traveled through these places & I know not whither next—

in truth I write for love & desperateness mostly none else is native—maybe a who or where at moments—but mostly it's me alone on a fucking bus wondering how will I pull it off this time—

& I will—I do—Luna T's Cafe coheres again in my mind—I slowly remember how to write this—how to write everything—

no choice, my rationale over & over—no fucking choice—

Years ago I thought ending these stories was the brave act—I think now it's not stopping, letting the music go out more variously & wild & clean—

Once, high, I approached trees through snow—the snow interested me—I wanted to stop but I had to take a picture—it was a mild grey winter's day—the campus was decorated with pretty girls & boys—I'd come to see a freaky French cartoon—

snow was cold pudding to walk through—sky a dour grey sea—trees barelimbed loomed perfect architecture—

when the darkness later came I was miles away on a hill overlooking a highway—in the other direction was an obscure valley, frozen waterway, tangled descent into trees & bushes—I lobbed snowballs at cars & felt arrived—cold, no dwelling, yet there I was, weightless with glee—

big night, what of it, we know at least that Noisy Children will rock it how & somehow—Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker will be there, served his drink by Mr. Bob the barman & assured by Franny Americus—

“That war was a vial thing”

“It was, Doctor”

“I have observed that when human governance leans too bluntly on denial or intolerance, one set upon or against another, bloodshed is the inevitable antidote”

Franny listens, her purples glow near neon when she's thinking. “I grew up in pretty rural Georgia. Most folks divided along money lines not color ones. Didn't help to be female neither.”

“In the larger story, the truth is opposite”

“Larger story?”

Knickerbocker, strangely sedate, nods. **“The one denizens here are beginning to scrutinize in earnest.”**

“Oh.”

“I await returns” he adds, sips from his cup, & says no more.

larger story from one moment to another, one place, the next, one person, now more, larger story & what primary myths & songs color it—

led by bureaucrats, fanatics, & thieves, by those whored out numb & the rest wishing for white chargers & stakes aflame—

what to do within such story to incur their weaknesses, more than simple resistance, more & more

old tribal stories wed to impossible machines—tis possible—tis?

tis—the pills & plants, machines & chants—here comes everything—

A thick sheaf of pages painful to look through—its fragmented hopes & hungers & confessions—yet I begin to think on it like a friend—its unwieldy beat-up old binder—its scent so near I cannot detect it—

this story is witness & so valued in such ways—it connects day to distant day & bears remembrance in a series of reports—

the big night leading toward now will mayhap join the scattered ragtag of lines—well so I hope as I sit on yet another of my life’s countless buses—safe for a little while—

Rebecca kisses my cheek & urges me cast along—

When freaks come by, they will, notice them by how they are past trippin scriptures, notice what music & trees does to them, what news they pass with fire, what oceans they conjure with casual fingers

regard this night bigger freak than all, all it attracts to sing it, humans a few number against the whole—

X the Space Alien taps me: “If you ever stop you’re caught” I nod

Beauty wilder than what’s safe, moves agreeably along—Beauty the lover night pursues through shadows & stars

Rebecca leans against me for a moment, best telling in wordless like always—

Sometimes this story resembled fiction no longer maybe became the fiction I called it, moreso than twas, & everything became possible save one: going back.

Cecile grins suddenly & downs a pitcher of T’s Secret Brew to toast me, I suppose—

What never has left is love for the melody & the hue, curve & rhythm, always in & of these,
the excitement black pens contain coiled,

Gretta nods, thumps her bass deeper—

More confession, now than ever however cracked, nonlinear, the twist & fight within, the
singing *will not fucking cease*—I feel it rough & roaring by day & dream, I feel it everywhere no
matter the dull surfaces of faces & walls—it's there, & there, more & moreso—

I release to it in waking but also in slide down among dreams, I feel it crush its cry through
my teeth

Freedom is hard. Waking up ever hurts when many slumber simply if betimes with stir—

Americus & Reality & Pascale play louder & louder til I still & stand back.

The train, the bus, whatever it is, takes me toward a bed or desk, whichever, & none of this
is new, nothing, yet,

this night is new, it blooms singly

open out like ever, forgetting now the where or the when, the page laying blank open & I fall
in the world thus sups me, then partakes of my knowing & shares its own

this night blows through the world powerful as any other

nothing but confession & praise left yet each bear lifetimes of enthuse, point newly to the
sky grey blunt & ever exciting, to late winter's snow black & white regard its every wonder

feel the lift now, everything aloft save what doesn't matter & surely everything does matter

the night in contour & glare, fistly greater than electric torches feebly alighting patches—

“Should we stop him?”

“If he ever stops we're caught”

I push to be my strongest again,
find those magick places within
& how the come from elsewhere—

divide live prayer from poisonous
habit—

The push some days is harder,
all feels flat, nothing dandy shakes,
other days remembranced better brightly
but truer they struggled too—
the better ones spend more ink,

tis all—

looser of space & time than once,
 memories forget themselves & arrive
 without sentiment—bent to fool; or
 beg to resume—

flat. flat. music eludes, power dim—

I think of Portland, days walking
 along Martin Luther King Drive, poor
 as fuck, jobless & heartcrushed
 often yet I felt like life was
 fat with chance.

Seattle before that, lost summer
 but just as aflame at moments—
 biking & bussing, writing poems
 everywhere—

Even Boston retains a few bits of
 glitter—

I'm nowhere now & pretending
 otherwise makes it worse—all
 I can do is keep coming
 back & again to Art,

Live my prayer as work toward
 ever higher days—

I sip my diet soda at Luna T's Cafe's bar, & explain:

I've been thinking that I've grown unclear what story, how? & so have begin to look for that
 story, realizing the one it used to be was Hartford & alcohol & poverty & books, & a long
 while it's been uprootedness & psychedelics & nature & music, story come from those basic
 elements, & they've changed, here I remain pen in hand working from very different baskets
 of clay—

awhile it was OK when Hartford became Boston, even when alcohol become psychedelics,
 but that led poverty to trees, nature that is, & books became music, things perhaps inevitable
 but still I wrote on—

then Boston became West Coast & some fuck fluke took me back to Hartford but we're not
 a we, not even close, & so I can't write as I did because the story isn't the same—

I sit on a bus I rode back when I was 17 but the story isn't the same—

I don't know what story, how, though lately I've been trying, all that's led me too is here,
lingual truth again is what I want, the page honest with words—what story, how?

Cecile's wearing his black sleeveless Motherfuckers t-shirt, head shaven of its hair remain,
arms rock carved from a lifetime of banging skins hard & soft—

“Getting a crush on me?”

“Just looking. What story, how?”

“Yr in yr own way like always when you get all cunt cloggy”

“Thanks”

“Rhythm & melody, not much else, my pretty. A few words, even for you not many of them
mean much.”

I nod. He's right there.

Rhythm & melody. Some words. Big night every night. Possible.

I continue:

The world I was born into, & later my stories, has transformed many times & slows none—
right now, someone far side of globe can read about some of you on any cyberspaced
computer—this won't do aught but continue—it's good—

regard my pen—its direct kind diminishing, a relative will take over, as much as I avoid it—

yet the truth is black ink on white sheets—big night every night, possible. One night I die &
what next.

What story, how has changed because the human world has shifted along, my place in it too
many times—

imagining Luna T's a small working class bar in a small degrading city long ago wasn't
enough—

I work at a newspaper & it hardly matters but the paycheck, too long ago I began looking
some other way—

have to stop awhile—



It's an obscure door out the back of Luna T's to elsewhere, elewhen, elsehow. Some see the
door obviously, some barely, some not at all—

I didn't see it, didn't know that's what I walked through, what anyone walks through, to get
to elsewhere, elewhen, elsehow.

Then the full moon reminded me, over Ohio, I was riding some bus & the moon
remembered another time we regarded one another, & it hit me: doorway, or perhaps I knew

it from a laundrymat some thousand miles east of this road chasing along the Mississippi—a door I suddenly noticed—& later the moon reminded me—& here I am knowing the door out the back of Luna T's Cafe—

& the big night nears, it surely does but I don't know what it will or can be like—I don't know—

Rebecca has gone through the door some while ago which is why I came before it, looking for her—there it is, I go through, here I am—

this is some kind of present truth to work with—

More a heart shared rawly than a calm story told, what pushes this book deeper, through the obscure back door, Rebecca is in there somewhere, we chase each other, take turns, now mine,

Each time I enter a pale blue vase on a small teak table too near the opening door's swing & I hardly catch the pending crash—

a rosy-lit room beheld, dark wood paneled, an armchair resembling others I've loved—a catch in the wall, never the same place, & me weakening & wishing just to sit—

or perhaps my musewife simply pushes me down into chair & takes her place in my lap truly hers—a window near shows a winterscape scrolling by, & she looks at me all blue-eyed darling & says tree chocolate kisses melody artist his muse artist his muse artist his muse—

Noisy Children music strums by restless & persistent, Gretta's bass leading with its thumping laugh, Cecile's drums flitting softly above & below, three acoustics & no keyboards hints that Stephanie has joined Rich & Ronnie on six-string orchestra then Rebecca flickers colors at me with fingertips glowing, peach, tan, pale blue, virgin pink, burning red

I agree to all of this & fall through hesitancy & woe to a place spangled with live making, fall through fur & beating wings, through leaves & branches pulsing with universe's potent bright stuff, become toward the high throb & none else I ever seek, music a rising floor beneath me as colors lift & I go, I go, I am gone, & keep going—

This human thing in me that thinks sloppy & feels selfishly, that calls one thing day & another night approving more the latter

that doubts like doubt is a good weapon & a righteous skill—

this human thing in me so prone to delicious shudder at a smiling face, a sky-spiralling tree, & values this papyry noise called language & its dancing kindred rhythm & melody

that watches & differentiates—a brown swamp at twilight holy, a raging king & his pontificating lies loathsome

I try til a kiss lords me all & here is this armchair watching a train pass by through which
 who I was scribbles furiously through fear &—

help me my every heartbeat says hold me kiss me teach me save me near me gird me chain
 me prison me if that is how to be safe when free drives me too frenzied I—

her hand now leads me on knowing better what to do—

Oh, heart crushed by a some-a man I thought friend shrug smile goodbye—nothing I could
 say or write to you—not my fist upon your throat—not my curse or cry—nothing—you
 lorded me that day & my pen drooped—

see it rise wild again, motherfucker—how you hurt me—how like her you swam in my trust
 & regard—how you smiled & poisoned me from within—

see me bleed, see it hurt,
 see the embarrass, the shame,
 see me vow to better beyond
 your sorrow selfish harmful
 pricking soul—

You took what little stable ground I had—you had masters to please—please them, please
 them, please them—

Oh it hurts—yes sure it does—
 & I forgive you no—none—nothing—

here look—see you hurt me—
 see this page for you—this
 music—ugly & angry—see
 it float elsewhere—low
 low bastard—

see me push on. see me pass you.

A mourning. A shift. Letting loose when not letting go. Oh sadness I can do nothing for
 your deepest roots, there is no we between us in truth, I suckle them, they inspire me.

I once knew a woman wrapped around her wound's dark fists. I knew her & knew her until
 one day she was gone. Words do not rightly lament such ruptures. Words remind the living
 ache of a

world out there, a personhood awaiting to resume. Slowly I remembered & the sadness
 found itself no longer sickly & bloated but sharp, tuneful, an instrument ready for travel.
 Packed & potent.

I said I love you but did not mean sacrifice nor demise, it was no longer spilled about &
 embarrassing.

here it is this continuing night & I am yet along its path. Not well as in sick & recovered but neither ill with heartstruck paralysis.

No what toward naught but assembling my tools & readying for carriage. From yesterday's home toward where everything now pends & has waited, & waits tonight.

Scrape my face, gather my tools, thank all that yet I live

I promised the universe to serve my world if given a muse to love & sleep twined many nights. Must & shall toward this vow. Must & shall.

Rebecca reminds me with her hand & we move further in, deeper unto—

assembling tools, readying for carriage, crown of tools simple plastic & metal & ink pen, & a sheaf of pages in a half-broken binder, & a few similar others—

the thousand thousand thousand words filling thousands of pages & runs along thousands of days & hardly any why involved now if ever—

gathering for the great burst westward, the hope for flight unto release not ruin this time—

carrying Luna T's Cafe along, sure, like always, this state to that, this decade then more of course

see this pen go see its raggy man keep trying yes see however which way possible—

the pain is fuel, the very weariness & its drag is fuel, all of it fucking fuel, this scribbling soul intends to burn everything in its eternal starflight & released keep going, a vow, a hope, a fancy—

the night every one of them does cover & carry me along praise em & love em & dance & laugh & kiss as many of away as possible—

see the scribbling raggy bit of man energy going to spend it all & ever & all

I know no other way!

here goes again!

t h i s i s o n l y h o w !

Big night ever coming & always about, kiss it lovely, its several sweet strums, a low voice jiggling between croon & laughter—

oh my let it out blow it way
out

Warm breath the years twas only mine own & a wish yet reckon current hours & the she-soul always about—

Luna T's bar roars wide with delight as hometown ballteams stomp & score & score again!

