



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Why? [a new fixation]

What answer is enough, does not shift to cloak its incomplete, or cluster in chorus among angled lights & bitched sounds, compel a pressing mind to turn elsewhere, & again elsewhere, & still again, suck on the cage & call it air, freedom less & less but never none, & comes the dusk & night's smooth unveil the slave's dream pitches higher & more, something tonight will reveal, some hand its new jewel, some face its first whole thought, the drums beat faster, conjure a gesturing hand with their rhythm, there! regard the chaos of the visible world giving way to the unaccounted power of the invisible one! There! The sky opens door through its stars & distance! Lift toward it!

A breath & a beat & again among notebooks & pens in another city, another raw joint of dirty tables & lukewarm food. Burn it down & a week later even its ghost does not remain. Any answer than can bite & bloom here is something worth the regard. No moon in view, no fire & wild heave of moving crying bodies, work any answer through the crust & maw of such environs & see what remain.

Choosing to set pen & paper moving again, fill moments with words & call it a chase after meaning, call it the only work, ask whither next & why? Ask, & again, & the pages fill & if true this book called from inner skies, heart's full moon, mind's hardest galloping night, will matter, will strike the strange bells of the world & make them ring, the music a great harmony of soul & pen & the high sought, full miracle again, will it happen?

Universe, allow this book into being, let it matter, I offer my trust & hours to its making, begin it with hope & humility, loose myself to chance & persistence, & the unknown ahead.

ii.

Another night, someone called the world illusion, again, I read his words calling the world illusion & he pointed to the bookstall & said, "go on, find out some more," it was funny, like a brief nosebleed, & I walked into the bookstall, it was plastic & crookedly set in its foundation, recent & not perpetual, mold in the corners coming on again, patient, unceasing, rust on the plaster walls, webs through the ceiling, windows rippled with an older power than a battery of men with hammers & flexible beams can hold long against.

I looked for the book on many shelves but nothing revealed. This is my problem. The mold & webs & ripples tell a story I must hear, & the books rarely do. The books tell what it's like to be human when I find myself wondering about everything else, what it

would be like to be a dying creature tonight, think with some other manner of brain, speak with some other kind of tongue.

I dreamed my way across a continent & cannot yet figure what it is I've found. The newspaper boxes say Seattle to me where once they said Boston, once they said Hartford. What am I doing here? Can a new heave into the depths of Art help me to know? Can I give more this time?

Here as elsewhere people talk of inconsequence & call it a day, half-awake, waiting, this is all there is yet an infinity presses within our temples nearly all the time, how to reconcile these, if at all?

How indeed but give more to these pages, work for the spark, the flash that explains all for a moment if not perpetually.

The night is pretty here as elsewhere & I believe right now as ever in things wordful & otherwise.

iii.

I dreamed about a woman not see in twenty years, curly youth in long smile & pink tights, taught me how to write bad poetry, I worked on the rest, I saw her mother & sister too, I doubt either liked much the skinny tramp I was then, in this dream as dirty & unwelcomed as then, how do such remembrances affect who bear them? Or did I not really matter much at all? Was their dead husband father all that really mattered? Intense years, those, unhappy outside of my imagination yet youth's unshaking gold is untapped future, the somedays collected little-realized around heart & mind, in this dream she was old yet flicked me around with yesteryear's ease & I look back & ask these pages would I have done better to have let her go years before I did or is that how one learns to love, by chasing, by wishing, by hearing the beloved's name in every yearning song on the radio, & if I could tell that boy how to win her would I? I still feel his pain, this dream reminded me that time hardly exists real among the soul's ruined places—

later she fucked a dark man as a form of vengeance, hips raw riding unloving cock beneath dark beams & red stars, I watched from some disembodied hiding place, remember this, some truth in this hard sex act, heaps of crimson scarves on the floor, her teeth bite at the air, her hands bloody his shoulders, remember this

—a hard dream—I've determined to have at them, become an oneironaut & create one too—we'll trade tales—his hair will be short, he'll be tattooed—he does this for a living—I'll call him Benjamin—he's the first.

Somewhere else the day blows hot & fierce, I want to spread me around til the pain of compassion lessens—the night cools til a warm native to love's true touch, & I walk awhile with others, the world is not so hard tonight, the dreams are loud but distant, the fires are in every direction, sacraments eaten are lifting within til I cannot remain with my companions who do not really exist, & hiding in my canvas hump only launches me up, to places, no-places, far away & how higher, up, up, I do not have to return, the offer made other times fresh before me, I am nobody, it nearly feels good, I nearly wish to, someone will find my carcass in a day or two maybe, do I have to return? I ask years along did I return? Did I have to? What am I doing here? Why?

iv.

I call him Benny Big Dreams. He takes a shot every morning after his dreamwork is done—"Best n worst of the day outta the gates."

"What's the shot for? Diabetes? Smack?"

"That's my business for now. You're new to me. I'm careful."

"You're new to me too."

"True. But I have some studying on you to do."

"Studying how?"

"Time & space are masks for simples. Consensual reality is the masque they attend all their years & call it a life."

I nod. A joke, & not, we both know.

"Well, you're scratching at the mask & looking for the windows outside the simples' ball."

"I've *been* out there. There are no masks, no masques, no simples."

He nods. "And yet here you are, here you remain. Writing still in a simple's language, living a simple's life. Dressed up like a simple. So I'm not sure of you. I'll have to dream on it."

That's Benny Big Dreams.

I thought about this book called *Why?* for awhile. Wrote poems about it. Tried & failed it a few times. It is permeating my life & that's what I wanted. Whither bound? What tis? I don't know. It's a book, sheaf of lined pages in an old red binder labeled *Nuclear Regulatory Commission Training Manual Supplementary Materials, Sep. 1978*. Not really.

Drift from words, watch a night lamp watching the highway. Interstate 90 runs down the West Coast, Seattle, Portland, further north & south, never ceases its traffic.

I people this nightbus with multiples of me in every seat, the music in my ears, every head's ears, comes from a small white plastic gizmo—a band called Flaming Lips, blah blah

Simple's language. Simple's life.

Dressed up like a simple.

Benny nods. I wonder what he shoots up. The night reigns wet & white

One day I will no longer take this bus but will remember it. How I shoved my pen along on exhausted midnight rides & wouldn't let it stop, words, barks, mewlings, whatever I could get out I did & did. & did. & did.

v.

I watch him play his drums, disappearing among his mates disappearing among him, his kit extends his intentions & plays him, man & drum contour each other, I listen closely & find a scatter & fall, infinite repetition of arcs, sounds inevitable, fanning cascade of rhythms, one, two, many, within the music there is no interior, it does not end, nothing explains, high grows higher, deep further, it does not end, something here to hook into, the music which does not end, not a culture or a king or a priest, not war or a death, what here in this?

He plays drums without reserve, weave here fury & there subtle, sweating harder happier, this band, some band, every band, better than the best pissing drunk you could conjure up, mate, better than shagging a few of the best in the audience later on every night fun but ends the beat in my head never ends I hear it in my fingers all the time it's hunger & feast both more than love or hate, some feeling of life that matters, that the shite was worth it & won't be the winner in the end, not the way this feels, the shite *can't win*

vii.

Looking more widely round I see a man with a hatchet in a deep-snowed wood. Chop. Chop-chop. The quiet woods echo & re-echo with metallic cracks, air very cold, clear night to shiny, creatures watch from shadows & branches, the sound & scent of this man familiar, his movement unhurried, & yet he is a man so something tense exists in the area, he feels & accepts—

His name is John & he lives nearby—the wood is for his cabin's stove—he lives alone & has for awhile—he is paid to watch the wood on this private land a strong man claims by human deeds—

They have an agreement, it came at a bar on the last night John's lips tasted alcohol—

“My land is mine—I don't dispute over this. I keep it for its beauty & for other purposes. There are places on it none but the invited go. There are others none but I go.”

John nodded & sipped hard. Had he gone home that night he would have ended his mortal life. Young & passionate & lost.

Night drifts in, the snow follows, the tavern heats bodily deeper, the drinks pour along the bar, a lingering still point, John remembers other nights in other bars, regretting the dimming flavor in recent years. Too many blackouts, too much tangled drunken slumping sex.

“The woods are a good place to clean out the mind's clutter.”

John nods.

“My gut tells me you're a good man who's developed a limp in his mind. Worse, I think you're growing used to the limp.”

Nods again.

A cell phone flips open & a mumbled instruction. “The car is pulling up front. Finish your drink. Or leave it.”

He sips then stops. His companion exchanges a word & a chuckle with the barman & they depart.

viii.

What I want to know is how to think other, how to be other, how to shake it new, how to spend the hours like every moment is creation's first, always arriving—

I struggle not with words but what to do with them, it's not enough to fill up pages when it seems the world is no better for its millions of covered pages. No, I want to know else, words that transmute, words that refigure—

Words thus far not enough flesh, not enough sky, there must be deeper, break wide, pages burning in the hand alive with making not result but cause—

I keep trying, keep my pen moving every day, let work up a fury in my head & blow it out on page, keep trying no choice what stays is what keeps, good or ill—

I trust Art is an open door & ever there for me, trust & hope, & do the work, & do it, & do it—

The Universe keeps me & I write, I call this life.

ix.