Joy fires through me, green with seed & sunlight & soil I bug & animal & dual thumb dance my way about, ancient magick, what kings & priests try to conjure & romance with fist & tome, holy ancient pagan green magick regards them not save as foul buzz, wee requirements—

I dance six legs & arms borrowing some & going more—call every flap & flourish some good thing's prayers

one for a girl giggled & gone
 one for a brother striving mongst demons
 one for a world pocked with cruel

beg me, keep me, bite me, eat me, dreams near sunlight I am drifting through ragged rooms of apocalypse, I am flying toward whatever soft & caressing,

ob big & little here goes up & higher shoot! score! shoot score! shoot! score!

I open out wider the joy & dirt toward every's where—

I remember. My kind remembers.
 I believe. My kind believes.
 I love. We love.

We grieve & we dance, hardly a
 change in vibration between them.

Rebecca watches me flare greater & her hands wild across her page—her blue eyes rise cathedral's dreaming high & more—

Big night bring the drinks & the best party jokes. Stop now.

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker in silence observes TV images of carnage & brutality, burned bodies, wrecked mothers, artillery wielding grimacing boys & he rises up hotter than holy & he cries: *“Behold yon vision of the small final king of men as he & his cabal of wizened chieftains arch steely against any plaint for mercy or humility!*

“Behold the small final king of men proclaim some other age's truth that of our own! Behold his clutch upon

incoherent tomes, sickly pages rife with tribal fables & ancient fears!

“Behold this small final king of men as his bloodless eyes shift among slaughter’s fragments for a holy instruction or clue! Behold nothing good in this world respond to his fervent scrabble!

“Fellow sinners in this reconstructed bunker of everpersisting iniquity! Ye all be helpless before the fist & fury of yon small final king of men! Helpless, one & all, but to observe the steady collapse of empires as the deepest mark in a shoreline fills inevitably with tide.

“Neither confess nor beseech any god in your writhing woe! This race no longer bears a loving father even as a child’s remaining dream. We walk many & alone, we fail & fall familiarly & alone.”

Mr. Bob the barman leaps for Dr. Knickerbocker’s cane before it can strike true the TV mounted on the wall. The Sox are on soon however right the doc is otherwise.

rosy-lit room, dark wood paneled, an armchair on both coasts, still & gone—catch in the wall, never the same place, & I sit toward beginning of a big night—

collapse within, remembering thrashing busrides, accidental pretty moments, lives for hours or weeks—

if I sleep dreams will come again & dash me hard with persistence, with hard heat & manic tune, & dreams strengthen & follow me into daylight—hook into my soft, prick me of power for obscure ends, raise me higher from something not quite necessity nor love—

Nothing happens like any prediction, neither less & more,

was it more love or touch or clarity yearned all those years?

branches glow in streetlight how little explains anything—

The secret agent sat next to the space alien, the old preacher, the dead poet, & others & he admitted he was a secret agent tho nobody had queried. “I know, I know. Now it’s not secret. But then again I was sort of fired. Sort of. I was told to stop what I was doing & do no more. They still pay me though I don’t really exist officially. It’s complex.”

There is polite listening. The agent continues.

“I could tell you things to give you nightmares. How two things can be equally true & totally contradictory. It’s what you whacko conspiracy theorists miss. I feel bad for them. They don’t understand the basics of time & space manipulation.”

The alien nods.

“Let two realities dovetail at key moments & whammo! Two correct explanations for one event. Let several cross or lay several atop each other & it gets even better.

The dead poet sits his ice water. “We knew this a long time ago, for a little while.”

“Yes! We let you in a side door & showed you! Then we let you out a dead end to assure nothing you claimed could be verified. It was sorrowfully easy.”

The old preacher sips his drink. **“You are a fool to claim such knowledge & wisdom. You are owned & cowed & deceived by your partial knowledge & full arrogance,”** he says quietly.

“Yes! I told them that! I said we no longer controlled events if we ever had. I tried.” Sad.

Everyone silent awhile. “I came here on a hint from something. It was like a dream or a delusion. The narcotics in my brain conspired this coming here. So to speak.”

“You can stay,” says Rebecca, smiling. “You’re safer here than most anywhere else.”

“Yes. Awhile.” Nods. Yes.

Secret agent looks me over. “You’re the kind they want. But you also scare them.” I nod, uninterested. “If you can just learn to wield it all, not just some scrap of coherent life, & not just a fat fuck nutty pen while your days burn down. All of it. A danger. An attraction too.”

“All I want is an end to the occupation. Men guarding men all over the world. Patches of my heart still not my own. If you say they connect, I already know this. But how? What to do toward it?”

“Burn it all. Every last page.”

“What good would that do?”

He sighs. "I don't know. It's what they wanted you to do. You nearly did at moments." I nod. "But you didn't & there is a plan for that too." I look at him. "Leave." His face flattens open. "What you were before you came here & what you are now bear a chasm between them. Nobody is after me. I do no good to their ideas." He nods. Pulls out his weapon & lays it on the bar. None of us go for it. It remains.

Finally Rebecca nods & Mr. Bob gathers it with a hankie. A fresh drink for the spy. Finally, retirement. Feels good.

We call him Agent Garrish. He nods, deserves this, knows it. Feels welcomed. The weapon is unseen again.

"No more warnings?"

"No. Information, theories, speculation."

"No help? I have contacts."

"It's not *that* kind of story."

"Burdened with plot?"

"Yes. That kind."

"What is my role here?"

"To discover your role here"

"You used to have plots. I read your file."

"No, you didn't."

"You're right. I was guessing."

"Help bartend. We need Mr. Bob for other things."

"Do I get to see?"

"I don't know."

"Does Luna T's even serve alcohol anymore?"

He is tall & very thin. His black trench coat & fedora stick around. A newcomer yet already some ease about him. It helps that he's funny. Tells improbable stories. People allow this. It's an improbable world, at best guess.

Watches *X-Files* on reruns with reluctance. Loves *Married with Children* says Al Bundy is nearer a realistic spook than Fox Mulder. Nods. One blue eye, one green. Some call him Agent Bowie.

Then he twitches harder & admits he wrote a book too. His twitch riles across his face burst from within by a need to understand, to please & connect. A weak man in some ways.

"Mine isn't all loopy and religious like yours" I snort. "It's adventure. Drug dealers. Slave traders. Fat politicians & juicy whoors." "Extraterrestrial prison camps?" I suggest. Twitch, twitch: "Maybe." "Transdimensional synthesis?" Twitch, twitch! "Some." "Stellar warp technology & space-time inversion?" Twitch!

Rebecca makes me stop before Garrish Bowie explodes or worse. I remind him of his bartending duties, something I learn quickly to hold over his head. He bartends with middling skill & intermittent passion.

"Rebecca, why someone new?"

"Why not? He's funny"

“There’s enough already”
 “I don’t know but there he is to be figured out.”
 “True”

Another speed westward, pen & place & muse all mixing up higher again, I’ve left Connecticut behind, my few loved ones there aging & broken one way or another. Barely made it out.

Bring a fresh crop of hopes with me,
 grown from a soil enriched with humility.
 What next, dunno.

3000 miles & 6 days will bring me my preferred playing field. A chance to make it, again.

“You’re wanting your freak mojo back.”
 “My music, yes. It’s not gone. It just . . . wavers in & out.”
 “And you know to get anywhere it has to run high hard & constant”
 “So what then?”
 “There was a time I was a mushroom while. Magick kind. I’m sure you know.”
 “This isn’t helping, Bowie”
 “I learned a lot. Soil & sunshine & moisture is a feast. I don’t know if there’s much else any living thing really needs.”
 “And?”
 “There’s nothing but the truth. The rest is trails away & vapors. If you want your mojo or music back, they’re the same thing, you have to tell the truth again”
 “I try”
 “Try harder.”
 “You were a mushroom.”
 “It was an experiment. Unofficial project. Controversial. They called me Freddy Ready.”
 “Your code name?”
 “The mushrooms. It was a compliment & critique. They’re like that.”

If this story hasn’t been virtually polluted with truth-telling or truth-attempting then I don’t know what fills its sheets.

What I don’t know is what exactly drives me right now. What the nature of the thing that replaced all that was crushed. Awhile it was psychedelic dream, later it was desire’s supernova. Now . . . I don’t know. Music a hint, nature a hint. No hint in people. None.

I’m 40 years old in a few days with four bags of belongings on a cross-country bus. My computer is raced west along the land too.

No slow. Little safe. Deep’s hunger.

Noisy Children music whips me hard along as ever. Driven, *alive*.

“Yam what I yam”

Bowie nods. Wipes glasses already clean. Mr. Bob teaching him well. “Popeye. Based on a secret super agent. Cartoons coded with messages. Spinach. When his pipe blows & how long & what angle.” Cackles.

I dig deeper into your songs, the nocturnes hoarier every day by which I cried our rise & crash. It hurts, some, you hurt me, killed a kind of thing in me, but I kept getting up every day, sloppy & tubby & clownly ignorant of any moment but this one, this one, this one—

Then I saw new human turrets aflame, embodied operas of stupid pain, ideals wielded & wasted by boss-men with fat hubris to protect from whatever world open hands might creep through—

See, my pen kept moving & a pretty noise here & there, & then blue eyes looking at me as you did, & others before you, & the green everywhere kept writing hope & instructions all over my sorry ass & what path I stumbled when not several—

All remaining of you were some delicious dream moments & a long drag twined of guilt, failure, sadness—& really nothing to do but write it through—say: I loved you—say: a swathe of you runs through me yet—say: you join many other swathes—you take your place alongside Jenny, Christine, Mark, Kelly, Barry, Guy, Douglas, Leni, Erika, Gerry, & more, you’re more a name on a list now, another grey empty burntout building in my long twilight prairie, I am putting you away in some vital manner, I sang you many songs, fed you from my dreams & very ether, close to nameless or even lost for you—but that day passed, & a few more, & what last of you I knew was laughing claws in my veins, & even that now some other day’s foul news—

the other night in a rainstorm I ranted & praised for a new beloved’s attention. I held her wholly when the night within shifted hot & cold. I called her blue eyes to me again & again when our temporary parting wild grieved. I told her I loved her because she stayed. Other words more romancey but these belonged to her alone.

Somewhere within you’ll always laugh through me. This is how hardest you remain. The rest old ink stains on pages I yowled & then elsewhere.

& this story’s longest plaint: be again about more than Soulard’s woe. Not knowing how, but again.

The whole bar at Luna T’s watches my arriving minutes into Seattle, the swoop of bus along I-90, a million trees beneath a clouded sky, the fistly wind pushing everything about, & I put on my many shirts & jackets that didn’t fit in my bags—

They regard my tired face & murmur words to rouse me—neither hour nor mile separates us & they come along this old path now new again gladly.

Few who know me well, if any at all in fact, regard this city as my last arrival. Yet it marks the full blossom of my latest re-birth & shall immerse me a long while—

Bowie the spy alone speaks up: “That Space Needle was a Martian artifact prettied up for the World’s Fair! Haha! I kid you not!”

Some days pass, some things move, some wait, I squirm with the begging for a place among others, but deeper is the thrust & shaping my renewed life out West demands & deserves—

I wandered hours, riding my willing old bicycle monster & timeflopping to other days & their passing truths—

nothing what it seems, so my brother Jim Reality says & OK & yes & sure & certainly & huh?

30 years I’ve put pen & pencil & paper & pause here to say: yes, & say huh?

Sitting yet another joint & scribbling w/longhair music on my earphones & what is all this how do I do it when else & more & but & all not as it seems?

I’m working on it, elliptically, & so not making my way greatly enough—

Rebecca leans against me & her smile is all yes, no huh—& I think: she’s right!

Bellevue Transit Center 9-11-2002 I last sat here & the woman I loved then was still perhaps within reach—a job interview then as now a total bust—

yet reckon the difference in 1½ years—reckon how being here again was something I could not have foreseen—here I am—the woman I wanted then is another’s wife & another’s mother—perhaps I never had a chance—

I speak marry & love to another as well—the corporate waste about me hasn’t moved—

All alone. All Suffering. Yes. No. Sometimes. Creatures & all we know clung to the earth, hurt, hurt, yes, true, sometimes else, days perhaps moments near elsewhere

the wide plunge deep unto another night, another city, another muse somewhere, the music without memory or fear, I feel the jitter again, feel it careening

the day sorted through its losses, one still hurts but not as much, I wish her happiness & novelty & would rather not know how she fades in me day by day

You’ve come & gone, by your many choices—there’s nobody left to blame or forgive just remembrance pursuing unrevealed mysteries in times past & to come—affecting, wild card—blood haunted yet flowing—

Surrender some things, forgive others, let some hate poison everything, then let that fragment away too, forgive, then move along, to teach, to heal, to dream, whatever, the words rise through as ever, their will told by shifting vibrations, by lean & dizzy, rise & press, how many colors, how few

Someone looks about Luna T's bar & cracks some query about pending Seattle Mariners' banners—Space Needle souvenirs—Rainier beer cheap on tap—

Surrender some things, forgive others, how many people I've been while filling these pages, how many more awaiting, press it on by one slant then another, several, none, I talk mostly to old pages & persisting mysteries nowadays, if a creature perhaps by now a cat's fifth life going on til sometime rather than when—

Rebecca kisses my cheek, good wife, good muse, good schoolgirl high & low, resembling many & ever further herself & I suppose it's possible in her paintings I may still resemble clarity—

yes I want to hope, to stride through moments more stroke than blur, make words bounce & jingle newly & like always, no how-to, none, sit some joint among caffeine & human passages—

Surrender some things, forgive others, keep fucking writing with some crazy electric noise tapping fists & wet smudges within, keep, yes, neither surrender the music nor forgive any threat the line, right round my inner globe, nothing, nobody, not the pink cheeked fairest nor the broad beasted bullet, hardly even concede ever stopping ever, this power very itself is my home, is my who, bears owns carries cuddles kisses defines my who—

ever the flesh begs flesh, promises how good this time, how like the moon's breadth, dream's flights, filling no other means might—

how fool.

a tongue down any raised virgin's heated back, slower than ticks, slower still, not enough, not answer, not the power, more power's great dandy toy

“Young heretic! Thou shalt not deny the soul's carriage & its earthly manifest! None shall realize truth's merest thought with such blunt & blind impedimenta!” cries Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, briefly.

Body fouls & furies—

Surrender some things, forgive others, pursue the highs which never find high enough & settle, a feast of music sings this world, beyond the bumping thugging extended twisting crumbles of this & that coughed-out empire—sings those bumpings & thuggings as deliberately as any green chorused canticle or pink climaxing caterwaul—

Nothing within life slaves as much as life itself. You are spit wildly fully fiery into it & shat blankly dumbly numbly from it.

A few steins hoist high at the bar.
On TV, the Red Sox are winning again.

Bodies fire & freely, lift up & out & through, I spent all day scratching at rocks til I thought something had to be proven—& nothing came—will ever come—

now I sit slower thinking of flowing sugar, wiggling leaves, what many musics near always—

Surrender some things, forgive others, snake among the hard questions themselves, the erratic touches of blown white light, how they allure . . . owned to the moment, pink soft slave bitch to the universe's tending taking hands, taken by a hunger still rising when the feast subsides—

High beyond meaning, the band shifts melody rhythm harmony lyric among each other, perhaps into a dream where several are raged wild & crushed—

play more & more into that dream, sometimes resembling the Big Night, sometimes discovering it is 1968 or 1988 or 2288 & what would each year have sounded like if they'd sung it?

High beyond belief, a tap & several, the moon gives way to its stranger's thorned grasp, now shocks of jagged glow all about the sky

another psychedelic dream, the big shaman chases his small wandering potion-struck tikes, others await him with whimpers of broken dependency—

melody harmony rhythm earticks

your instructions become an erotic lure somewhere deep within, there are ancient strums raised between us, where order breaks off for a beat & the red wild chatharrrrrsis pow! Pow! POW! High beyond meaning?

Yes. Now just fucking pose. Still, & ever. None of you holy house me now but pose & pose & fucking pose & there will be hours I return by.

Scratching at rocks today, some lost mongrel of hours, love me, lick me, let me rejoin, call me back from this throbbing murk, where nothing centrally matters n'more

Neon blinks along a worn stretch wind bops the green to rawer dance brick taverns lean back from that last human word

Just fucking pose. All this freckled glory high beyond meaning, soon, soft, near,

never. Keep one small finger around. Maybe, never.

The hook in my heart broke awhile ago. Sorrow. Mock. Another morning in the sick hotel & trudge on.

Tonight you are nearby my true & new wife, my next wife, my this & here & along wife, near & wishing nearer, we do,

Make Truth is Art

Truth is Art

Art is Truth

bump up higher ugly or otherwise
a step a crawl a cry a whimper

The band pushes it a little
more nobody is going to leave
tonight the windows pulse
black & drip long teeth, the
floor is liquid & warm &
bears naked feet in propulsion
not still dance or drown
oh yes this is psychedelia's
hard truth you will do greater
or you will simply disappear
to yourself in some juking
high way shown IT you carry
on it or you do not there is
no sentiment in the psychedelic
eggcrack of worlds upon worlds
revealed—

I take a moment in the sepia-paged hour upon me. Scared, selfish, old, beset, angry, jealous

green regardez I yes thank ye
green waggle about me & thank ye

cracked phalanx of electric nocturnal buds hung standing mounted blah sky concrete above
except when you know it's trick blah I am failing the world give no fuck lies no fuck lies blah

see it all shine too big
see me seduced by something
& fragments, a little pipe organ
& a flap of pink scarf in the
midnight blow—

Longing for the staying music, the lasting shimmer, crush the nightmare, the sickness, heart
nay broken never was but beaten

two drummers now three feel the rhythm
lengthen & noise deeper & more bodies
now more tightly raise the careen now
raise it again some worlds only live
here inside the rhythm like some only
branch out from the nightest fires—

there is no world I write a few times & it means more or less or other & else

Days scared & then an hour into a secret cavern where several live fugitive the wind spasms
cheap windows & I look around & do not see this resembling home—

Bowie laughs & nudges Cosmic Early who does not comment. Near Luna T's now a great
structure rises its neck beholds a round compact spaceship—Bowie laughs again while
Cosmic Early makes a note—

Rebecca notices sepia reflection off a dark wood counter, the reflection of a ceiling fan
refracting in a darkened window, how the traffic light turns greener each time as the acid
comes on slow 'n' good—

Whatever book after this, if any book at all, this one truest, its pages brutal with innumerable
confessions—

Kassandra, all good & hope in me with you especially tonight as I feel how close & soon
maybe my muse & wife at last to stay so long upon so long but maybe—hope's prelude

the wounded minstrel led along paths secret & known through the small isle's green throb—
if this a dream, it mattered enough to grasp for at dawn—on the beach countless stones
tangled in puckered clutches—from a height tidal mysteries threw out patterns & chaos both
as possible deductions—within the wood charred ancients recalled lost days of
conflagration—a great bird swept & dumbled the air over a road empty even of rural truck &
tractor—a salamander froze & was corpse to the curious touch—

“drink water, breathe deeper, remember the tide,” something counseled—

there are nods at this story—some wisdoms found only on the careening path between
conscious groping & rarer flashes

A long wheeled rush down hill it tasted brilliant, head lowered in to the shoot & lovely &
hard & silent—

only music was magick'd summoned

I look at Knickerbocker. “Men. Foul, lunatic men.”

He reads from his tome:

**“He with body waged a fight,
But body won; it walks upright.**

**Then he struggled with the heart;
Innocence and peace depart.**

**Then he struggled with the mind;
His proud heart he left behind.**

**Now his wars with God begin;
At stroke of midnight God will win.”**

We nod & agree though it sums all nothing. But:

“Stood on the ledge
tied to a noose
you came along &
you cut me loose
you came along &
you cut me loose” blows out of the speakers & matters as much & no deny

long night for sleeping without ease.

we become root & roam, alike & elseways. Nights especially mark this true. Hours among caresses, what love breathes, what foul it breaches, what remains along, its other, its grim—

Shadows by your lashes, hands pressing one page back & another, your great young sheen, how I cannot contrive this all alone, how music passes through flesh as desire—

“Someone shut him up, he’s writing too loudly again” a drunkard at the bar sneers bemused—

Love taps, taps, etches, smotes, disappears with a long excruciating tail of pain behind, lifts, careens, kiss me, go, now, the new berries of sweet nearness, I bow, beg, kneel, remember unwilling, brave by pocked faith back into this shared world I’ve known it full yet twist grossly often to its crushing hungers I willing embrace

If upon the stage Noisy Children amps higher, distort unto distort images of burst chains, slow tapping boots, rising ships with just one bearer—

fanblades flap slowly as the LSD mists the whole run of Luna T’s Cafe for the Big Night arriving here as once the Empire bombed the jungles & rice paddies of a small faraway enemy with—

“Shut him up! Barkeep!”
“Wait a minute. You’ll forget why you’re asking.”

I remember leaning into your grasp as you rested against a tree & you fed me sips of water & small berry endearments—now your pages turn & I can’t remember

“why I was asking”

can't remember "who I was talking about" can't remember "where I came from soupset"
 can't remember "my fears that cripple my happiness"

can't remember & the band shifts back to acoustic the show never ends the music never
 ends follow it, follow, it passes through & leads you to where you will be freer—

Toward truer if not true notes,
 toward a more fertile something,
 a wide-eyed careening time,
 clean bass notes raising nutty highs
 I don't know, comb her hair every
 morning & renew the work's ideal—

Always evolving toward a medicine called love, bear, bring, share, make, mix, spread—

candles splash shadows on stone walls, incense works music & desire into the slightest of
 cracks, hands cup energy awaiting new bid—

Rebecca lays along our bed nude & sketching, smearing, twisting one image toward another
 & back & more & back—

I bear her as my golden light, sleep her in my arms bloodheavy prayer to the night—

What if I could do something other with this story, begin to tear it open & clean up its
 tangled guts, get it well & walking rightly again is't possible? A question now pending—

I wrote: "There can be no lasting bliss in this mortal life til nearly everything ever known,
 ever felt, ever lived, ever chased, ever bitten, ever touched, ever ever, is gone, til one's cell is
 the air, one's scripture's the bee's, til one brushes with sun's light moon's light candle's light,
 til one's body reserves just a little golden moisture, til memory is nonsense, dreams bunk,
 play obvious, polity fool, all truth & future apparent in a lick, a fallen leaf, a shaping
 breeze—"but this time do not stop—I look bluntly & say you are about to get stripped of
 everything including nearly your pen, you will see your heart razored with mocking, cut up
 by lies you treasure when most else is gone, you are going to do things a least a swath of
 respect would prevent you from—you will become a stranger to who you are right now, you
 will regret everything ever—

don't make that call—don't chase that girl—turn off your phone—I am telling you now—

"You can't stop me—Aren't you glad I become you? You got the girl—she sits with you,
 loves you crazy & sane"

"You're going to get awled deep! Mocked, hated, laughed at! For what? For some bitch who
 tells you she does what she has to to survive—long after crushing you & disappearing will
 show up & consider your remaining fidelity as though owed any!"

"But you get the last word. You don't reply. You choose to let it go at a cost unknowable—
 because to continue would be worse"

“But stop it! Save me!”

“No. There’s no saving & no failing—you honored that love to the end—til it was gone—”

“It’s gone—I sometimes feel everything good is gone”

“It’s not—you just have to piss & paw yr way to the green & the good—”

“She destroyed me—”

“No. You don’t need psychedelics to know that.”

“How do I find it again, that magick drive, it just lived in me like a lovely obsessed beast?”

“Turn back to the open door & Art will be there, through the doorway as always. Music, follow it, it will always bring you home.”

“Old sentiments. *Fuck ‘em!*”

“Agreed, but use what you’ve got. That’s all really. Love the one you’re with. Sometimes you get what you need. Blah Blah.”

Rebecca pulls me into her embrace in our double-bed sunk luscious in moonlight. She holds me & hums. Using my black pen she sketches secrets on my back, erotic promises & picture-spells, adoration in black ink—

The book is called *Why?*, my book, appears in my dreams lately & is strange—sometimes I read it, sometimes write it. Sometimes we read or write each other or vice versa—

All is grief, I dream asleep & awake, so one grieves, & sometimes music commiserates & everyone dances awhile—

Why? dreams *Things Change?* dreamed by *6 x 36 Nocturnes* dreaming me composing them one & all we shift among each other in the raw moonlight Rebecca kisses me love through evanesce nothing ever lost—

I braid her hair while the fecund summer moon slides down her back a trickster for how it reveals, what it calls its sums—

I am praise again for everything pulsing with the blood-making I buck & fidget to raise the night’s gain, I am a shiver, a convulse, pen moved by bunches of mad, nutty neurons—
abbbbbbb

More words but they come out of me by wild breath & skittering heart & numberless prayers—

Rebecca tries to bring me into sleep but nothing will cease this for long, she just wants me to both live & make art

Without the second, fuck the first—fuck fuck fuck it—she knows this too—

What feast of music has run from my soul, why do I feel like blank pages blowing off in the grey twilight, I tell me “to reinvent the world you must begin everywhere & nowhere” & this tonight means nothing, I say “imagine no world at all,” add “total absence of this life’s grease & goo, no moan for the newly born nor tremble for who & what passes on, no breath that anything, anywhere exists at all” but fuck it they’re only words on a page, a lifetime of pages & I don’t know what for—

the howl deep within: is it still there? Is anything still there?

I ask these things & I don’t know what an answer would resemble if it exists at all—

Not a prayer that sadness suddenly disappear but a chance to work it loose of my heart—that’s all—

A long coffeeshouse with white curtains open to a nocturnal hilly street—a sad woman’s voice on the radio—I write for whatever sanity can come from it anymore—

memory of a tall tree with a soft red trunk, lacey green needles, how breaking its beauty!

What’s left, how to spend it, does it renew?