The Artist is female, what else would she be, my counterpart, my other, her other, as years go by she moves less by my strings & I enjoy her more for this, the unknown is life's greatest allure, its most biting hope—

She wants to drink with me & I say no, laughing. She regrets this, some things only a wine-glow can reveal, so she maintains. She turns to her pipe & I am more agreeable.

The pipe looks like a dark brown crag, glints, light in the hand, deep clean draw, the hash is good, sweeps in on the breath & sends blood & bones shuddering smile with high—the music becomes palpable, rests & leans about the room, flavors its shadows, shifts among rug and ceiling & furniture connecting patterns, fuzzing the window's view, lessening the ever constricting press of time.

"You've written many books. Why this one?"

"It passes my hours."

"That doesn't answer me."

"No, it doesn't."

"Why this one?"

"I'm trying to decide exactly what you are."

"Do you know?"

"Not yet. I would just like to know."

"Because?"

"I spend many hours on these pages. I'd like to know if I'm around old ghosts."

"Are you?"

"Maybe."

"Who then? You've got many choices."

"Someone I want around, someone I have something left to speak to."

"Will I be anything else?"

"Yah. Of course."

x.

Sometimes it's small things to do or not. Gestures, responses. Smiles can lie as well as anything else. Words are even worse, cosseted up for formal, political, social, even intimate use. Servants, docile, restrained. Believe any with risk.

"Then why do you do this?"

"They draw me. They're familiar. I conjure good as I can with them, I try to be true to best intents."

"Conjure?"

"I feel at times I can blow up with them & should do it every night."

"Why don't you?"

"I don't think the answer is in words or in silence but in transfiguring the world . . ."

"With words?"

"I thought Art was the answer, the path, the way, but to what or where?"

Not release from life or to life, grasp for death or its repudiation,

xi.

Hartlee laughs at me, not a cruel laugh, but that of a wizened guru, something of the old friend returned to me in these pages. The tough, smart blue eyes, wiry, feisty with high knowing.

"You took a lot. It kicked your ass. It happens."

I nod. It does.

"Cut the dose or figure it out better next time."

"Learn to steer. It's so simple."

He strums his guitar & I feel his spiritus flow into his instrument & sparkle pretty high chords outward. I would sit on the couch, boxy frame like a coffin, he had his seat near his computer. Books on the floor, shelves; the ones on mushrooms, the ones on plagues.

"Don't worry," he says. "Remember for next time."

I nod. Seems all the old ghosts are invited to this party. So be it. If it's to be a freak gargantuan of a tale, so be it.

Tap. Tap. Perhaps the only way to lighten the traveling bags is to spill out their contents & give each a moment of light & attention. The past has noisy persistent aspects, none to do but see what they want, if even they know.

xii.

Someone hidden, maybe hiding, maybe in wet shadows, beneath a bridge, it's where he's slept the past few days, he's in a new place, no money, afraid, confused, but not completely. Allows himself a daily visit to the local soup kitchen run by the Catholic church, & a night-time walk to the library. A big building, he likes it. Books excite him even as he can't read more than a few pages at a time. Impatience, high-strung. Words simply fill up fast in him. Once full, he can't continue, won't. One security guard likes him, spreads among his peers word to leave this boy be, but watch out for him. Who knows anyone's reasons for anything?

"You got a home?"

"I'm OK."

"There's places."

"Yah."

"Say the word & I'll help you. I promise. I been there."

"Where?"

"Where you are. Young. Running. I had a thing for needles. And other things."

Others live near him, among campfires & sleeping bags. They know about him but nobody approaches. One did, to tell him about the soup kitchen, but after that they let him be. People have their own reasons. His are his own unless he shares them.

“Are you using?”

“No. I don’t do drugs.”

“Booze? You’re pretty young.”

“No.”

Left alone he picks up books by glow & vibe, the paper talks to him before the words appear. Different rooms too, since there are so many. The library has a lot of computers but he leaves these be. They are curious & people use them a lot, but he just leaves them be.

The night air is sweet. The church fed him, he seems to be a pet there too like at the library. He is quiet, slowly folding into himself for the night’s many hours to come.

A new figure comes by. Sits awhile near him. Does not say much.

“We’re all lost here,” he says finally. He hands over a crumpled brown bag, within containing a fair number of small dried asurescence mushrooms. “Keep these safe, take them a few at a time when you’re at crossroads. They don’t lie. Listen to them. Chew slowly. No alky. Just water.” Leaves. No judgement.

xiii.

Thinking poor scholar’s thoughts about Magick, seems to be in the seeming dull stuff of things drawn from the catalyzing ether, mixed by music, spell of lingual chant, something like a faith too, both that world exists & that world is not all, a quiver of desires & childly love of play, maya by its many lights, illusion, dream, play—

Magick in one word & then the next sometimes movement kin to dance, more than this, how the mystery still rides through every song, fair & flawed, call it Magick, presence of other, feel it in best moments, no explain for what or how—

Yet the wish to know it more, a flicker better, the thought of smoke as guru, shaman, & what tis, & why?

Told: patience. Told: work hard, work steady. Told: you know creation runs into invisible, into imaginary, into & seamlessly through many kinds.

I nod—

I remember lately nights of power, juiced by mind accelerants, by neon city furies, music hitting & again & harder, I’d run my pen from one half-lit trip den to the next, nests or near to for letting the words fire through me to my page & elsewhere—and I still feel it tonight—there’s no diminish or retreat—

another city, another year, I see some differences but simply yearn for more—thinking about Magick, it seems to me the Universe is a miraculous creature & no reason all its inhabitants should not be brilliantly supped & fulfilled—my race is often very small-minded, fearful, not trusting each other much less all of the non-human potentialities existing. Easier for most to

subject the world to a man-made cage or some form of subjugation—& a permanent sense of other, of world as transient, illusion, test, punishment—

Some refuse this way & reach around, not to capture or even explain but to widen sense of mystery, how great it is, how greatest thoughts struggle even to partially behold it.

xiv.

Remembering every tree I've neared & spoke & wished for, how they talked to me & kept me in lowest hours, how my promises to the Universe were told to them & I love them, wish to learn of them

feed on soil & sunshine & water to create fruit & nuts, wild vistas of color, sweet & hard

teach me, teach me

a night some years ago half-awake on a highway, van pulled over, trees titans above me—impossibly beautiful—other years on jet planes & even the sky did not lord over them—no, the power was there below me, but nothing harsh, nothing lordly, all open & invitation, beyond good, beyond night, beyond free—

Trees, beauty, desire, high, higher, from some root deeper than sexual, containing it, powering it, but deeper, the force connecting among all creation

What explains toothaches, lightning, & peppermint candy.

xv.

Dreams countless & years in a large building, maze, stairs, corridors, chase, wars, disaster, always running, always pursued, again, last night, what of it?

That waking, this strange bookstall cage life the dream? Helpless hoping.

No. Foolishness. Nothing less real than anything else, nothing less important or authentic. Each is all yet each maneuvers through all. One is here, nowhere & everywhere. One is I, you, all, nobody. Wherever humans have pressed universe for answers, firing wildly for godhead, peering at the minutest bits, eating its prettiest esoterica, these answers again & again.

"I am you & you are me &
we are all together"

What next? How to ignite a next—dreams can loop ceaseless, how to jack into waking's ceaseless drive, its impatient propulsion?

Sick tonight, it was brief cruelties & a few supped morsels that jumped my spark—so tis possible—

dreams can bite do & I want to know them better, tunnels, rooms

"born from drams to return anon" someone whispers—

"Benny?"

the voice does not soon return

if each is all then why sadness all over?

xvi.

Never was a question this story would arrive soon or sooner at Luna T's Cafe—she joined my life 24 years ago & comes along with me—Merry Muse, Rich Americus, Rebecca Americus-Soulard, Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, Jim Reality III—yet how will they arrive? I look at old stories & cannot write their like again, am pushed, sometimes shoved elsewhere, conduit to a lifelong hunger for new, & can only insist they not be other than what they are in some down in the wordless sense—

Once in the City, later in Hartford, later still some kind of placeless, where Luna T's Cafe now? I live in Seattle yet I find my consciousness lives multiply, in memories, in hopes, the past not a uniform ended thing but a great live dark beast glinting with faces & hours, with stretches of world & days—

Luna T's Cafe exists in pages, & maybe in the minds of a few others than myself—but for me its existence has filled much of my life, created aspects of my identity, it matters & thus it changes through the years & I cannot write of it samely for I am not samely—

And what matter anyway? I've always believed that Art mattered no matter the audience—& for some years now what audience I had has dispersed—so what matter? Commitment to the pen & pages, to the hours spent with them, to faith in the . . . necessity in doing this, its inherent reward—

Never have I cared for much else, never has much else taken me to the wild places my pen has—& thinking it over that's where Luna T's is now—the wild places—a door still kept open to the bar where workingmen still come for a beer & an hour of TV—but it's now the wild lands that predominate

the question ending this passage must be: are there any wild lands left within my grasp, within, without, any that matter, can I still reach them?

xvii.

A mystery, a riddle, a chase, a maze, a journey, this, a pursuit? A psychotropic fairy tale? Metaphysical travelogue? Raw symphony, chocolate high arc of event & misdeed?

No answers. Called *Why?* & so be it. Kick it up, & now higher.