I look back & forward, within & through, I reach around for what’s powerfully trailing me, burden & beauteous, dreams arch up with cantankerous opinions of my loved ones in their endless decline

shake it twice & join a dozen full moons scattered through as many years, shake it twice & watch her dance tight & free & full, watch the sparkles tremble through the luminous desert city, watch another & another,

someone speaks up with a fist of rules & pronouncements so what to do—bark at his fucking grinding verbal tome of bones—

watch the strange couple link & scratch, a word here, several there, wage beauty & like this phrase & then some other year let it go for old & frivolous or keep its reminding twinge deep among the squeezing insistent things far below—

ahh shake it twice & twice more, many the band then & to come knows how to roar in & around the quick tender taps & the throat choking squalls—

The bitching gnaw, holiness of need, sleep a thousand nights alone to pay for what few damp & laughing among curved & colored smoke, garments breathing happily atwist on the carpet

What is holy if not all, I asked in an old poem from a lost night kin to tonight

In leaf & man, storm & art, some frenzy, some jitter, bullets fall from kings call it law, edict, how to live & why or else, something still rattles my blood, rocks my bones, a flourish of curves, riddles, & upset, & I have nothing other than this for the years past & coming, shake it twice, & again, & ask, & listen, moan, moan, going going going but not just yet—

Rebecca drapes along me bonelessly how dunno & she listens as I write out cries & mews, she becomes at moments the small vital link to—I don't know—to the world's desire for & from me—

long descending roads, green swathes every kind of human grunt & grope, the night shuts itself to me & gestures away—

But I refuse the refusal, bark at the door until I let me in, believe nothing, believe everything, evolve to a melody, a good enough called God, & then better, an arcing cry that opens wide in flames

I refuse the refusal & play on even when nobody listens, long past some critical—

I fragment & won't stop—pick up what's about, trudge along again—

sleep in loving arms won't let me down to despair ever—

Feeling crazy tonight awhile the fears not gripping but following, a ratstink from worst days. There is only love. Something laughs hard. Prove it otherwise. More laughter.

I won't let you, I call together my fractured bits & stand them hard together—we'll make a new juice, some new mind nutty drink for the Big Night o listen let life heal you now & again—

Surrender some things, forgive others, keep trudging, & more, several directions at once & call it dancing again, love anyone in sight, it's faith anything good exists anyway, faith & a night before laughing til the hours lead most into covering dreams—

Belong to the world, let it, choose it, silhouettes high enough for any conspiring soul with a few trinkets to share, willingness to following the lines awhile then elsewhere—

strum strum—nice, nicer,—now let em out—

Rebecca up all night painting one of our bedroom walls black & upon this black a perpetual bonfire beneath a fullmoon—all the light that of reverie & reborn, dream-stuff we find each other I—

Dream of endless vines, true nature of the world, no time & space, shaking with it, the cover on things for us to do more than feed & duplicate—

want to be enough to say how much more there is now—

I read a poem by a man remembering the boy he was & I sit in this green coastal city remembering the man he, I, was—

he remembers a boy who loved a girl by way of him loving a new girl, & so too I remember him—

All alone, all suffering, yes. All is grief, so one grieves, yes, that's how something is—
but then days aside a pretty face new to me, new to the world still—
music throbs through my skin still, sway, shake, shudder—
grimy paintings on a coffeehouse wall—
glitter, dust, inexplicable moments, & push & another door gives way & is behind,
now gone—

Holy something in every moment,
& I know best through pen's scratchings,
I raise up awhile & good gushes
in—

Smile. Wake up! Happiness

Those words struck through me that blurring day in a town thousands of miles & hours from here. I have never bettered them or dismissed them—that autumn Cambridge day, tripping hard on dream-film's music & jumpy-hard colors & writing those words on walls all over Boston

& descending escalator into a train station toward a rough figure with his hand out into his face & we clashed brightly & the moment held—

I wanted to sing, paint, dance those words

Smile. Wake up! Happiness

I carry them with me still like a braided gold token with a secret shine I can leave an endless bit here & around—

Noisy Children wants to play & wants me present with words ☺ ! []

A dream comes along & perhaps a gift & a better knowing, I find place again at Luna T's Cafe, in the bandroom, small table beneath the front window, Rebecca in the other seat, & Noisy Children up on stage willing the perpetual flowing noise of aether into sound, squeeze for melody, stamp for rhythm, craft crazy into words, weave, knit, build a soup from collection intuition, call it music, or laughter

room goes blue in smoke conjured
by E Major 7th chord, smile! surprise!
a yes both I & we oh glad

windows shake green til like formed
portals in jungles never found &

the evening cries in A minor wake up!
really! come along! ready & here goes

bodies all shades glow pink with
energy & blood & want a cry from
many voices strikes C Major 6th Happiness & a quiet

a pause, a still, til Cecile Grey hoary punk drummer roars out with his sticks & cymbals &
jolly good sneer that the dance will now resume—

abbb good this dream delicioso—

The revolution is now, not tomorrow, transformation perpetual, smile, & continue to work,
this moment a god, breaking wide in flames, the band descends into an underworld of
rhythmic mulling, playing to the ash covering the world, bleaking out harmonies of midnight
& deeper—

We make the world with another's clay. Wake up! Everything possible is going on now,
suggesting not a universe of right & wrong but one of infinite occurrence, no center of
singular truth, no fount to near or gesture, bowing, toward, no matter the beckoning,
promising tomes, the king's stony thrust, the market's secret vampiric suck on one's content,
the whore's wiggle & wet laugh—

Happiness, regard it everywhere, regard something at least kind to it, & share her dreaming
bed with your beloved maiden, my singer & my song, the sound of her cheek kissed & need
not ask what is holy if not all? I wish to sing her singing us our song still bearing ragged old
me, charred figure chanting to the long moon's glow, but new, nameless, moments of
content, *abbb, yes, let the world heal a soul sometimes—*

I breathe me out slowly yet here I am, a forceful remain, strews & seeds enough to build up good again

The dream of Miss Chris & Algernon Beagle, long & far off friends, is like gift to me &
something of a path too—

In the forest, green & good, they are with me again like a gargantuan of years ago—but no—
no years, no miles—no loss—no loss again & again—loss til one forgets any other way—

the only Soma to drink of is the green & shine of the moment, its music—immortal contains
all of us everywhere & now—the light is here in every last glowing & dank cell—gods found
in the very jumpy molecules of our skin, so on, *blab blab—*

just keep breaking into fuss for more than boredom & rust, raise it up, things change, things
change, I know right now for the moment they surely do—

Part Six

*“Life is sad, life is a bust,
All you can do, is do what you must”*
—Bob Dylan,
“Buckets of Rain,” 1974.

Yes, & this page will fill up black ink lingual howlings unto whisper tonight I waited for the harm, the slap, then stopped waiting, some other day, but tonight no, & this page arrives rave & mew with hope, thinking how impossibly long & long this story is, fiction now ragged confession, yes & I suppose still more live from the green coast, endure & more, a wife in many worlds to love & remind me to my task & obsession, sweet thing I cry unto you, harder the trudging than the dancing—

Never rough & low in the full moon’s blithe high—

Nearer nearer to the moments dreamt toward perpetual kisses & life buried & blown out in music—

Something not yet word, nor yet shine, or maybe lastly becoming both word & shine, all these funny years come along,

“The way things work is that eventually something catches” sings Noisy Children & twist into a long high jam, come on! something more than another ragged metaphoric tell—more—

I bob up & down, Seattle, Hartford, Black Rock City, Eleusis, let my eyes raise & plunge through a skein of strange places beloved &—

knock it off—

Word & shiny, the arcing fire of music, a thousand thousand blue fancies call up, countless thousands, call up,

I read old pages & wonder what it was about, old years, watch one wife read her novel in a punkass coffeehouse, & another in another world sketch every face in Luna T’s Cafe’s bar—
which world is true? how many?

a youth passes by cafe doors, he wears an Afro much like they did in my childhood long ago—

Well, maybe—a face emerges, a page turns, I want to lift out beyond bones & muscles, gravity’s persist, feel parts of me break away toward other secret places I will not know—feel what I was scatter across miles & hours—what’s left resemble some ratty kind of tree—plant me near others, no longer a pen fanatic,

no. Traffic light red & green, can’t see it. Sunshine come & go, can only feel it. Music alone in the way the wind shakes me around.

Noisy Children talks of an album & wonders how they could be wrapped in such a way again—

Perhaps I will figure it, they agree, hope, doubt, among many other desires & deeds—

Surrender some things, forgive others, ever a want & drive to play one true note, pitch higher into the burn & feel the shivering magick how it translates miles & hours to something like a name—less day's thrumming breeze—

what beckons raises stronger again—

Art Nature Eros Magick Dream Psychedelia
I speak & feel a good range in this
utterance much contained—

World becomes & again, years in the ever-re-raveling, & a little carries on, habit, prejudice, taste for this or that—

hunch at a table over a notebook, some city, ragged & willing as ever, some plan careening at any given clock—

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker sips from his coffee cup, sober as a branch, crazy as a coaster, & speaks: "There is nothing to find the world novel & transmuting. All shines in faint remembrance of another day. One's very flesh yearns for the gone, the utterly disappeared. The passing hour gains or loses its measure of praise by comparison to its ancestors.

"I sit here not awaiting my demise but at last experiencing it. Breath rattles in me not by my will. Thirst & hunger are unwelcome visitants.

"I even confess a rare hour of unalloyed joy, the taste of a rainy dawn, the frank cry of laughter sudden upon the greatest nocturnal depths.

"Nothing presses a soul forward that he may wholly harness & steer, yet conversely nothing restrains either.

"We stagger, we lurch, we know the topography of our secret beings little & even less."

He sips again. I wait.

"Were you to come along to your demise by fullest face & straightest bone, ye must never yield to the lazier urges within, those compelling loose & mild days & them more thereafter.

"Thee chooseth, sir. Now, upon thine seat, later in thine bedchamber. Tomorrow, upon busy pathways." He ceases. Hardly a high note, but I listened, I nursed at his sentiments, I find late nights open my pores still & any shaman gesture at me flows sharply through—

Art Magick Psychedelia Nature Eros Dream

Wondering at & how pen as ready
for the flare as ever—

Ever there is a war, ever there is laughter, I know, & these pages fill more & less by ways
some familiar—

A fat sheaf of pages, over 500 pages long now, & I keep thinking pull it together finally,
make it coherent, mix it til smooth, til every stray bit finds its neat spot on an emerging map,
all becomes contained, o lovely, o I understand now, o it only seemed a soul scattered mangy
over the miles & years—

but it was, I really did travel these pages crazy & in many kinds of danger—

one night told at a worthless employ I held from hunger's & rent's threat that I smelled foul
& had to leave—the job involved phoning strangers for surveys—O sat in a room of
strangers & we dialed headsets & spoke by script—I tried it, pushed, determined, plunged
deeply into my task, I was in Portland & had just a chance to make it—just a chance—

I wrote in this company's kitchen “This universe a mist, a light, a shimmer,” I cried to
“dodge the million ways of doubt,” oh tears I tried as the job diminished & no other came,
as Christmas came & New Year's & no hope held, & I felt everything slipping from me, it
was more than a lover, more than a city, it was how lost I'd become, how I didn't know who
I was, I wrote & wrote & nothing else held, & then I felt that going to—

a fiction? a something. a I-dont-know-anymore. A hundred pages of pain & more & more—
a long thing it shan't be what it's not—I sit tonight with my new lover & hope I always call
her new—days weren't meant to pass but to be *eaten whole*—

I watch him writing this story in that kitchen, small & undistinguished, little to say *here* & not
elsewhere & I nudge him, it is going to fail here, you are going to fail here this city & leave &
won't be back again a long time if ever years certainly will pass & I know what you don't
how bad things will get soon, weeks, you'll call for work & none, the woman you pursue will
move ever beyond your ken, soon you will be elsewhere & elsewhere—

he turns & reminds me of a night in Portland, a film I saw, long ride by bus, what was it, a
movie by Spike Jonez, something crazy & me tripping & I came back to my furnished room
& wrote at a little white desk by candlelight—

It was called *Adaptation*, a strange long hair thing, & that night I felt alright, something, I felt
upright, I look back now, it wasn't others who did that for me—as staggering & ungainly, I
wasn't deep down stupid ugly—I loved all I could—I wish to again—I recede from him
writing as he did often in that sorry lost kitchen & let it all play out—his many Philip K.
Dick library books, his beat clothes & book bag, his relentless trying—

honor him, his world, this world, every world huffing with beauty & open-hearted hope—

Knickerbocker nods at me full-faced & sips from his coffee mug deep & slow.

beat on, boats against the tide, borne back ceaselessly into the past, some other book, a few words remembered from a half-life between pages—so we beat on, boats against the tide—I sit here & anywhere briefly, nothing gone but everything moves—my eyes in a dream, blah, blah, & my new love this morning at her devotions, I sit at some joint like always in many worlds, Rebecca & I facing each other legs twined on our bed she's fingerpainting my chest, Algernon Beagle is watching cartoons on TV with Miss Chris, Nat Perfect is in his tub with a line of bubble bath & skin loving bottles near him, his chair nearby but not too near—

In some other world I never stop writing *Nocturnes* ever & this morning's:

*Cry for how arms cross & questions
toughen into judge.
Cry for the many leaves thrumming
to wind's bright tickle
Cry for men trudging down ways
with thoughts woe'd by wars
Cry for the news sheets sucking
out a hand's dollar & maybe another
Cry, the world throbs & hurries, berries
& raw necks in shadow for kiss
Cry, nothing gone, but everything
shifts, truth alone in morning shovels
breaking quiet earth.*

Some world a thousand *Nocturnes*,
a thousand thousand—

Cecile Grey in his YMCA rented room sharing breakfast with the building maintenance man. Old enough to have served in World War II, liberated Paris, all that.

“Grey, they sat in our laps, those Frenchie dolls, & fed us chocolate & cheese. We didn't want to leave. Some of us wanted to join up France & Britain permanent-like. Not your cockamamie UN, neither. No sir. We wanted fine French tail as a remuneration for services rendered, you might say.” Smacks his lips. “I married later, of course, & some days happy ones. You know all that.” Silent. Sad. “The only comfort from war's foul days is a soft woman's loving. Hard loving for awhile, then she calms you down.”

Nothing gone, everything moves.

In a better novel he wrote “We've got to come alive and aware” kept his music trained on liberation's constant task, did not lose to time's several strange twists something like narrative's tendriled thrust—

I did & good gone for what further I can get to now, clouds above shimmer to reality's complex throb—

I did & where now is tribe which to run?

I did & everything's possible but music is the same hard blossom to make as ever—

Music of sugar & kindness eludes me these times. No question. No fence. No wall.

What way there & back?

In a moment eyes closed I forgot back to the dance, the tug among bodies, the raised higher & yet higher rhythms, I brought you back there with me & joined your embrace to mine lonely one—

sloped lawn covered in dancers, we could not stop laughing or crying wildly—the band listened & awhile crazy with us, something other than you & I, them & us, electric colored lights mixed every soul in its sonic brew—

The truth reveals nothing but ashes at dawn. A body sleeping nearby to fetch water for, strum, sing, kiss, whatever, all alone, all suffering, yes, & it never ends, truly, nor does the world's great fierce to knit, to move one toward another & create some third, toward daylight & then it will have to become night again soon—

I sit far from the dancers tonight, the ones I've watched for years now beneath fullmoon's blanket, the drummers leading each other deeper within, around, over, & away, I sit in the damp grass some distance away, it was six years ago about this time, have I come along any meaningfully? Has the world?

Many shine & gesture to some newly gesticulating day, undreamt rhythms arrived, songs with hardly yet the instructions to sing them, new, strange, big, here it comes, regard this sign, & this, reckon the likelihood & the subtle but brilliant movement in things—behold! a new world aborning, tomorrow or some very near day—

the men at Luna T's Cafe bar drink on, the home brews wiggle them within a little more so perhaps they sip less & fewer, enjoy more the resulting . . . more—but the ballgame goes on TV, the warrior-bureaucrats in DC continue to govern by bicker & self-interest—some new young piece shakes it to the top of the charts, cries glory me unawares the hands rushing to topple her/him/them/it with a smile, nay, a snigger—

someone prays, someone desperate & sweating on tender knees prays—wind shifting through nearby trees, unheeded voice of . . . something . . .

an absent god easier thought of as residing in empty skies above—

Something happens & again it's more than history or civilization or culture can as words bear—something happens countless times perpetual—

if anything the shift is one arcing over centuries at least—

Noisy Children jams many nights & mulls what tuneful record might emerge from their work—

Rebecca Americus works on decorating every last inch of Luna T's Cafe in as many ways as she can—works a continuous flow of music into odd spots of the old joint, architects shifting zones of silence & tunes, & different kinds of music, sometimes penetrated by, say, caressing a felt-covered fragment of wall, or by sitting in a shadow-bound chair in some obscure corner—she dresses Luna T's in Art, pressing it to breathe deeper, &

No world wholly mine own anymore
& I suppose this means something,
nativity is black pen as ever &
somehow more—

just do the work—keep singing—

A breath, call out a note, many drums, raise it up yah again, even tired hurting tonight works
up a tall spark—

Things Change. Things Change? All these years living among these pages & what. What? I
don't really know. Some city, its electric seductions glow all night—another city, a bit
younger, a little greener—muse, wife, she fusses up a late night meal as my bus nears—

nothing left but the truth its endless strange thrumming music—

A bus & tired faces on it, how many jobs & late hours—I'd say I'm cracking or waning but
hard refusal to do so—

long since a chapter heading or a section break—

someone told me she was looking for a book on airports, airplanes, soul's first flight, the
thrill of at least remembering the new—mm—

sad—

What word could possibly burst out now that is new, that matters because it does, what yet
tugs, what fiercely remains, what blows up still & yes &—

“Does he ever stop?”

“Worse when he does”

“Do things here dim?”

“Not really. He gave us our autonomy years ago. He visits here but not a maker, not
the omnipotent hand”

“Why? Seems like being God to someone would be a good deal”

“He figured out it wasn't. He decided there was better”

“Better eh?”

“Sure”

“And he stopped drinking?”

“That too. That was good. I've been where he was. Worse than a bad marriage.”

“What, the bottle?”

“The thirst”

“Ahh”
 “Kill it or be its bitch”
 “Hard words!”
 “Not really!”

So sing, what learned, sing, love’s hard notes, tangled green’s subtle beckon, the few noisy questions won’t free a soul ever.

Sing! Make it up, make it true, make it worth all the years arcing between birth’s teasing remain & death’s quiet away.

Pause, no, slow, never, sloppy, rude, empty seats, lonely sky, whatever, sing, a pen, a twig dipped in blood

think back ten ten thousand years to a calm plain, a dateless dusk, not a flash of exhaust or metal in sight, a fire, some meat, what song this hour, what to tell?

What is singing but a curvy history’s recall?

Reach back, more than this new or the last bloody old century, back to impossible centuries

or ahead to days, centuries, whatever they might be called, some impossible time where nature & mankind’s highest tools have merged, contain each other—what shall singing be then—

Luna T’s Cafe across geography & perhaps time too, places where there is no time—pre- & post-history

How to talk, cry to those other days, help, respond, near, some sort of lashing twist from there to here, now, then, whatever—

summon, conjure, wish it with hard shoulders & longing’s parched teeth—

to write an anti-novel, an inverted roar, a tome neither home now nor—

“He’s desperate”
 “It keeps him safely aware”
 “He’s in love”
 “With her, she waits, accompanies, listens, stays”

Noisy Children in the Ampitheatre no electricity but much acoustic troubling the night’s darkling stretch—

something of this book paints cave walls in pictures, something floats in living dreams a soul releases too—mmm—

A book wishing it belonged to both history & prophecy, a book wanting its ancestors solid spectral presences & its descendents intimated in glints—

a book long & lonely, buzzing sad with no cousin or brother books—which its shelf?
Whither its room in the grand wall of words?

A book sunk partial into dreams, into the glare of conjuring hands & hours, a book like an
offered kiss, persist, jump, hold it precious, hold it friendly out—

Several fire one up & gather loosely near me, this strikes them worthy, this lacks boredom

a book its mentors, roots & branches, its blood moonlight, its regrets' burned sheets of
wood & ink—

say cry for what lost
what lost cries for you

kiss the blue eyes soft upon
your face, let go nothing as even
aware the choiceless flow away—

stairs one by one to something called home your hands heavy with food parcels, your mind
on a rough-skinned man in a coffeehouse earlier & his spoon & his small pouch, his
traveling bag, his various small electric devices, pups, ponies, a sheaf of handwritten prayers

the moonlight above & about the crawling shadows across night's unknowable face, faces—

I stood in a bookstall begging one by one the masters to teach me again, their stories, their
directions, their counsel—& none answered beyond a murmur of well-wish

you are on your own, we depend on you now, we dead we cry, who cried toward you &
beyond, luck & awareness is all we can say—raise each by the other—

or is that anyone talking but me—

I don't know—I write on helpless, angry, restless, an idealist bent on more than avoiding
defeat—

bent on making the song good, finishing it right however the many years, or the countless
rotten moments that pass by—

something for someone these ragged sheafs of high notes I call my life's work, its chase
across tick and tock & inch & mile—

struggle, cry, now higher, now higher, love wild or cool, awareness, luck, raise them both by
means of each other——

I think in sweetest, nearest of chambers an abiding loneliness, a melancholic thrum beneath
the daily traffic of human noise

there, heed it—not bloody raw nor shouts of violation, but there—& there—& there—

Other nights, emptier beds, sometimes simply couches or bus-seats or whatever was beneath
& cleared—my pack of blue recalls—mine, bide, & tell of them grimace at best

candlelight & there were others—

Noisy Children deeper into the Ampitheatre where souls & instruments among them harder
to discern & the audience twist into the rhythms & melodies more bluntly & subtly than
before

No time space names any thing

flames below stars above & dancers vibrate to both & more

Some wait these days for the cosmic tide raise up high enough to crash the banks & flood
the prison, fling us to a chaotic brilliant freedom so long dreamed

Always that wait for the banks to crash, rare the occurrence—

someone calls it new age, new world, shift in paradigm, hopeful faces listen, wonder which
book explains, will buy it, will buy two—

harder to keep Luna T's doors open to the world when the world dwindles

yet wonder this book's cousins & idols—

a tired man wild for his pen still writes these pages, whatever else matters anymore

these pages flood me deepest

What to report back to the caves adrip with berry stains lingual shaped & what to pass on to
remade other kinds of days about what this meant—

I don't know. People clot in masses called cities & most live fair to poorly & treat each other
worse—flailing through diversions, & details til it was a life & here's its exit nearing—

much of it asleep to both daylight & dreams—much of it eating sans joy or knowing—

I don't know what I am chasing—glittering moments of wisdom? A patter of true high notes
to keep away? A tap-tap from the trees I love, yes, here, this way along—

A righteous curl throbbing pink noise, a faith as undeniably rewarding as chocolate?

Some justice for loved ones' lost limbs & artistic decay?

Something, something, how to live & why. Yawn, growl, press the fuck on—

Another day, reckon, 7 minutes old

by the city's electric flash—

Something. Say it's not all brute
formulae & unscripted improv,
say

skirts & slacks stroll down the
sidewalk, the night mellow with
shallow pleasures, has any time
passed at all?

I wonder, I don't know, I sleep
near a warm woman, in a green
city, yes some things happened—

a friend called writing my om &
I felt recognized,

what secrets left, what beautiful
unknown crevices, & brutal revelation,
tell me, tell me, take me, take me,

neon lights through the streets
tomorrows anticipated

somehow find the ones not, the
good golden tomorrows foamy brim-
ming with else
sing new, how?

Sing new, shatter the song note by passing note, willful faith in the well, always more,
brilliant more, hard, wild, newer, stranger, ever softer the pink melody, ever greener the
roots find rhythms in the dreamst soil—

Noisy Children play fire high play countless winds in the leaves, make their new record from
roaring starlight, five beams the moon has gifted its brother world's ranging men-pups—

A man stands at a podium before ten thousand faces & a million TVs & he speaks, the
drinking men & others at Luna T's Cafe's bar lean closer, wondering their land must remain
foul with empire's conjurers—

Rebecca sketches in & around my heart, she taps & touches to my beat & breath, pushes,
gentles, urges, reminds—

sing new to the daylight not yet arrived, to seeds hidden within intent & even deeper—

sing, shatter, sing & sing—

Another bookstall & I ricocheted from sexy books on shimmying to cajoling covers shilling solace & sometimes I feel sad, no purpose, nothing—

Find myself back nocturnal marauding & it's OK—eh—somehow—

Kings rule by dissuasion & petty merchants suck & grimace, & rare does any given soul sum to much not even one—

Modern life seems to fatten one's deft ugly & pig the eyes, don't look for dancers when most barely wake with pleasure or purpose—fewer words are admired as though the mind cogitates importantly on some other matter—

by day & night autos speed hard along & electric wires rev & harder
comfort by consumption, however empty—

bookstalls stuffed with every loud manner of trinket & the majority of its tomes a glut of nothing—

some other way belongs to some other time but little succor in this—

are humans best off living the lives of tame intelligent beasts?