Tap, tap. New creatures & old await. Art ever the open door when faced with open heart.

Emulate world in ragged chaos & centerless whirl. Crazy for the sure pink thing & the tallest perches.

Story like what if & what is, some ways slipped in both

Someone always asleep, someone always awake, someone dying, someone coming along, bleeding, hurting, attacking, kissing, taking, spending, driving, urging to let self fall nearly all away to what & where & how elses, to when, to more,

See through eyes upon eyes from high strange buildings like cliff dwellings some year away or years or now or what—where the wild lands who will tell if best found in mind, dream, body, or wilderness itself?

Fixtion that fixes limitations & does away with them, nothing else left to do, come on, that's something maybe—

the waters stretch far out but will ever recede & return, the confessions cosmic & the confessions mundane, to nod over this, best Art stained with toil's hours & vista's dreams, I want to know it hurt & salved both, something sacrificed, something received—

xviii.

He owns nothing from day to day, refuses, even his clothes come & go from donation baskets & dumpsters, maybe other lives it was different but here he is in this one—yet feels himself belonging to the morning light & the wee hours' tinsel air—stars know him, trees pass him around city parks—

When spoken to he is usually soft & kind. Life is suffering, empathy, uncertainty—watch any freeway & see—from here to there & then otherwise—it does not end, it does not even slow—

I imagine him with a few tattoos & a bit of science knowledge—he eludes me as dangerous—a naming, befriending sort—

Yes, suppose so, lonely, worked up, loving but rare liking—the tears are in my blood—

Night works color for its own ways—by highlight, by subtraction—night is pantheistic, no single mind could have conjured all of its odd pretty wonders—

Nothing will return from another day—not much I'd wish for—I guess I couldn't stop though once commenced—

Things try to own him, however; the strange & beautiful tug of the church as he takes his day's meal, its offer of comfort nigh to answers, enough tempting for him to know he is being tempted. Or the fire others huddle near at night, laughing, the way two will share a meal or a cigarette. Even the library guards who watch out for him, slip him dollars unasking, curious over the books he spends more than a minute with. Humans push at one another & tug closer almost simultaneously. He feels it, how he breathes like those around him, how his heartbeat is like everyone else's no matter his rags or their finery—feels it in how his hands are unique but like all hands

xix.

Does the world open out with the years or collapse slowly, I don't know between gain & loss, & what of ongo? life intense then empty, splayed with strange, what meant the miles & years, what means anything at all?

Tired works it harder & slower until—but sometimes no & a shout holds it back, renews,

Years & faces & miles, what did they matter, why must this pen push along paper every hour I can, I've watched people bookless live it all excited as me, what did I miss? What did they? Trash rhetoric comes nothing

Sleep twists within & through until pen rouses & goes—there is nothing can take Art down but starts with some capitulation—be a bitch making it not another coward yawping over life's wastes—

life doesn't take it away—fools & cowards give it away

I do not wish to—

xx.

Beloved,

While you travel tonight I sit on the night coach & electric shadows flee by. I wonder at the night's ever-magick to keep me anew & along, the clean of night, the burn, the high, where does it go? Where do I go by daylight? You travel & the greater freedom of my hours is tempered by longing, by realizing that one's long-held lover & best friend affects ceaselessly by presence & absence. Yearn for you conjures you, of course, & my lingual-nutty mind touches this yearn curiously . . . is there Art in it? More lyric or more prose? How to transmute . . . it never ends.

The coach ride into the city is delighted by night's prowling monster presence but I could truly do otherwise happy with hours such as these. While you travel, your own night passing, I try not to dull with the familiar. Nay, thoughts of adventures I could have to share with you later tempt me.

*My pen moves, what matters, what I chase, what I give, what I keep—
this city downtown after midnight is empty of all but neon & hustlers, the coaches carry people through it elsewhere, & I wonder what long-made agreement led to such a late-night desertion?*

Hours at the wheel & my pen finally slows, I so long to melt into things & bring back words of essence—

xxi.

The world always with its doves & its lunatics, those half-buried mumblings into the dirt, other empty sparkles on the riled air

& I ask again: do the bastards really reign on every path, in ever ville, over sky & sea & wood alike? I ask because I'm not sure & I suspect no—but—

Look up & the whole bar cries out to the 4th quarter Super Bowl interception & the Patriots already up 10 pts on the Eagles—

I listen & for a moment care intensely again, remember faces blown up with delight, beers bought & drunk & spilled & shared, I remember because that is in part what one does, one remembers

chooses, shapes, embraces, lets go,
the past to service or slave, help build a deeper-boned kindness or resist on the shatter of old hurts,

chooses, shapes, embraces, lets go
I remember those faces with love, those shoulders & hands, tavern nights that led into moony vows of fraternity, that called beyond themselves, that yearned to be remembered, to matter after the glasses empty & the dreams washed in,

chooses, shapes, embraces, lets go,
I call tonight brutal with new, let its blood & matter wild the world, for I will not burn in daylight's next swallow, I call tonight a rising upon risings, a new language & a long hope, fresh, tight, eager, the lights higher, the harder dancing, worlds invented all about

choose, shape, embrace, let go

I leave the faces crying victory & the like, there are other places in Luna T's Cafe to be even as the faces at the bar were for a moment lovely with sentiment
choose, shape, embrace, let go.

I don't know how the game ended, & I don't know where all those faces are tonight, a fragment newly keeps them for a moment at best
(choose, shape, embrace, let go)

xxii.

Why? I don't know. Why? lights blink in the distance. Why? The day was hours with rain. Why? My beloved travels far & thinks of me. Why? People read books for answers their own hearts bear. Why? Music is an easier way to bear life's slow drown. Why? Chocolate & pussy. Why? Because one remembers & hopes from similar impulses. Why? I sleep alone tonight buried in the world's webby miracle. Why? It kills to stop asking. Why? Please stop asking. Why? Won't you stop asking? Why? Desire bites every fucking hour of one's life, let it, let it, o let it bite. Why? I don't know. Why? I don't know. Why? I truly don't know. Why? Because it must. Why? Because it will. Why? Because you can.

xxiii.

Sitting in the bandroom at Luna T's Cafe & Noisy Children jamming & higher hour after hour, many songs, one song, like shaped winds of joy, I listen & sometimes find myself moving in the dancing & someone hands me a pipe & the smoke is smooth & offers steps up inside my mind, offers with a smile, a glint & I go, feel myself going steps up in my mind & Noisy Children plays on & on the night beast's hours beauty mull fire murmur past & I think OK, try again, think love, try again think happiness, try again think hope & settle with this when a small bit settled on my tongue by a smiling face & the night big night is the crackless mystery & I am glad all these years haven't solved it for me o yes if God there be anything one could say yay there, it be in the mystery & its infinite ways of revealing without explaining

The dancing bodies close & closer a safety in the friendly sweat in the heats thrown about in praise & play & I am remembering moments so intensely I am no longer here completely

I am several completely now

I am walking a poor city in the winter & lost & lonely & in love & the world doesn't fucking care & yet I do insist it matters, it's what I learn that winter, that at bottom, in the most broken lights of one's soul *one must care*, find some hook, something, & this is not another person, it is the saddest truth I've been gifted yet I feel its potent, it's helped me to love some better & loathe some better, it's made me stronger to the wind—fisting through human places & more fragile to places elsewhere—

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax. Ahh. The songs. My songs. My notebooks. They matter. I love them as evidence for me that I exist. Whatever to others, I exist to me.

Noisy Children will sometimes play it loud til dawn then slow & slow & slow, instruments higher than coins, players become conduits & elsewhere a bakery is bombed & elsewhere something pink grows full & snaps away to something else—

xxxiv.

"John, what is the world if not what's evident?"

"Meaning?"

"I don't call it illusion but I don't call it all."

"Nobody does."

"What then?"

"I don't know. What to do with things unseen? How can one account for the invisible?"

"Look around you."

I see a cabin. One large room with a curtained bed loft in one corner. We're sitting at a table, wooden like everything else. A lamp with a green shade & a pull-cord.

"Real within real"

"I'm making this up. All of it. It's pages in my notebook."

"Yes. You're not alone."

"It's all made up?"

"Go on."

"Earth isn't made up. Seasons. Blood. Gravity. Fossils."

"It's all the same stuff."

"Flesh & imagination are the same?"

"Does that not make sense?"

"World & world imagined?"

"Lots of imaginations."

"One is many"

"Many is one"

"Do trees make art?"

"Trees *are* art."

"Why do humans have to try?"

"I don't know."

"How much can be found in dreams?"

"Dreams seem another way in, or back."

"I want to know what to do."

He nods.

xxxv.

What to do. I suppose there are more answers than souls ever to exist. Sometimes answers intensely press for attention but no word, more runs of light down a midnight alley, a human smile, a tree blowing, out crows suddenly—sensations of a moment—dreams where I nearly break through—

Imaginal corridors reveal at night, walls, angles, electric stars twinkle down the freeway, the world two kinds of wilderness, alternating kinds of power, forms of complexity, the erotic coil in things looses, spreads, connects widely, dreams beyond stellar wield countless highs break hardest stone, lows wither to dust. What to do. Soul's best weapon twined awfully of faith & doubt. Night bids follow & learn new.

To Art? Some kind. New, old, perhaps best called a different pitch. Trust, yes, but more *necessity*. What I want. An art tough as bone, fierce as blood, long reaching muscle.

A word at a time. A few.

Flying. Praying. Kissing. Relinquishing. Kin of melodies passing angel through the heart.

Night again & wield an older instrument & wonder how it feels sweet & strong among fingers, I fall great within, press memory into other years & move again with a younger body, call each day a new beginning & how they pile up, the mind fats with years of questions & partings, ecstasies, repetitions, disappointments, little deaths, cracked hopes,

how many bus rides, how many reefers smoked, how much sunshine eaten, how many good & bad shits on how many toilets—

This story wants for its skeleton & its path & pending these will arrive, but some pages more in the wilds of mind, where direction is irresolute if existing at all—

Night passage call these pages, where horizons form by electricity or fire, where even the rudest brute may for a stretch cry hope & vow to his yearn whether or no the day finds him nearer—

What to do, pen's moving, a rhythm & melody tangled in the moment's acceleration, ask why? & nothing may animate alive to answer—

“Rebecca”

“I’m here”

“Wife”

“Still. Always.”

“How do I do this?”

“Like you always have”

“I don’t remember”

“You never do”

“Then how”

“Pen moving, rhythm & melody”

World something real & veil, yet mull
its comings & gones, what is sure? What
is true? Some would say God & perhaps
be justified in giving one name to many—
but some would not find this enough—

Something real & veil, hesitate in the dubious labyrinth of metaphor but so swathed in worship of night's wild magicks maybe no choice, I don't know, here is wielding of ancient root again, raise its spectral noise high & lone, why the universe & why love, ask & ask again, why exhaust from a truck & blood from a struck rabbit, why this hour with its simple name & that one too complex for the memory's surviving grind

raise the root again, raise it
high & mad, & bring it down now—
now—NOW!

I am sitting in an armchair in a coffeehouse I've crept to for weeks in a poor western city, & here I come with my dingy books & crumby countenance. Sometimes I buy, sometimes I don't. I find others hard going & we talk whatever comfort of suffering toward suffering

& I remember these nights long after, remember them viscerally like snow & sugar, remember the old man who traced every modern king & institution back & back to ancient empire, a race of madmen do I've known their many numbers who call the present hour an old crime's confessing blot

The music is hard & complex & unsentimental as I walk the city's streets where beggars lax & poor souls everywhere—

I remember a circuit I followed so many days, afternoons at the job center, wasted on computers, & a walk to the poorfolks restaurant sat in my corner with books, refilling my soda cup, sometimes I brought it back for days, & on to the five & dime for sweets, then the train into the city where I haunted the library for books & more computer time, & on to coffeehouses like this one staying til midnight when the dirty bus brought me back to my room.

Remember those nights too great for them to settle among the rest, what to do with them if anything at all—What to do & help me & I write & break this hard til open—

What to do. Go back & carry on, nothing else, remember without fear, anticipate without bars—

Nothing will be the same but while life there's hope, the human hustle resumes every day & anyone up or down can trade fortunes.

xxxvi.

He walked into Luna T's Cafe with his sack of books & his broadsword, sat down at the bar two seats from Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, nodded & smiled at Mr. Bob the barman, ordered a tankard of mead.

"Nice bit of metal," one of the drinkers remarked.

"Keeps me good company when the nights & miles get strange."

"Must get pretty strange to need something like that."

"I'm a scout. I get sent ahead to recon."

"Scout for who? King Arthur?"

Laughter round the joint.

Smiling, says, "No, a clan of vikings."

"Vikings? Randy Moss? Fran Tarkenton?"

"No the *other* ones."

"Sailing ships? Pillaging villages?"

"No. Not really. My sword helps me to cut through fabrics of reality, get to the next. No pillaging. More . . . aid & comfort."

"Good vikings?"

Nods. Smiles. Stands, swings at the air three times three angles. A flap opens in the air. Snow, lights, herd of triple-horned beasts. Flap slowly closes of itself. Now gone.

The drinkers look at Mr. Bob. He shrugs. "How's your drink, Son?"
 The Viking sips & nods. "Secret ingredients." Mr. Bob nods.
 "Are you scouting this joint? It's sure weird enough for the likes of you."
 "We've heard stories. We thought to come along & see."
 "Would you like to see the owner?"
 He pulls a parchment from his rough leather vest. "Ree-bek-ah?"
 "Her dad owns it," says one of the drinkers. "That's his kid. Not so young anymore, I guess."
 Mr. Bob nods, holds up a finger to the Viking, & pushes into the bandroom.
 Noisy Children are on stage working something over, sitting in a loose circle.
 "Sorry to interrupt. Is Reb around? She's got a visitor."
 "Not here," says Rich. "I think she & Soulard are working out some new part of the Ampitheatre. Something about his Portland days."
 "He's let go of nothing," says Gretta, a smile, sad maybe.
 "Thanks," Mr. Bob leaves them & walks down a hallway that leads to other places, even more complex.

He finds us with notebooks & pens & paints & brushes in a half-conceived new place.

Reb runs over to hug him. "I'm glad you came."
 "What's all this?"
 "We're building Portland from 2002."
 "Oregon?"
 "The Ampitheatre is near here. Raymond wanted this to be near there."
 "Why Portland 2002?"
 "I can't get it out of my head. Those months there. I'm not done with them. It's better to go to them than be harassed."
 Mr. Bob nods. "Rebecca, a man is in the bar to see you. He looks a little rough but not harmful. I'm not sure what his business is. Shall I tell him you're tied up?"
 Rebecca looks at me. I nod, & she seals her small vial of Goddpink. She motions for me & I shake my head. "I'll be here. If you need me bring him here."
 She nods, kisses me holy wet love high, & leaves with Mr. Bob hands held.

I sit awhile wondering if the dream I had this morning of fixtional worlds old & new again can be made, can burst up in the world & behold it new & strange again.

Wonder. The mind leaves traces where it passes & carries traces along, it seems I can summon moments from those days easily, waiting for buses downtown, traveling to rotten jobs by rail. Nights wandering alone & always the hope of turning a magick corner, of getting the phone call that would stop the descent, I'm still there in ways I can't name, still trying to work it out differently, one more day—

The Viking looks at me & nods. "We all shake with terror sometimes, my friend."
 "It's not terror. It's some kind of pull, strong one, some magick I conjured those lonely nights, how could that be? What remains? The girl is gone, this is about me, the complex of hours I called my life for some months."

"Would you like me to come with you" he motions knowing to what Reb & I are making next to the Ampitheatre.

"Is that why you're here?"

"He's here to help," Reb says, still surprised I followed her shortly after she left.

“Could you see it with clear eyes? Clear but kind?”

“Yes. Both whenever possible.”

“What about your clan?”

“I’ll take care of them, Raymond,” speaks up Mr. Bob. Viking already likes him, smiles & nods.

Rebecca crawls me deep with kiss & hug before the Viking & I leave. Him & his sword & books. Me, my pen & notebooks, & I.

Night drinks me whole again & I wonder at home beloved like water & music & wifely pink cheeks. Sitting another carriage countless carriages recalling that city those months what ragged crush I have on those days & how they reverberate strangely even now.

Breathe. Relax. The people from those days are all gone from my life, gone each with a grievance, gone & I can’t conjure the sweet intimate words & looks of romance, of fraternity. None remain.

A few more fleeting creatures from then & the curiosity imaginal space invokes. Not fate but what if—

“Coming?” asks the Viking smiling with his sword & sack of books.

I nod. It was the nights then, that’s what hook I’m caught on. The days were jobless impoverished suffering, none else. The nights were different, still secret ribbons in my heart—

The Viking & I walking the downtown & I can see Rebecca did not finish it—so I do—not with her gift or grace but the streets are solid, the buildings visible, the sky passing—

“What can I do?”

“Be my witness.”

“Where there none?”

“Not really.”

He looks sad. His hair long & shaggy, his eyes blue, intelligent, warm. I like him, & realize he will protect me in every way he can.

“Thank you.”

“You come from good impulse, not just inside me.”

He nods. “You too.”

I feel about ready to begin this.

xxxvii.

There was a man on the bus into Portland, the last bus of several from Hartford, last hours of several days’ worth, & he learned of my writing & editing & told me his notion. Erotica for the incarcerated, way to couple up prisoners.

Portland approached & I did not know what I was coming to. I’d never been to it but by it on the freeway. My possessions rode with me in three bags & crate, the remain in a cellar back East.

He talked on & on. I look out the window & see the waterfall he is describing.

The Viking stands up in the seat behind me & I are reminded this is fiction.
 “Enough of this for now.” Agreed.

His sword slashes lower left to upper right, across, upper left to lower right, across, then a clockwise circle around the perimeter of the cuts. A perfect circular hole opens.

“Fancy.”

“Let’s go before it repairs.”

We leap through & are back at Luna T’s Cafe.

“That’s how it works?”

“One way at least.”

“What are we working toward?”

“Integration.”

He nods.

“It’s not just about me. It never was at its best.”

“That can be true.”

“How?”

“Release. Look around.”

“It looks old & familiar. People lifting up & putting down & calling it a day & a year & a life.”

“Anything else?”

“I don’t know. Some call it a war. Holy, political, cosmological, something else.”

“What do you believe?”