Sometimes a film shows on a blank wall at Luna T's Cafe, sometimes several, sometimes the same, sometimes not, sometimes as though related, the several films, different rooms, sometimes kin closely similar but for moments, sometimes not, sometimes many watch, sometimes none, & they appear on the wall sans projector, sometimes silent, sometimes Noisy Children jams hard or soft to their images, & sometimes it seems relevant

um—a preacher's crisis in scripture, it often begins there—& perhaps he resembles a very young Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker except when he doesn't—

a crisis in scripture—her voice in the dark—an artist works nearby, has a maybe to run through his oils, chords, black pens, roughs it hard for inspiration, we hear him cry of witches & crows—

she never speaks to the preacher in most versions of the film—in one she does—in another she kills him—in yet another she is the preacher & he's the artist who dreams of witches & crows—

Holy emptiness, it's called, this film's central idea, we see it run through cold fields, twitching alive & more so in murmuring seeds,

Bless everything! comes the scene of revolution & flood, the long pink skies, running & rising, & the preacher feeds his many pets, mostly puppies & snakes, but a dying phoenix in one version, someone told me, I missed that one—

“Three strokes light an eye” is the careening psychedelic crash of lyric & Noisy Children acoustic implosion when the wall explodes in the middle of the film nobody is hurt it's a good scene—

Witches & crows, keeps coming back to them over and over, & a slim volume rests on top of Mr. Bob's AM radio which discusses this aspect in several of the films—

it never ends, this high fucknutty chase for the next note, jump to the deeper rhythm, groan with every silent moment then

Boom BOOM BOOM!

pen explodes & I am present
where before shit nothing ah
um mm yaz yaz—

What moves one toward another, the film sometimes seems to ask this, when the he-preacher & the she-preacher found a spiritual commune in the desert, they preach agape, preach it hard loud, hand out & around a deep bag of dried mushrooms—Rebecca likes this part, watches all the versions of this scene—

the land is flat desert for miles & their structure stands lone & strange while believers & skeptics arrive though sometimes they do not—other communities form of the ones who never find these preachers—soon seekers cannot distinguish which community they seek—it grows strange—

the rain bring the many communities together—hard & bitter—sometimes the wall showing the film begins to smoke & a fire extinguisher is hustled to hand—

the angle of the street changed, films can do that, & I beheld a cupcake baby in a bin of regular cupcakes, it might be this dreaming again but others around me watch too, & the band rocks hard to what I see—

Scrawls & trails of the film all over the Cafe, & stranger still toward the Ampitheatre, I talk to the preacher one night & ask him—he says it's not really about Godd, never was, it's about being here, this shifting nexus every soul experiences every moment—

I agree & ask about her, he says it depends, no one key fits each time nor any always—do you love her, I ask—do I what?

a crisis in scripture—her voice in the dark—to love one must be willing toward attachment—flow from nexus to nexus slows to fault to fault & ever a circling back—

I tell him that most of my days are strangers for a moment & the next & the next—bookstalls, coffeehouses, streets wide & crowded—

he knows—the pulpit is a tower over unknown souls, a sort of conduit from the estranged to the ineffable—so our talk goes—

she talks to me less—we listen to trees together & sometimes she points out the notes played—knowing my obsession—

a drinker in the bar asks if they're actors or real—I say yes—somewhere a twist between the two & now one—that's my theory—he sips—nods—those who come to Luna T's still see things all the time to challenge, um—

stop she says—listen again—

a crisis in scripture—her voice in the dark—the world too much for simple tomes of thou-shalt-nots—society bulges awkwardly with its clumsily rendered forbiddens as well as its commerce- & fanatic-driven yeas—

her voice in the dark—the rustle of shifting bodies—night breezes lean in through the open window—somewhere a cry, elsewhere a siren—

we discuss the edges of the world—where enigmas perch & cast their effects—she says I don't know what they mean, I listen, I poke around—

I drift into a descending bus on an endless hill, cypress afire both sides of the road—some meaning mumbles close—

Teach us let go, don't know how, praise everything, the hurtest of remembrance, shatter everything upon creation, believe beyond faith & loins, wonder blindly despite eyesight & physics—

Noisy Children my friends & heroes for half a lifetime & going, musical testify between old electric power & tonight's new hard blowing—I listen to them likewise, hold myself to their standard of high—

Greater music, greater silence, contrive the cage & its keys, the scripture & its accelerant, the eros & its diminish—

Someone wonders where next & I shrug, & point with my eyes shut—tap my ragged sheaf of high notes twice, recall other days miles upon the thousand away, what did it, what does it, what can it,

slink down curves of light, multiply, let the drums out of their timely beat, follow slowly the pink silhouettes, the damp path, wonder at the hardest of dreams says nothing is ever enough until a soul's loyalty is burned into place, praise submission, teach it first, teach it first, only one foremost claims, once burned what else follows lesser & more easily—

hum like silken secrets in this nocturnal embrace—hum, burn, teach, slow & slow—then let go—

the story ended a long sing ago, this must be the next, the one after the last, a story from after—

We sit together, one reading, one drawing, two worlds, many, none—moan, high, mystery, teach it hard, possess deepest, mark unending, let go—let go—let go—

fan blades flick, this & that one argue & laugh, someone taps the books on the walls endless shelves of them—

her blue eyes find me—I keep along—Noisy Children raise it up more for fun—

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker rears up tallest of man-wounds & cries from his broken volume: *“The secret of life is metamorphosis & transformation! Nothing within can stay an unprotected aeon! Ancient flames whip maniacally at this day’s resisting frost, its high moment passes flayed into oblivion!”*

I read old poetry again & wonder at the creature I was that other year, toward what my vows truly were when but they themselves I still bear—here I sit—penmad—full freak neither old nor young when the pages are filling & near or nearer a high sweet sound rages along in guitar, bass, drums, voice, voices, poetry simple or strange upon the stage here I sit with lingual fossils & what of it—

I sang, a benign face with a broken black’d heart, heeded, I offered, I twirled, I shucked old sadnesses & twas a new day, & yet here another, & none resemble its predecessor, none, what carries along—

what carries along? “No safety, no time, no pattern at all,” he wrote, & I agree, high & higher without ceiling or floor, I agree

The world passes on. Next note, & the next. Wounds heal, or persist, but they change, things change, things change? I don’t know.

Franny & Rebecca braid each other’s hair, something about dancing in the Ampitheatre after Noisy Children finishes, or with Noisy Children there if the rocking tonight won’t cease—

Little things: Bell Rock Cemetery, how I prayed & praised & hurried & paused there—a friend I watched late-night manic cartoons with—the spicy sandwiches the sober Polish folks snapped together—one coffeehouse near the Atlantic, another near the Pacific—

Strange here a late night diner & it’s some recovered year & its odd adventures when I ran lone—

a distant town even as here I labor, nothing familiar here, we remain from the beginning only tolerant strangers—

this book nearer its end maybe it was simply arc, collapse, recovery, what ruins the heart sheds on its way to renewal—

everything shines here & laughter & clinking & hoary old pop & I want up & elsewhere—

surreal guts of the night, a green city downtown scattered through meagerly, neon sells hotly to nobody at all, desks & stands & mannequins mean nothing til the daylight, streets poor with activity—

I watch a man crouch in the coach's far end, eating his meal with a frantic bob & smack

something prickles me write it down—something of it—

Lost between dreams, what now? whither next? Not enough to sing, to know how, the songs must blow up with necessity, every word a hard crunch, burn sleekly, burn mad, pages white leaves on a tree made of music—

Old dreams bear little power, are like peaks in a rear-seeing mirror—old dreams neither bite nor conjure much, they simply bid recall, scabble through dead hours for a glint, revise, whatever—

pages are white leaves on a tree of music, only new shine feeds to roots—

whither now? what next?

More than forgiveness, more than today's new-plowed furrow, more than any dream's try at surreal magick synthesis of memory & symbol & loosed reins,

how to live, how to live, how
to live & why—

The bar is never much lit, not by noon or midnight, its twilight induces stupor in some, reverie in others, one clock only, in a corner if sought—

Some at the bar take drink upon drink, some an occasional glass, some none, there is no norm, no press & harder press toward some late-hour climactic booze-shaky epiphany—yet the air is riven with something of this early hour's relax & that later hour's hype—

some wonder for the answers by television's luring beam or the radio's gesturing charms—some finger deeply into books after it—

I sit many nights at the bar trying to discern what I still believe, what I'm not, what my heart yearns—some talk to me, take a long or lesser glance at my notebooks—

The floor is old & wooden, the ceiling smoky mass, it is an old bar, I figured that years ago & it was old then—

Rebecca sits near me & lets me writhe as I will—she is available to me but lets it stand there—

Americus & I want to talk more, old animosities long exhausted—

“Will you really make a record?”

“We'll make something”

“Are you & Franny good?”
 “For now. You’ll sometime come around to that again”
 “You & Rebecca?”
 “That’s no question”

I watch shadows of men & objects late at night—how comfort blooms, the talk plays from frustration to vow to an acceptance not quite resignation—

The mine within is still full of live, raw pain, & nothing lovely will emerge unpoked—nothing—

& the work won’t be easy because it’s never been easy—ever—it’s been moments so high glad wow & years trudging & worse—

& I’ve never cared, ever, & caring now just clogs my further paths-

this is the rehearsal & the show, nothing else, ever, life & art this angle & that angle on the same soul,

ever white leaves on a tree made of music, near’s end faces I know & talk to around me, far’s end sizeless space & dreams which disdain my life’s little interruptions in their tall, brutal, truer business—the night breaks into this angular cluster of hoary confessions & a later time of meal & embrace & warm bedchamber comforts—both demand of me—

something else—something hard & old & it is as much source of any beauty I make as aught—

nothing forgotten or no art that means a thing—

Accelerate again & again, waves hard countless on the shore, & a wish of both new lights & old in the sky, trees & tomes recall impossible old years, & wonder if now’s arcing toward oblivion too & every animate face in tavern & coffeehouse & bookstall tonight a short time from nothing’s conclusion—

What can it be for then? How can the yearn be dressed in words & truly answered?

I don’t know. We want & we sate & we want some, even more. Then bones stiff, remembrancing bites while memories loosen, blood & neurons each carry us along & down, & what, & how, where—

Continuum tries its crush on curiosity—safety turns touch to claw—dreams pick at soul’s frays—worries dust down & remain—

walk down a new street
 ask a stupid question
 loose the bitching from your belly

Green leaves every year, eggs crack & reveal, someone at his tool coaxing a new creature along, renewal & connection every which kind of way & else feastly—

Noisy Children rocks the Amphitheatre til their instruments rag & time to bury—

There are hours I walk as though none before had ever occurred—among expressionless strangers—in places shineless & secretly ill—no explanation just nameless enemies—I speak nothing resembling truth—wish the minutes to hurry by—

something then something else, call it time or simply change—patience—endurance—

I look at Knickerbocker. “Explain to me humanity’s virtue, how it isn’t a foul sentient virus.”

He shrugs. “*Centuries of sages have no accumulated answer.*”

I try to find in my own ideas something to work with, turn the sound of endless human feeding into a music both novel & familiar—

What touches me still aren’t human ideals or individual personalities—it’s something rhythm or blood or a rising warmth—or—

I watch 3 armed soldiers surround a man & undo whatever he might be in search of. Armed & sanctioned by the Empire, an unconscious swagger, an ego feeding; I watch & feel something like fear but not fear—

I have moments of late when no little king can do much toward me—covens of bitch, trios of brute, something beyond them tugs at me, beyond easy desire,

No rise nowhere to go
No want when nothing sates

I burn down Luna T’s Cafe a time or too then raise it up—wonder what in my world—
old fight, old yearn, old regret—

Days along & then high very high a hum & a rumble I watch the passing mist & much below wherefrom the tattered net of ago whereto the glowing pink palm of hereon & my arm spreads out one side & another marked with arrows & instructions days along & ever the hustles & hope to sing the best I ever could—

the world greys & a moment for remembrance which one it was a sunshine park fat years ago & I loved her like no other like you love me now her voice & gestures played through my heart then another year suddenly & she & I walk among stores & she loves me surprised by its depths but no bones no map no tune she can pass along—

Another, another, suddenly the sun again & she danced nude in the moonlight & conjured possessing strands all about me

I do I do I do I do I do I do

Now I tell you I love you & the words are brown with years’ basting & pink with each moment’s new cry into being—I tell you I love you & it means what leaps over & gone

while what stills solid & what dances higher, something blind, something brilliant, this day along the arcing currents up toward, you wait like the others if one discards time as a fist—

Rebecca asks me about her blood parents one night, if ever I thought them over the years & I say no she was born in Cement Park aged 4 & Americus met & kept her—& she asks me about now who might they have been—

“They resemble our child”

“?”

“Yes that’s so”

So she draws them & I watch, & no human forms emerge her paper, the lines are tall the colors bizarre & she nods with my nodding “That’s them” we smile now we know—

A jet plane with a hundred passengers or so approaching a midwestern city from above cloudbanks & setting sun toward the story’s last page & whatever comes next—

on the grey wing a red painted circle around a bolt drilled into the surface—there—through this window, hardly six feet away—the arc begins there, center of a world with no center or every center—this secret red circle around its wind-roughened bolt is where the arc described now & for days commenced—this moment, that circle—dark red, ragged circle, window near, wingtip far—

start somewhere, trace through everything everywhere all & no-time but call something a here—its black arrow cousins nearby pointing toward the plane’s rear end—its neighbor label

SAFETY LINE

ATTACH POINT

Delta Airlines Flight 679 Hartford, Connecticut to Cincinnati Ohio left at 5:42 p.m. Eastern time why this **no reason** just happens to be why life no reason just happens to be why love why pain no reason **happens to be**

the ground nears mustn’t hurry the river sunset-lit, the houses chunky with human wakings the red circle hardly two inches round & the arcing now ground now the thumping now the leave but never leave—

A moment in the desert at the freak festival I watched a figure stand high sailing in the nocturnal blow, ragged shoots of cloth flappings watched with musewife told her this is something later on still remembered & we sat some other night among tales of a school bus driver & his hound, a new name every day & thus a new personality it was something, again, I let it go that night

smile.

wake up!

happiness

gave it to the long curly temple to burn, a bag I’d carried of firelight & devils, something, nothing heals in the world, I’ve learned, things change (things change?) nothing returns, oh lorn & long for it, no, a pilgrim walks & shapes & sings a path by wish & fear, things change? (things change), I sit as far from something beloved as I can, another dull-lit

coffeehouse in some spent city, that night we watched the flapping figure & twined hands
it—

a bag of ragged tales & songs, on my shoulder, within my within, tap, tap, accelerate, tell me
of beauty—or I'll tell you better, tap tap, accelerate—

Frenzy upon frenzy live the happy mad artists, collapse the years to a small painted red circle
& find how little piles within that circle, every dusk wordless, every fine piece of ass, every
long suck of chocolate, hours of decades in dreams scrawled within, the music yowled from
boxes & platforms, miles walked & rolled, beds on the hundreds and rare with bodies—
sun's crush, snow's bite, rain's assault—

What is the sixth threshold? Is it death? Love? Forgiveness?