“I believe in Art.”

“And love?”

“Love manifests. It’s not something to believe in.”

“Art is?”

“I don’t know. Maybe neither are anything but work.”

“Art can be done alone. Love is live relation. Art is documentation, sometimes of Love. Love leaves effect but no evidence.”

“So what now?”

He looks at me. “I’m here to serve as companion & protector. I don’t have your map. We go as you will.”

“I brought an icon tonight” & hand him a black & white plastic pen labeled Portland Community College.

“Strange. Did you write with this?”

“No. I just carried it, by chance at first. Then later it was remembrance.”

“What do you want back?”

“Nothing I could have. I suppose this instrument is more a promise than a remembrance.”

“Promise to?”

“To not forget.”

I am there at that office where I sat at computer terminals all day long, jobhunting? No. I was chasing pussy through cyberspace. Dark sport of a lonely soul. Contrive erotic lingual fantasies & make them feel real, make them spasm with submission & release, bring pleasure to a stranger & then disappear, not free love but free fuck, no love involved—

I did it til it got too bad then I read & wrote for my life & that got bad & I would sleep when nothing else was left—

The Viking slashes at the computer terminal before me til the hole opens up & we throw ourselves through back to Luna T's Cafe

This isn't working well yet.

xxxviii.

I could lose the minutes, hours & years, & recall myself to other nights in vanilla-sweet air, to a courtyard where I sat writhing in the benign souls about me, remember it all til whatever now whatever is falls away near completely—

"It's not just about me."

"What then?"

"We need to go to where it matters."

"You're there already. The lava's all around. Hark."

"The revolution is everywhere always"

"Of course."

"What do I do?"

"Like always. Submit some. Resist some."

Luna T's Cafe moves West with me. The Viking nods. Lingers East too. He agrees. Any change then?

Rich Americus sits in his old green pillowed chair smoking a reefer. Ideas come to him in words & melodies. He lets them. He feels his time of mattering again coming around. The view is pink sky, & some snowtipped peaks. Nice.

The resistance too is everywhere, always. Someone presses down, someone shoves back. A little too loud, & again.

"It matters, Rebecca. All this."

"It always did."

xxxix.

Breathe, relax. The vehicle is up & away, fuel plenty, structure holding. It's ragged & freak but see it go.

Another breath & a beat & again the raw joint with the dirty table & lukewarm food. Some continuity drew me here tonight, picking up the noise thrown out awhile ago & slinging it on. Call it a report card some thick of pages along.

Whither next & why? Higher sparks, flung round greater, because I can again, because I've dog hard at this to get something back & then further.

One makes Art from one's depths in collaboration with the world's many effects. Art both sings & replies.

Universe, my new prayer wishes this book to bloom its best intents, its ideals, its gift. Building up craggy & improvisational, nonetheless bearing shadows both smooth & fucknuttty. At this place & page, it is stable but not yet the big, good, necessary being it wishes for. Hardly a prayer here but for its green to keep coming & its blood to stay clean.

A night fine & cool. Vagrant with an outheld hand guards the door & repeats & repeats. The world is hard but for its many exceptions of soft. Or vice versa?

xl.

Noisy Children is making a new album & then going on tour. Well, well. Things *do* change, don't they? & change & change again.

Well, well.

"It was time. We have new songs & we need some new spaces & places to explore them Stephanie brought up to me. She's been very patient. She's right. Now is likely better than in a long time. She said it's been so long it will be like a new challenge."

"Is Franny coming?"

"I think so. Chuck & Rebecca can run the cafe."

"Are you happy?"

Americus looks at me a long time. Stands. "I'll miss you too." Smiles & returns to bandroom.

Well, well.

Noisy Children on tour & I'm not going except, perhaps, as disembodied storyteller. Old school. Heh. I dreamed this story idea this morning. Benny Big Dreams nods.

"Now you can say the story's begun."

"Will it work?"

"It will give you some options. Write near or far. Been awhile, eh?"

I feel sad not going. Like a jam is indeed loosing. Even solipsism ain't what it used to be.

"So you'll have to figure out how to do it differently."

"How?"

"You figured out it was needed. More will come."

xli.

It was no old job, years back, & I've dreamed it before, the old faces, & a sadness in absence I've rarely felt since, I left unfriended, a pariah, during a black out no less, little goodbye, little well wish, & sometime later one of them lost me a new job, the place was bigger, I wanted to return, to make it right, enjoy it better, a connection with Portland months, make it right, enjoy it better, does the past cascade down some by some, til the regrets a great wood where old ghosts wait? I wonder if my father lives in his woods, younger flesh, fuller days, I try not to, breathe the current air, love it now, love it hereon—

What remains the intensity little the facts little the paths of hopes unfollowed—

What remains the stain travels battered by years—

What remains a human mystery no logic no evolutionary explain

What remains perhaps clue but in dream-code & conflicting & incomplete—
 What remains are shatters of many another lives crushed—
 What remains now little predicts the year's passage, needs a key may not exist—

The night delivers no answers but stresses choices make the path. How useless, how helpful. What next. Fuck only knows, isn't saying. Voices on the bus blather. Finish this page, stop, hoping for better.

Benny Big Dreams laughs & grabs my hand & pulls me back into this dream, we stand together.

"Speak with me" he says we lean within each other: "Embrace it all, let it go, see what remains, come on brother sister let dream & memory conjure together why this place, was it the years there, the brown staircase to office above, the back room desk your own for so long, the pass of time, faces not seen in years they were strangers then now more bluntly & who were they who are you can you say?"

It's bigger now, white, long, some faces remain, what are they? How can one fix upon the nature of dreams built strange from memories til not quite either, & drug dirty onto page now what are they, conjure of dream of memory, now what are they.

We speak again: "If anything can be netted useful from the murk it is like this, a shard of layered glint, hardly much yet if story there be left on these pages, this its direction—this its clue—*this its key*—"

xlii.

Not sure of too many details, old Luna T's Cafe friend Rick Jensen, now managing editor of *Thunder Road*, includes the following in a column:

"Noisy Children, the near-legendary reclusive band that's been around for over twenty years, are completing a new record & planning a subsequent tour. I never thought I'd write those words again, hardly believe them now, but for the moment they are true."

xliii.

It became quickly the most coherent hour at Luna T's bar: from the moment **TripTown** began its TV history few doubted that this show & Luna T's Cafe were unusually connected. Everyone watched. *Everyone*.

Not that it was set in a cafe or about a rock band or a freak artist & his wife or had a nutty old preacher in it. Still—

It came on Sunday nights though some claimed it was on other nights too. One drinker, Ali Doyle, claimed he heard it on the radio one night at 4 a.m. when he couldn't sleep.

"But it was different."

"How?"

"The story. They told it straight. It was good but I'm saying it was straight."

Nobody ever called **TripTown** 'straight' before—but Ali is a good guy, widower, never stayed late. Sometimes his son Menace would come & give him a ride home. We like Menace too.

"I like the homeless guy in the big boots," Ali continues, talky for him. "I'm glad they got him a job. I knew a kid like that, he liked the streets, the excitement, all that. Then

one day he stopped coming to my shop.” Wet eyes, glass gripped tighter. “I don’t know why they killed him. It was ugly. Cuz they could, I guess.”

xliv.

He still lives near the bridge. He’s not ready to let it go even though the others found out & won’t let up telling him to get a room.

“We like you. Anything can happen down here. Worst are the cops, you know that. You got a job & you’re young. Go have some good times while you can.”

He will. Sometimes another’s fears become your warning.

Tonight he holds the azure shrooms in his hands. The sun is nearly gone, pulling away the last of the mild day. He won’t be guarding at the library but somewhere else. Simple work, he was told, once an hour walk around the building & parking lot & mark off items on a checklist. Call an automated phone number to check in. Simple work. He can read the rest of the hour or bring in a little TV or radio. Eleven at night to seven in the morning.

The shrooms are tight little brown nuggets, smell like the earth, like the earth’s secrets. He decides to eat a half dozen. He even bought a pint of bottled water today.

The library guards arranged everything, even his uniform. The boots he got at a charity food kitchen, a back room. Heavy, black, laces up past his ankles. Lovely. Power boots, make him feel like a traveler to the moon.

They taste acrid & chew poorly but eats them one by one slowly, enjoying. Earth’s secrets.

He’d like to know where his sister is, if she’s OK. He named her Cordelia in a ceremony they had in their park. Her hair was blonde pattered in pink. They decided that as orphans they could declare they were long-lost siblings reunited. She named him Dylan. When she left, he ran away. Remembered their promise though.

A lot of his companions are now at the stream. It’s running again after a long winter’s frozen dreaming.

He brings his pack down & his books in their double-library bag. Night’s cool moves in soft, licking, no bite. He knows that for awhile it will be strange til what clouds & blocks gives way.

The men are jolly tonight, someone is passing around a bottle, there is singing. He listens vaguely, loving them more than any words or embrace. They watch out for him but leave him his distance.

“He’s a thinker, that one.”

“What’s he think about?”

“Pussy, booze, a good meal, a nice bed. Like all of us.”

“Nah. He’s special. We’re blessed by him.”

“Yah, all this, & a queer little kid off thinking by himself.”

“Look, I’m not fooling. You meet people sometimes, they’re not normal. They have a halo around them. Not like Jesus but, special. It’s like they see the world different, & it sees them different. I’ve known them. My grandmother, rest her soul. She saw things.” Shrugs. Pull of bottle.

“Like a saint or an angel you’re saying?”

“Sorta. Not really. He’s a street kid, you can see that. But there’s something more to him. I’ll miss him.”

Earth’s secrets. Cordelia’s angel-blue purse. That’s the color she named it.

“Angels are blue?”

"Their souls are."

"Angels have souls?"

"Of course. That's how they become people. Well, babies. And that's what happens after too."

"We're angels?"

"Of course. Not just us. Angels aren't shaped like people. They take on forms in the world. Rocks. Dogs. Oceans."

"The whole world is angels, Cordelia?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I dreamed it. And I knew it was right more than anything ever in my life."

Earth's secrets everywhere, lick the air & taste them as they rise up. Cordelia's angel-blue purse. The world filled with blue-souled angels in every shape & substance.

A little shudder, like a small ocean wave arriving within. Delicious. Happy. Mysterious.

A fire over there & watch how its sparks float to the sky, how it never keeps its shape, what is it, fire? What does it do & why, could he find a way to talk to it, ask what does wood taste like, what about charcoal? What about when you cook food, rub & lick it, penetrate its surface, do you stay in some way? What does tobacco taste like to you, what about reefer? Do you see me watching you from over here? I mean no harm, just curious.

The trees too, look at them . . . looking at me. Ahh . . . hm . . . yes I guess so . . . I don't know . . . can you tell me?

"Is he acting funny?"

"His normal is funny."

"No, look. Is he drunk?"

"He don't drink. He using again?"

"I don't think he uses."

"Should we check on him?"

"He's a private person. Let's just keep an eye."

"He's a nice kid. I wish him luck. It's a shame."

"It's a shame for the rest of us too."

Is that how I look? I'm hairy all over! What's crawling on me? Why is my heart so loud, what is my blood doing? I don't understand anything, I can read the dirt better if I draw in it eyes closed & then read after.

The world is daring me to join it & leave it behind. How do I decide which to do? Have the stars always been hanging from strings, what is holding them?

Has it always been tonight? Has it always been like this?

"It's OK. Everything is fine. Shh, don't talk, not yet. Drink this water. Slowly. There. Everything is fine. Drink a little more. That's good."

"What's wrong?"

"They take you straight & hard, no doubt. Nice, yes? Good, very nice. You're calming & settling into it. You're nearly ready. It's going well. Everything's fine."

"What's my name?"

"Everything's fine. You'll remember," said the mushroom from high up, dropping words in icicles.

Looking down the world seems covered in mushrooms in many colors & shapes, running, swimming, barking, firing guns, buried in boxes, blowing everywhere in scents & melodies

& then nothing.

"He's just staring."

"He ain't dead. He's breathing."

"Is it a seizure? Epi-whatsy?"

"Nah. My kid sister had that."

"Do we get him to the emergency room?"

"Don't. I'm OK."

"What did he say?"

"I'm OK. I'm OK. Just let me . . . sit."

Hours. Days. He waits. He breathes. Notices the moon & watches it pass very slowly.

Finally says aloud "Where is my sister Cordelia? Please tell me."

Nothing. Just nothing.

"Tell her I'm OK? Tell her I love her. Tell her I remember. Tell her I'm sorry."

Maybe something. Sum your life & figure.

It's pretty nice after awhile. Things seem sweeter. I don't know. I'm listening but someone cares enough to write it down. I'm as much a conscious creature as he who would intend me. I could like or dislike him. It's possible.

Things shimmer awhile & dissolve & it's OK, release, loss, hope, beauty, words, what's left, goodbye.

"He's saying goodbye"

"Where's he going?"

"I dunno. You don't think he ate some magic mushrooms?"

"Like the Indians? Peyote & all that?"

"Yah, maybe he got a bag from that injun who was around here for awhile."

"I thought they were all drunks now."

"Yah, mostly, it's sad. But not all. It's like everything, most forget, a few remember."

Under the freeway there were many pillars & where the men stood & camped the ground was hilly, eventually rising up to a quiet road. Dylan liked the many pillars, & up the near the road he sometimes stopped awhile among the vines & weeds there. How does home happen? By time & quirk, I suppose.

If he was supposed to leave this place, he had to know for sure, not because he had a job he hadn't asked for, but because his path was moving on, as his life with Cordelia had come & gone.

So he went to see the viney mass near the quiet road; it seemed the sure thing to do.

He sat near them in the full moonlight & trusted the mushroom spirits would aid him. He said there for a fair while.

lxiv.

TripTown ends & as usual there are no credits, just a pink & green-striped screen for half a minute.

“That’s it?”

“It’s always like that.”

“Well, I wish it didn’t.”

Mr. Bob labors to get everyone a free round of drinks, part of Sunday night’s tradition watching the show. He’d noticed it would rile people & decided to cool them off with liquid treats. It works.

xlv.

The vines form into a man’s face though he is sure they don’t always do that.

“You’ve come this far. Are you ready for more?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you curious?”

“Does it get scary again?”

A laugh ringing deeper than ever these words in his head. Shaking him within.

“It *always* gets scary again while you live & breathe on that plane of yours. The secret is to know & experience *more!*”

This last word blows wild through him, body & mind. The leaf-formed face disappears & he feels a world coalescing around him. He’s forgotten where he began & releases entirely to what next.

Something large & square in the distance before him. Glowing with images. Peoples heads . . . seated as he finds he is.

“Dylan, I’m so glad we’re here,” said a bright pretty voice next to him.

Cord . . . elia?

Looks like her. Light blue eyes. Pink striped blonde head. Seashell necklace. Warmth. Sweetness. Curiosity. Restlessness. Fear. Stubbornness.

She holds his hand twined with hers. Her eyes snap back to the movie screen. He tries to remember that day they skipped out to the movies. Is he time-travelling? Is this Heaven?

Their movie eludes him & he wonders how it relates to the mushrooms & the vine-faced man. Colors not people then not colors but shapes. What does Cordelia see? He wants to tell her so many things, more than he knew til now.

I don’t like living under a highway. I don’t talk to people anymore. They try to help me like I’m one of them, like you can help a stranger without even knowing his name.

They don’t ask, they don’t listen. I don’t tell, I don’t want to. I protect myself & my memories.

“I wish this was real,” he says aloud in a whispered croak.

“It can be,” she smiles. “Look!” She points to the screen & it’s different now.

dreamlinger. Teeth & claws snaggle song & drag it near, long black fur, alien black eyes—wait til it sleeps, hold still, it sleeps, monster fade—now lift & barely gone—wonder what in ten ten thousand years unto this moment?

Wake. What warning, what clue, can any lift from this clumsy film of reality? Dream, death, orgasm, song, pain, magick? It follows your days, along, within, pawing—still sleeping, let it near, no lean, still sleeping, no fear, still sleeping, always still sleeping, face of torches, let it near—

Release it all & what? That preacher's book & his egghead talk about God & energies, his urge, his promise—

Is it regret, is it love, is it hope? What canvas does this world meekly dot?

A little more, & a little more now, the players lean into their instruments & play up a skyful of stars & the woods & plains below, the seas far & wild, the bodies & flowers, the sweets for hope, bullets for control—

& a little more now, the drummers accumulate man in skins or nude, & the dancers with their ropes of fire, the night stretches out ten ten thousand far, years, miles, branches of blood & light, memory & want—

& a little more, the temples crash wide & the dust & mites are free, prayers scurry into the soil & grow, new touches new & begin continuously

someone shouts “Eat the tab! Eat the tab! Eat the tab!”

Where a pilgrim retreats, the wood is soft & warm about him, the cushions dark & comforting, the vessel full & clear

& a little more

& a little more

the scarf so riddled with symbols it jingles

the gloves thin for its hands must work deftly

the blouse & trousers readied loose for the run

the shoes align with feet like lovers to their best task

World's kindness oft-muddled in blood scarves of cruel, nothing new, call it a religion's narrowing partisan noose, a king's wide cult of death, skin against skin, tongue against tongue, call it years random harder into tradition & polity & cosmology

Name the else, the half secret passed between shadows, the lift of something pretty from the human swinefest, name it, & no longer there, coax it, another comes, live it & know bones-midnight truth & dusty daylight doubt—

He looks at Cordelia til whatever she was disappears leaving him coated, stained, lighter—

“Is it over for the night?”

“I think there's more.”

“It's been on for hours! It's past 1! I gotta work in the morning!”

“Go then. I'm staying. Call in sick.”

“For a TV show?”

“For *this* TV show.”

Universe within & without, my thanks for these higher days along my path. I am trying to trust in something I won't name, reductive to say flow or energy or God, neither nameless nor nameful

propulsion, music, grace
dull glints in the street's morning trash
a brief leaning presence in the clouds
metaphor's endless wildlands

praise, grateful, the world nothing & how important for a passing
closed shades, soft voices within
steel power, concrete manacles
desert's windy roll forever
dream resembling Art I am

lxvii.

Whoever it was a year a decade ago here is this strange new time, trees still bloom, lights blink, I can't tell now from else,

Dylan feels a little steadier now, less like crazy oceans within, not released but . . . loosened

The bar at Luna T's Cafe goes at last dark for the night—

Rebecca looks at me softly: "Let up a bit. Do the work. It isn't supposed to hurt."

xlvi.