Squat in a den's bare toilet & no answers. Something about loving the world, something
about better surer rhythms & thus better shine, some blah-blah about the forever possible

a shit makes your stomach feel better, that's all—

the busdriver would be late & hunger & seeming no way to get the kids from their houses to
school by 9 but he would do it every time by flooring the gas pedal on the straightway path
through the swamps & it worked the kids knew it was a secret they liked being in on & the
driver was scary too until he was caught by nosy parents & a speed radar gun & he was fired
but see it was his bus he owned it & the county had no green for another he offered to lease
it to them but any other driver would demand more pay as well he was re-hired & warned to
slow down which he did not as a matter of pride—

his loved one was his dog who developed the idea that he was many dogs because
he'd not been given one fixed name & all these dogs lived inside his head out at the driver's
shack with the schoolbus parked in front of it—

I bet the fat chick there with the penned-on tattoos could tell it better—she'd bring some
real grease & goo to the matter—it would be funny, sad, relevant—she'd finish writing it up
in pink razor point pen in her fat red blank book then take a cigarette break outside, loan
some shady bearded motherfucker her cell phone, read the whole mess swaying on Bee Yr
Slf Nt at the local transcultural bar, the one with three toilets, him, her, whomever—

see this shit sink, see it—

hustle it up again, the music, the surge, if others can sit around a soft chat I can do else, sing,
pen, push, something more than casual become the years—

work it deeper & fine, what wasn't possible then, what took all til now to bring out, believe,
art in sweeter rhythms, humble happy knowing, within clean & blowing, what's gone gone &
luck with it, what remains live & high & so aimed to the task—a goodly prayer for the many
years & the coming many more—

vivid remembrance of a moment:

downtown ZombieTown, near the library, across street from the high school, there, bang, memory's stand even more potent than body's, I was lost & years at it, jobless, poor, hanging along, it's all there still, with the light changes of a few years along, I knew nobody, liked nobody, or maybe a few, there was an all-night coffeeshop, they let me sit with notebook & soda, I was a strange pet,

what is it, what was it, rainy night, then, now, that continent's end, this one, shiny streets wet wordless, a dog never able to obey fully, but a dog, but never able, what remains, what next?

Is remembering a cloud upon the senses or a tool for jibbing & jabbing at the future?

I can hardly look on & see my hands curl in decay, my face shrivel, my energy dribble down—

Will Noisy Children disappear entirely? Luna T's? The world is not much hopeful can that turn slant better or can a race forget hope so soundly--

I feel alive & hungry & wanting in a sloppy, fluids, emotional, intellectually capricious kind of way—I don't write fiction per se anymore or really I don't see it as lesser or other—cartoons & mannequins & crabbed secret rituals all people this world among worlds too—this world of worlds—

Climbing stairs a late night & shits-sick but high on a pending kiss & a beloved music within—

What lasting, nocturnes? Nothing. What abide, love? Something. What begins, again, & again? Everything.

Call it hunger, the clawing rhythm within, maze of heart's ripe drink & need's percussive flail. Breathe, relax. Let the coils loose some, none other way any brighter—

Let the beauty we love be what we do, smile, glow, explode, again, hundreds of way to kneel & kiss it, sky's bright beckoning blue ass, artist clad in pen & faith, great grand pathetic singing bit,

life of trenches, dreams & kisses by spare moments peep a head up here & there—

I watch the fat drunken man watching that old sun set over water, hum, persist, believe, wiggle, years twist around me, he hums truly the unpretty magick of persistence, belief, wiggle,

Nothing is real. Not even a dream.

Band thickens its sound, raises, corrodes, cries, cries, instruments high & unplayed now, raises, high, let it, let it, let it go, burn these fucking pages, kneel toward the unknown, all what matters, high, higher

how to live in this world, these worlds, anything, something—how to live, how to live, how to live & why—

be the flaming thing you are

slide along the hidden hum of the
universe
beg & smile & make it better hour
by hour

Wait. Leaves stir. Always with you.

The night balances toward hunger's most insistent touch, what must, & will anyway, & fail,
& die, & up & here again,

terrestrial music conjure from everything ever known, it hurts, any night too close revealed,
there heart's saddest aspect plain open to any stranger's hard-rised glance

burn it all down again, or else—

Seeking love resembling music, revelation too spirit & sugar, ahh, & erhm, the night again &
its raising moon

Luna T's Cafe, Starbucks Coffee, a moment in the streets of ZombieTown, a dream dancing
with my true love, a more, a shift, I look for hope & hear guitars start up & drums fill
between—

I don't know & allow this & then an angle of light, a light pink scent of lure, better tastes
remind, new words, or old worlds & their new songs—

Cecile Grey reads on in his tome & nods for if Huxley ever meant anything Grey himself
sees it every day when he strolls with his drumsticks over to Harvest Street—

was it the foam in his stout all along that made him glee, not the dark sea below?

I think I wish to confess for others too, sing because I can & will & many won't—other than
storytell these years—I don't know really what it is—but some surely for another, named,
nameless, now, then, words a line out to somewhere, wait, a tugs hold on—

Faith it's been & must be there's nothing else really, sometimes garbed as music, sometimes
a soft cheek awaits its pending kiss, night's slinky lures, what connects all among the
constant advance & recession—

Faith I call it Art & intend to find my way upright along for a lengthy funky perpetua—
intend & shall, within that ragged boy, that lonely man—him & thus every wayward, every
smiler despite & despite—

Faith even love still among it regard my heart's careening vision toward a soft bed with a
yellow blanket & my beloved half-awake in the TV's hypnotic pulse waiting me—she my
golden light—faith, art, love, faith, art, love—faith—art—love—

Faith it's hard one step & the next—
storms cross the path—woe & want—

I brought the best of me to this far end of the continent & the work hardly begun—nights stretch neon blue & high leaf green far—

I can & will & do—

Call it a scirocco not a book, whirl it up harder & harder, crush every fist & nay along the path—finish it into the water, in, hard splash, wave, splash, gone,

the band looks at me & turns it up a little bit more—

Knickerbocker eschews books entirely & brings leafs & berries & fish skeletons to the bar to study—

feel the roots deep beneath uproot some, home is my pen & my beloved, bring Luna T's Cafe nearer & near—

Pen big in my mind I won't find another way—X the Space Alien reminds me my several psychedelic visions are true & what I saw was a picture beyond the crumbling limits about my eyes—

the spy leads me to a door he found ahead of readiness & shows me crazy happy days when I am writing everything again like new & old both—

bigger what's ending, bigger still what pending thereon—

No revelation, no revolution, no yea for every nay a collar or a formula raises up, just the music dreaming you on through collision & twine both, & again,

told build up a world from sugar spirit, nod, assemble tools, what?
No? Maybe wrong?

Let it go? See what remains?

I shoot Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker through the back of his head, watch him slump forward, cries, then will him sit up & continue ponderance of his branch with its several autumn leaves—

I can I will I do

The music dreams you on through the years & riled & fallen red gold, on & on,

Revolution, revelation, words dead of power & yet the world ever accelerates away on their rails,

again sing worlds brilliant as icycles, up on a box, hands wild toward the sky conjure from some torrential within, feel it feed it, give it all & watch it go—

it all goes, feed a million souls,
ten million more fall & are gone—

Luna T's lifts up from basement to garage rooftop & brought else—where, I don't live in Connecticut anymore, my stories don't either, whatever they are—whatever they were—

the power never ceases, not time, not space, not king, not one lord or another, not quake or blizzard, not, not, not—

I can't ignore or forget, too many pages to believe into this thick ratty sheaf, I press on there is no other choice, none at all—

dance or die, sing or die

A day, a week, nigh a month Luna T's hovers & I do not know where to land her, what to call the place, tisn't Hartford nor Boston nor Portland nor Seattle nor Black Rock City nor Emerald City—I don't know—

I write the other side of this long song closer & closer to its finish til now when I had to return to this fixation & pay its kindness in my time—

Looking at Rebecca, say: "I finish 6×36 *Nocturnes* in about 48 hours." She nods, smiling.

One of the grizzles at the bar hoists his tankard. "We'll throw ya a party for your poetry! Give you a fine hoorah!"

I think: when I first set to writing few knew my pursuit, & awhile more did, & now I suppose some do but it feels again secret like those years—

The words & music are mine own & I would not expect what this is to delight anyone as it does me—

tis my task, none other—

Time by & here me pen going again the other side of this great shaggy thing took weeks longer than I would have imagined, then click! & it was done, a thing now, point at it, fold it up, think of other things, that's what it all is now, big monster sheaf & done, yet its live unfinish still chases here, so no I have not finished it, or anything, good, high, tap, tap, breathe, relax, go, world ever opens out like an offering hand, three strums & harder, years shine stranger the farther they reach, offering hand, tap, tap, I carry around some fear & sickness & death with me, look around less familiarly, opens out like an offering hand & think of times of accept & reject,

like morning tossed out from dreaming, there were trucks on the rainy street before dawn & damn I'd sat out that long coffeeshop night in that dank milltown winter, only all-night joint around, I kept going there over some years like many others, they took me in, it was OK, what I did, poor with my library books & frayed hat—

like a tree dazzled in moonlight, growing toward & toward both, eating sunlight & soil, to bury beneath one & join tendrils, dissipate into green—

like the careening noise & silence of a keeping dance, tap, tap, breathe, relax, new strums through new rains, what is the world but countless crossings, shine & shadow,

Liberation surrenders to suffering & stillness. Dr. Knickerbocker studies the mushrooms given him by the smiling girl & boy long hours before eating them one at a time, chewing his way slowly into Godd at last.

Liberation submits to love's tossings, the whiplash of internal starfire. Rich & Franny Americus renew vows of fidelity at the Starlight Lounge—Dancing & Cocktails Nightly—fat old MacFarland's laugh as he thanks from highest high down for the beauty within which they traverse by their love—

Not at peace, dance harder, eat every beat deeper, deeper, the dancer I recall became all roots & branches as the music spun him out & out into the universe—

Faith this pen's cries or habit or fear of boredom or lack of novel intent, commitment the wrong word, even compulsion, no answer for any of it, no answer wherefrom or whereto or how or why—none—here's this rainy night on a Seattle bus & nobody knows—

Things change. Things change?

Feel the world open out in gunfire & poverty, feel the lesser kings anguish & envy the one most girded, the one whose two words are “crush” & “save” back & forth—feel the war crossing nearby streets & not a soul in this bright market remarks how near—feeding on plastic & meat, on the comfort of familiar coins & every pose about them known—

o fuck I wish otherwise! Sheep & feed & drones, is that all any of them are? Scuttling from stall to stall among trinket-swingers, soft, this way to today's sweetest diversion, watch! how they all watch! watch too, move close, it's special, will help, will sing, will make you laugh, remember, hope, take one, another for your best kinfolk, go on, & this too—

peace hustles & snickers close after—dance, coconuts, high on pipes & slowness,

& music lays across every night like a golden bomb—

pause. tap tap. bursts the scattered heart of creation, blows out in fizzing wires & blank baubles—somewhere within bushes of words still fruit crazy—somewhere maybe a story of a man & his can & a flickering lamppost out his window every morning at 3:36—somewhere several neon signs surround a high, lost girl who remembers everything but where she is—stories of rain, brilliant machinery, the history of shadows—

 somewhere within still waits a book called *Why?*

Write: “Liberation is soul twined, mournful but still moving.” Again. The old men came in from the race track for their coffees & some time to bullshit, everyone one of them full of blustering nonsense, all dead now, the windows looked out to great curvaceous clouds, luscious layers low over the old factory town's skyline—it was hot, it was years ago, she came through the door like coffeeshops were viral, her eyes clipped my attention & brought me from comfort to company—

I miss everything some. Dr. Knickerbocker chews slowly, no anger, no fear, he might even wish companionship later—

Write: “Slave to nothing. Say it again. You are a slave to nothing.” Again.

There’s nothing left to do but to go on, write it out, find out what happens. This life a gift I figured out some years ago—Art is an open door ever after first passage through—everything matters—every last dot—I believe these things—so go on, write it out—

Suffer. Suffer. Then let something bright & unbidden in, a shift of will & circumstance, another day passes, another, call it time, call it an illusion, startle at how things change & how they do not, let something bright & unbidden in, let it knock about your walls, melody with a face & fingers, a star-drenched sky, branches up higher & roots down low & through, let it knock about your walls, noisy with strange rhythms, cries & confessions & wild intents unafraid of those drone & sheep about them, suffer, suffer! Then tilt your face differently, use a strum of words new, bid the world be kind & hope vulnerably, & reckon the sometime triumph—

Suffer! Then let others in & watch them continue building your world while you writhe. I gauge my face, its intentions, its fierce. I should hardly walk vertical & I do. Who am I? Could this ever be known? Who are you? What becomes this beat old notebook a later year when I’m gone? Are these lines for anyone, or anything beyond their pleasure laying down? I truly don’t know. Tonight I bought gifts for blood strangers & far brothers—I’ve seen forty Christmases come & go & it makes less sense to me now than ever—I don’t hate it anymore, or battle it, or embrace it. It happens. A year ago I worked this sheaf 3000 miles east of here, one step, the next, little better then. Two years ago I was a couple hundred miles south of here & flaring wild with pain. Three years ago I was 3000 miles from here but yet another place, a happy delusion, oasis midst a growing spiritual blankness of a life—four years ago the blankness had not yet fully set in—imagine five Decembers with a ragged sheaf I cannot & yet true—the poems are done—they rest save waiting this to join them—

Write: “Liberation watch it flow away & have to follow.” What else? Bus nears the downtown & I forget which one watching the lights—I remember but it does not replace the forgetting—

& I get sick, fall shivering & whimpering a Sunday morning & stay writhing in it for days, & my beloved tends while I vague here & there within, it’s strange to fall away thus, cold & this is like death & all good will be taken away I know it & sleep & here is waking again neither seems to matter more, & I dream of a book about a man whose reality is changed each time he wakes & later I dream of exploding & wake up here again

A less shaky day of sugar & holiday & walking in tandem with her, this day gift to her, love her from afar as plan for next near, her eyes through hours high blue & lowest, explain the heart of an extant creature to me, explain liveness not simply life & no fucking answer that one either write:

“love them all from afar, & learn how to near” I wish I could I see sheep, feed, & drones—I see instinct & hunger & ego rule, pack devised by stupid maths of race & locale—learn how to near, learn how to near!