Now walk, Dylan, walk toward the city, the long night is pushing you to engage it, to find what you can in this city, walk & hum songs which come back to you from the radio Cordelia would play. It was a pink transistor radio with a white cat's face & feline body & it could be plugged in or run by two little batteries.

Cordelia listened to it before going to bed, she said the music that played would color her dreams.

What you're hearing now, of course, is her humming voice, her sway to some songs & finger dance to others, how she'd doodle as she listened to the news, the radio was her favorite thing. Well, you were her favorite person but the radio was quite special too.

Now you're in the city. Its streets slathered in darkness, little open & why are you here?

Over that bridge, the endless busy freeway below, wondering what it would feel like to jump into it, shuddering at the attraction.

OK, now, turn onto that side street, walk & walk, how it feels like flying, how shroom reality is still uplifting you, good, there you are, through that door, the cavernous coffeehouse, here is a place for you, a gift for when you've left behind the bridge. Here is where invisible souls come too, the kind that you can see.

An old man in a ragged floppy hat is sitting in a rusty armchair & looking about for a companion, who? He doesn't know. You sit in the armchair next to his in the small room among many, a couch its other piece of furniture, its light by beat-up lamps.

Sit. Close your eyes. Relax. Let the world arrive before you. Cusp of new, that's where you are, that's what this is.

Dylan's eyes open & sees on the grey linty rug below what looks like a greeting card.

"EASTER GREETING TO MY

VERY BEST BUNNY!"

says its cartoony cover with two bunnies arm in arm smiling.

Dylan looks it over, reading the sentiment too deeply for its intent. He doesn't think to open the card but lays it down on the small table between him & the old man.

The man looks at the card & then at Dylan.

"You're a Christian?" he asks.

"I don't think so."

"That card is hardly part of the story."

"Story?"

"Their Empire rules all, some by invisible strings in things, some more obviously"

"Empire?"

His eyebrows are like old slow bugs fat upon their branches. His eyes are older still, & they do not see Dylan as another sketchy kid hanging out punk-broke. His eyes see him deeply like Cordelia did.

"Everywhere you go, anything you touch, most of what you think, the Empire has programmed. We abide in their seat of power."

Cordelia thought trees had great power. She said the younger ones talked to her but the older ones didn't have much to do with language.

The old man is drawing a map with a blue ball point pen & a scrape of notebook paper.

"Europe . . . New World . . . colonies . . . missionaries . . . Founding Fathers. Illumnatus . . . secret societies . . . power within power . . . slaves to corporate multinationals . . ." on & on he talked, his voice by turns angry, fearful, cajoling, Dylan lost him quickly & felt a droning music lift the air suddenly with drums & organs, now shivering in elevating shroom space, how the walls angled oddly, why am I here, where do I go next? Is this place safe?

"Yes, it's safe," says the old man suddenly. "Don't worry. Even after hours nobody is pushed out blindly. The Resistance takes care of everyone one who seeks it."

Cordelia talked once in awhile like this. Paranoid, intimate. She'd read strange books & get so spooked she'd avoid libraries for weeks. "I have to believe the world is good," she said bluntly one night. "I have to believe it."

The old man has ceased his ramble. He rests eyes closed now, at his ease though still tensely alert.

Dylan looks around wondering what next.

xlvi.

How to put a Noisy Children concert on a stage other than Luna T's to an audience other than Luna T's. Leave it bare, or rise it high baroque?

Could some be induced deeper into the music, encouraged to follow within it? A concert within a concert? Yes, possible. What means? Tryptamines? Perhaps.

The concert within concert idea was Rebecca's. She & Rich sat at Cement Park discussing his doubts about live shows other than at T's.

"Maybe it doesn't have to be so strange & other."

"How?"

"Well, um, as the show goes on, the band recedes, leaving behind a visual image, like a live video. Whoever sees that going on is allowed where the band goes. They leave a visual image too even as they follow."

"Where though?"

"Well, here, for most. But for some, a few, deeper still."

"To?"

"The Ampitheatre. That's as deep as we've gone so far."

"Is there deeper?"

Rebecca's dark blue eyes shine live throughout her father. "There's always deeper."

"Can we get there with these shows? Is this a way?"

"I don't know, Dad. Maybe."

Americus now embraced the tour fully, seeing many possibilities more than initially. He was getting happy & hopeful.

xlix.

Hide of the earth rank with life, high noise, breaking hours in every direction, strangers all, the crawling, the pur, ancient lamps, spells in dark cities, cafe languid, sitting in every year with the pup & the crone

prayer for a moment so familiar tis a new magick—

for hands shaping something begun & finished with mystery—

for many years more with claws in my blood riling & raw—

Two cups of tea & a thick newspaper

Long stories of old diseases

Lights red & violet & how acoustic clear

was that night

Someone grows til the straps break

inside his mind, thoughts & words arrive

through him clean water

Strangers all, what leans one toward another despite, kisses by iron lamps, a dog moans in the darkness, how will it be tomorrow? What does nobody know?

When I knew him years back he shined, & still thoughts of those days return, his was a great body & mind, a singer, a lover, we ran each other hard & it was a happy race & tonight he's far maybe dead maybe a stranger & when I write strangers all I think of him, & wish wordless to him—

When I knew her years back, she was highest's bloom & still I remember with intimacy's sugared hurts, how life rang with her soul's bells how hours mattered sometimes desperately, how matter & music curved through her & tonight I don't know where or who she is, & when I write strangers all I think of her & conclude nothing at all—

Strangers all, not just those deep awled within, what were those years & did they in any way dream these? This bus jostles rusty toward my stop & then on, I leave it, where it goes is nowhere between us—

To allow one intimacy's veracity is to let possible infinite numbers. To acknowledge any invisible force as real in the material world is to let possible unknown many. To ask "why?" until the chief shamans—king, preacher, scientist, hero—shrug & turn away is to arrive in the unretrieved place of answers—told to love the questions, love the path, love the struggle, let go & trudge on, ask why? & why? & why? told the world is one, ask one what? Told the new age is come or the next coming is nigh, ask where? Given books to treat your enigmas like ills to be cured, **push back & hard**

Raise a howl & believe a thousand things at once then a thousand new ones if necessary—

I want to make Art, that's all, I don't know it to be truth's path though I live thusly, don't believe it to be truth's only way, know only where we've been together—it's been my dearest when the rest swept in & away—

I believe but do not know. I love but see bluntly how this shifts with the pass of years—my pages fill not for others but as my testament—

the night my partner in playing a music I never wish to know fully—

I hope for continuance by working ever free hour I bear—

1.

The old man wakes, takes off his hat & roughly pats down his wild of white uncombed hair.

"Mary Magdelene had a child named Sarah by her husband Jesus," he said sans preamble. "After the Crucifixion, she & Sarah fled to France where they lived out their lives. Some say Sarah was heir to Jesus' teachings, not the disciples."

Dylan blinks.

"But there's a deeper story than that. That's what you call the popular alternative to the official myth. There's more to it that is little known. Long ago, I was a scholar of ancient books. This led me for a time to regard myself as bearer of some kinds of esoteric human wisdom. I began to preach. People listened to me. Some cared for my ideas, others denounced them.

"Eventually I stopped preaching. I had ceased regarding myself as a knower & felt I was a profound fraud."

Dylan is bound to the old man's words as they come out in soft pinks & bright blues, as they scatter around the room like sparkles & settle on faces & chairs like dandelion seed.

"Now my path of humility is well-walked. I am ready to engage some of my old ideas. My dreams have stopped their tortures & bid me near again. I look at you tonight & know something must be seen greatly in this moment. Something new must pick up & carry on newly from where we sit right here together."

li.

Rich folk stroll great lawns thinking how to fill their sacks deeper, poor folk eat greasy bread dinners dreaming of sacks someday—

What else?

Children talk to sunshine & descending seeds til told no, look at him, look at her, human, human, human—

Preachers tell old stories of myth-men with great care & open palms—urge humility & subtle kindness while passing round baskets to pay the rent & the cable television bill—

Kings pound maps & call their passions new—call their years the greatest beheld—reckon how the centuries rise to our feet & how the path ascends from here, within our sight, good dog to our will—

I try to believe other is going on—the daily constant spell of gravity, the small gesture between strangers which binds them in passing—

I, we, I we I we I we & sometimes which one? both? either?

I want to believe my cries are not solitary & may be heard in ways I do not know—

I struggle with many hours pushing stories up small hills & down small vallies & up & down & up & down—

Told of the new age I believe no such thing. Told of end-times & nearing conflagrations I wait elsewhere for the bus—told God or no-God for sure, this book says so, that man says so, symbols in the cowshit say so I would rather be alone & free than sure & chained—

The night is shiny with questions in the electric glare—the night is wet with secret half-lives—the night comprises songs & sweets & not a pretty face or a purring beast but softer upon the eye & skin nonetheless—so much—

Nearer night & nearer dreams & nearer some moment when—when—

A breath. Another. A life of them lungs expand toward tallest man-moments & let up shrivel by the later fading years, even if soul rallies & rallies again.

A heart. Heart's great long task shaded by fool metaphor, it does more than light & dim with the fortunes of romance, it is fistly sun in our chests, unseen, little known yet touch chest & hear its loyal tapping.