Write: “Slave to nothing. Say it again.” Fuck that, sometimes. Slave to body, to money, to want, to wonder. Slave to short skirts etching tight asses & the autumnal slope of a nameless hill & memories of a lost friend’s many accumulated hours of brawling laughter, to colors on canvas, in neon, splattered along a floor, slave to memories, say it again, suckass philosophizing piece of shit, to dreams, to plans, to breathing, to virus & kiss alike, slave & sometimes willing, wild willing slave when sensations rule & want feeds blindly greedy, slave to music, to turned faces, to symbols of power & beauty & hope, slave to everything that comes in & tots up, to all that’s generated back out, slave everywhere & how & when, fuck any other egghead play on the conditions besetting any creature—

Dr. Knickerbocker looks around slowly, twice (twice), looks around (around), looks (looks), yes, this is (yes) a familiar (yes this is) a familiar environ (looks around slowly) (twice) (twice) yes this is a familiar—

“Suffering” I say “*Say yes*” he whispers.
 “Say it again” “*It mounts valleys & years.*”
 “Say yes” “*Say yes*”
 “Then something else.” He nods. I go on.

Something else. Wings, shadows, a turn.
 How to live alongside blade, submission,
 & passing clouds.

“The world ever opens out like an offering hand!” he cries.

Accept. Breathe. Relax. Once twice.
 Work another night of mystery
 & stain. Mind reaching out &
 finding nothing, everything, both,
 scrapping among dreams for guru
 glints, secret paths to wider open,
 the past a fantastic pretty of
 great & mere residuum, one’s body
 mostly services until a moment’s snap again
 it barks hard from the best
 within, will not cease awhile—

Cry out from this world’s narcotic
 delusion, ceaseless flu of want,
 once, twice, cry out! Now breathe,
 relax. Reckon all’s burst from
 flowers of flame will eat these white
 leaves til gone, gone as never way,
 but what to do now, & whither next?

“Follow me” she says & we overarch the
 years again to meet, shared & still
 within, she nods, I smile, we agree,
 the night burns its many hours, tends
 its music higher, keeps at its dreams,
 at ‘em & at ‘em, burst through, now, **soon**—

I dreamed an old friend as though just a week or two, a note recently, the old spicy stuff still
 between us, but he had a dream-brother who heard us shouting & didn’t like me, & my
 friend led me away & left me saying “go home I guess” is that what he did? I dream of
 waking up exploding of buildings wide & mangle with labyrinth, home is Art & sometimes
 love, hardly other—

As though at the end it could be but confession & raw, another great howl in a life necklaced
 by them, as though this story could pretend that readers mattered, that world mattered—

What matters is something nameless not tagged by eros or polity or brute survival—

What matters is never static, never still, blatant & undeductable—one sees it plainest when
 highest in its those—confuses it with sex or Art or God—those are its gestures, not they
 gesturing—

This whole book has been confession & raw, I stopped being able to take almost anything
 seriously—there is too much random in this world to believe everything is human-controlled
 or indeed that world seen is all—it is comforting to hint at rewards for pain, great shiny
 redemptions for good behavior, but I not believe good behavior is the point of anything but
 convenience—raw & confessing, no being is pretty or coherent—the world does not sum up
 to anything no matter the nature of the count—

I once thought it was music—but it’s not an answer—at closest sparks flying from its
 shouting heart—

but even saying that is to humanize & encompass what can’t be—

love no more explains itself than anything else—mostly habit & vanity, yet hints of more,
 not the answer, there is no answer, but something,

was it Art? Is it still? Most art behaves, feeds the bored, reassures bookish idiots of their
 fashionable restlessness, or points toward some way, some end, coming or going of days,
 signs everywhere, it will make sense, buy this & this, so soon make sense, buy this & this,
 feel it coming together, spend & vote & fuck & feed & stop & go & did you like it when it
 came?

Rebecca looks in on me & smiles. I think I’m at Luna T’s Cafe’s bar & it’s 4 a.m. Maybe not.

“What did any of it mean?”

“It meant itself. Memory decides by what you do next.”

“There’s no point to any of it.”
 “That’s not true.”

“I’m a failure. That’s all.”
 “By what standards?”
 “I’m supposed to care & I don’t. Deep down I don’t care anymore.”
 “Then why this page & the next?”
 “Stubbornness.”

All that has traveled with me are burnt out notebooks I keep filling—that’s what I’ve loved & known when nothing else—

I want to forget limping back to Connecticut, broke, humiliated, defeated, & see how I had to hit bottom to start anew—

I want to believe my best works aren’t long ago written, believe this by my own estimate, none other—

I can only believe that Beauty & Music are Truth—but none of that—

“Young Man, cease thy frantic scribblings & behold a moment’s deserved peace”

“Neither chaos nor order sum creation’s raw, confessing heart!”

I wait but he says no more.

At a place beyond gurus & gods & trees, when one submits but does not understand, no prayers, no conjured lights, dreams nearly but do not—

I don’t know anymore if the highest intensity is not now, if my balance is backwards then what?

I never wrote for gain but for something of greater matter. I wanted to know why & believed words could tell me. Believed words could be conjured toward wanted effects—that knowing can evolve, one can trace it through streets & hours—

The agent says “Would you rather a city full of tangles, a known face at every corner? Few know you but few own your obligation or time.”

“Is that good?”

“Is it?”

“I’d like something that felt like home.”

“Here it is. Right now. Home. How does it feel?”

“Like a coffeehouse with closed hours. Like a music device with battery life. Like a job expecting me again & again.”

“Like a woman who loves you.”

“Others have.”

“As much? For as long? Not you. Not since your blood mama let go about 20 years ago”

Tell me what to do.
 Nobody tells you. Nobody ever has.
 I don't know where meaning lies.

Nothing directly will answer this.
 Paths are not clear or direct & any
 that seem so are lies. Whatever is
 to be found will seem too obscure, too
 disconnected, or too obvious to value.

What irritates, what troubles, what haunts. What's hard, even stupid. Let false paths ride themselves out. Untrue hearts will eventually tend away.

What remain. What persists. Like or no, mark it. Value & virtue are not the same.

Mark too what falls away, easy or hard, sometimes surprising.

“Use things not people”
 That's not how it works.
 “Exactly.”

Is that it?

No. One more. It is always harder to do than watch, to figure when participation means listen or sing or neither—

Whatever truths or answers that exist have always been there & are fresh to each day & night & for every creature—hard to ensure survival, soft because alive & malleable

if you consider yourself part of something more than you, even if you do so with every possible reservation & by countless terms of negotiation, you will nonetheless find a comfort that pure solitariness cannot provide, was not meant to provide—

every moment of your life is of consequence, deepest meanings are everywhere & always

live like it matters

I look at Rebecca. She nods, smiles.

Breathe. Relax. Once. Twice.

Then continue.

Recent days books about secret groups & extraterrestrial origins, half-built towers woven in fog, & the danger of any path suggested by gurus or pages—

Not to understand the Mystery but to see it greater—pause

Knickerbocker my old chum spies the brike & molding, the riven floorboards, the nooks of perpetual shadow, he nods, this is not the whole of it but tis not awful either—if I live writing to be a hundred I suppose he will approach two—I choose to carry Luna T's along even as we change, things change, things change?

Things change. I cannot say otherwise. Things change, slow, quick, sudden, secret, & one is part of it, birth not true beginnings nor death true cease—my farthest, deepest gropings have told me this in countless ways—no beginning no end

I nod—thinking of one cafe toward another—Luna T's Cafe as real as my notebooks, exists in them & elsewhere too—Real like Seattle, my current home, but both contingent too, relative

groping, here, whither next—

“Are we cousins?” I ask X the space alien.

He nods.

“And cousins with oaks & neon signs too?”

He nods.

“All is kin.”

“You knew that already.”

“I'm trying to know it better.”

Silence.

“Nothing ends. Perpetual gestation & metamorphosis of blue fancies.”

He leaves his bar stool. “See you later, Raymond”

Last line of my new poem “Cry out! What breathes worlds listens, & listens for you” don't know what it means, nothing explains anything. Is life some kind of defiance of something greater, other? Sweeping along highway traffic power visible to the senses yet what tis? What? Sun set but night unfolds with its eternal potent. Faces on the bus wait. Doze, read, wait.

What tis? Whither next?

The sixth level is called *Why?* & this book's secret name is *Why?* & the next book will be called *Why?* openly & I suppose that is my question as the pages dwindle & hours few—

Dr. Knickerbocker rests on the couch in the manager's office, not asleep, still beshroomed, breathing fine, safe & even loved, I keep him as both assurance & warning, & as friend, as colleague of sorts—

Noisy Children play acoustic, sitting in a circle among candles & incense, they know more when together & are better when apart for the music they make—I thank them, they thank me—the dramas among us belong to other days & notebooks—

Mr. Bob the barman pages through my Christmas gift to him, a souvenir book about the 2004 world champion Boston Red Sox—he serves a kind of mead worked up by Guy

Lemonde—not alcohol but better, magick elixir to the weary workingmen who still patron the bar—perhaps some see pints of beer in their hands til they are ready to see more—

Jim Reality sits with me awhile, strums his guitar as I write.

“This story’s title was from you, Jim”

“Ahh”

“I decided that things do change, & maybe this means all kinds of things.”

He strums a little deeper, blue-grey eyes twinkle & lost among chords. I know he is happy.

Rebecca joins me & we sit at the little table beneath the front window—while I also ride a late-night bus down a far highway—

This is what I do. When it’s pretty, high, fierce, ugly, awful. These pages & those of my other notebooks have been what has traveled with me all these years.

Eventually we walk into the Ampitheatre, further & further in, holding hands, the whole of creation plentiful, not explained by music or love or death or memory, walk on til we are somewhere pending & we are something pending, there are no words here & this narrative stays behind awhile til we return to it—

I learned with my endless book of poems kin to this book of fixtion that endings are hard & must be fought for & toward, & tonight wanting to finish this book cleanly at year’s end I’m not going to because it’s not there yet those words that are its last words high enough good enough—

the bar at Luna T’s Cafe roars with New Year’s Eve cheer, & in the bandroom Noisy Children kicks out an all-oldies night, jumping from Beatles to Who to Pink Floyd to Cream to Traffic to Hendrix & elsewhere, song after song without a bead of try, it’s some year ending some other night, & they tune in to the change only humans can feel or know—

I sit there & somewhere else too sit there & here & see how nothing ends nothing begins everything changes & everything changes?

I’m going to keep on it my pen is too young & nutty to stop I hang on & hope—

Something, not yet word, nor yet shine, yet beyond shadow, no longer blue fancy, i don’t know, a game, this cosmos? time + play? something from somewhere, recover of a dream, word then another, shine, again, blue fancy, now more—

She turns away, i follow the path her dark blue eyes trace, followed them, call it miles & years & what? Word, then another. Sunsets through electric chords & neon dancing, i love you, say again, i love you, & again, never stops the punch’s effect, i love you

Night burbles fulla details, every one, nights on coming & fleeing buses, nights in arms & none, nights that didn’t end until the smokers were under a dawn tree exchanging thoughts—

World not revolving, no, world undulating, mist & meat, yes, both, I still believe that, dreams nor psychedelic space nor the basest of hungry desperate moments have convinced me other than: mist & meat—

all music world is all music, flow of energy into, out of creation, nothing ends, everything changes, mass explodes & scatter over the many worlds, words explode & worlds become one, explode, explode, energy builds to burst & release, & again, & again, call it a single man's wisdom or a civilization, creation leads to explosion leads to dissipation it won't stop—

I sit at the corner of the bar shortly after New Year's Day 2005. What a cartoonish sounding name for a year.

“Why not call it Frederick? Or Blackfoot? Or Funk-a-doodle-doo?”

Americus laughs. “You finally figured out the secret”

“Eh?”

He looks at me, smiling, open as he's ever been to me.

“Not to take it all so seriously”

“Is that it?”

The drinking men at the bar nod among themselves. Mr. Bob the barman just looks at me.

“Your choice though, Son. Always.”

I nod.

Walking into the night air I am free. Done it. Told this one. Right to its last page. Took it mighty seriously. Now letting it go.

Walking into the night air & I tell who I was, OK. This is good. I've made it.

Whatever comes, my pen & I did not let down our dream, our music, it hurt, it healed, here it is, still, world here, all music, all music, all music, love & clarity.



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