Mind tangled within head trying to vine out to world's material lure & snake deeper to dream's surreal charms, unexplained source & organic vulnerable to its last neuron. What else?

Music the sourceless beast, opposite of moon's pull, swamps a soul though fingers & similes feel it & none explain. Move. Melody & funk have the controls tonight. Move!

Did you hear me wail at the bastards the other day? Did you receive my vow not to fall? Did you know how I am insisting how it matters, every hour & word & touch of it?

For anything to matter it must be able to flex & flow, find a beat, then another, I'm years trying to learn this—whatever this art is, has been, I don't know next & damnit all I don't want to—

Riding late night carriage in Seattle remembering its blocks—long back alleys & Amante & I stumbling drunken dawn toward the ferries years back—what could I tell him now if I could?

“Did you love him?” asks Dylan as he & the old man are leaving the coffeehouse.

I nod. “Why would it matter if it wasn't love or hate?”

lii.

“Will they be like Acid Tests?”

“Maybe. Not everyone will turn on though. Some won't know. People go as far as they will.”

“What will it be on the deepest level?”

“I don't know. Something tried before.”

“Did it work?”

“It must have sometimes. Victories convey through history differently than defeats.”

“Will there be cross-time talk like with David Time?”

“I don't think that ever stopped. Maybe we didn't want to see it for awhile but some doors don't close.”

I keep wondering what transmits best. Words? Prayerful howls? What summons, what conjures? I am not trapped yet here I still am where I wish not to be. The boulders impeding begin to give way. Whose are they? What causes the world's response this or that way? What ongoes?

Dylan & the old man out in the city, the hour later, Dylan's trip unfinished.

“I knew many of them back then. Leary. Alpert. Huxley. There was no consensus, just excitement & fear. Was it real? we'd ask each other. Was this the way elsewhere, not moon shots, not Apocalypse? There were many more quiet moments than popularly remembered. It wasn't some race to the climax. It was *all* climax & none.”

He pauses. “We thought we had something.”

Dylan's feet seem someone else's, he watches them too fascinated to listen. Are they someone else's? Would this old man tell him if he asked? Would he know?

“You're doing fine, new through the doorway I imagine. Very welcome too. There's so much work to do & it can't be all done by us decrepits with our begging sentiment. Not at all.”



To be continued in Cenacle | 65 | June 2008



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Why ? [a new fixtion]

(continued)

liii.

Two climax in a single act become three falling away over years until the single act's issue tucked into a box to crumble back into the infinite. What else?

Luna T's Cafe roaring jolly Noisy Children's farewell weekend has come a feeling sad & pridely both. It's been years. Awhile even the band all five at the bar with its regulars.

"Knock 'em dead, kids! You're really good!"

"Yah, call it your Comeback Tour!"

Ronnie Pascale, lead guitarist, hair shorter than once but still a rock-n-roll tumble, says: "It's coming back around, that's for sure. Bands like ours are out there again on the road & making records. Good ones. I feel less lonesome. Some are damned good too. Mercury Rev. Wilco. Low."

"Who?"

"Nah, they're not around no more!"

Tumble of raunchy laughs.

Americus nods to Mr. Bob the barman. "Where's the crazy old man?"

"He's not around as much lately. Goes home early."

"Sick?"

"I don't think so. Old, but not ill, Richard."

He nods. Bothered, though.

"That TV show on tonight? Sometimes it's on special nights."

"Let's check. It's gotten unpredictable lately."

A new show is on, however. A man walking a flat landscape, low piano music, fast & nervous, & the sound of wild galloping along.

Walks & walks, his face not shown. Black & white film fades hardly noticed to color, colors, many colors, piano music becomes organ, long leaps of notes, nervous to frantic, & then the colors overwhelm the scene & there is no man nor landscape & the music is electronic smooth & flowing til the colors leak away & the music dies slowly until there is silence on the screen & blackness & the TV is off as though it had never been turned on.

"What the frig was that?"

"I dunno. Put the TV back on."

"The clicker won't work!"

"Ahh balls!"

The bar TV won't come back on, try as they might, Mr. Bob fussing with every aspect of it short of pulling out his toolbox & tearing it open.

"I don't think it's broken," says Americus, as he leaves. "I think it's that TV show that was on. The machine got scared."

liv.

He hadn't gone to see the old man's place in years. Ever? But it mattered. The band was going on tour & it could be weeks or months returning. Sort of, since they would be around during shows too. Complicated. Good.

But he knew the street, Harvest Street, where he & Reb & Franny lived too, some blocks further down. He'd not once in all these years even seen Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker walking down the street to or from Luna T's.

Yet here was the building, called, oddly, the Iconic. The old man's mailbox was unlabelled. He caught the main door as someone was leaving.

Up two flights, yes? Only two apartments on the floor, one had on it what Americus recalled now for sure from years gone: an obscure symbol for faith below the silver knocker. He'd looked it up then.

Knock. Knock knock. OK. Now wait.

Movement inside, old man shuffling sounds. Then silence. Then more silence.

"It's Americus," he said too loudly. "I'm here to see if you're OK."

More old man sounds. Nearer now.

"The band is leaving on tour," he explains unnecessarily.

Now near the door.

"Chuck said you weren't around lately. You OK?"

Door latches undoing.

OK then.

The door pulls open as far as a chain will let it, & the darkness inside issues little report.

"Tell me how you are."

"Wishing to be alone."

"Are you sick?"

"It doesn't matter. These are days beyond reckoning for the mortal lives of men."

"Can I see you?"

"Not with your eyes."

"Listen, old man, there are people at the cafe who care a lot about you. My daughter first among them. I'm not going to let you die some obscure martyr's death if I can help it."

A laugh, cold, like an iced black cave.

Americus, now uncertain, backs away from the door a bit. "I can't make you do anything. But you do have friends. They'll take care of you any way they can."

A long silence. "I know." A longer silence. "I'm grateful. Sometime later today I will come along. Thank you." The door shuts, the locks slide back, an old retreating step fades.

lv.

I look out her window & for a moment see a brick wall near to view & remember some other year in a far city when someone copper if not red-haired cared awhile.

I hear her hitting the craggy hash pipe hard. "Till all this is a dream?" I snap.

"Perhaps till it's all real," she replies without rancor.

"Real seems the least important aspect of things."

"Yet you insist always on more of it & better. You try to run real through every whim of yours, every fancy you shake for its real bones to break out."

"I saw someone & thought of you, remembered what you were to me."

"I let go less easily than many others have."

"I lost you for awhile. Someone encompassed my every inch inside & out. She lingered then left."

I hear another long hit on the bowl. "I don't remember you smoking hashish at all."

"You kept reinventing me til I disappeared. I've come back but more on my own terms."

"No longer my muse?"

"Not quite yes. Not quite no. You'll have to figure it out."

"Do you know?"

"I know that none of my previous guises fit. You might still summon them but it will be sentiment at best to me."

"This book has some skeleton to it, some bones & muscle."

"Some, yes."

"You're part of it."

"Yes."

"But in a new way."

"Always."

I draw the heavy curtains shut & the room devolves to faint candlelight & an unfamiliar incense. I take the chair I happen to knock into. Sit.

"Can I write from here?"

"Do you need another candle?" Answering herself, she lights one by my side. Her face too briefly in its glow.

I push back the black woolen cap on my head, adjust my greenpatched zippered shirt jacket, lean into my notebook & wonder what next. I hear music distantly, a hard electronic flow, & grab on.

The room with no ceiling or floor first, was it round? It was white, all white, I was able to crawl all over it without falling, no door or window, I crawled, & this image traveled out of dreams with me & I was not sure what to do with it, why it was or what, now I think what if I pushed below me, rolled my body & pushed hard, what world held this room, any?

I feel shaking & then convulsing & the room opens out, loses its round shape & I crawl along a white surface neither level nor a hill, all white still around me I crawl & tumble then decide to throw my body down when there is no down. I imagine a down & there is now falling without a sense of movement, how to break this? How to burst it? I

think “Benny” in my mind over & over & over & over & hope & wait & keep saying it over
& over & over—

lvi.

Maybe he’ll come, maybe he won’t, I slow my frantic & slowly assemble my limbs,
make a freak grab for my will, stand? Maybe stand?

I don’t know if I’m standing but within the image holds, I bear it lightly,

“Better, mate”

Now he comes.

“Explain any of this?”

He laughs.

“Not a word?”

“You don’t need one & there isn’t one you’d like.”

“Not much help now you’re here.”

“Help? I can give you help. Change it. Uncause it. Disappear everything around you.
What else?”

“What next?”

“Make something better!”

I’m sitting on a dirty bus in a coastal city after a long night shilling for a corporate-
doled pittance & think: I want to disappear from this story awhile, no me but at the far end
of a black pen

that’s what’s better, what I intend, a push forward from a throw long unmade—

here it is, watch me go, the blank store windows, the chilled clear air—going, going,
the music on my little machine, the old black woolen coat on my back—my red t-shirt says
Las Vegas

going going

my beat clothes, beat eyeglasses—leaving to some other angle on these pages

going going

just as loving

deep deep loving—

leaving the bus near my home & hoping this will shoot this world somewhere new
good, dangerous,

matters even more—gone—

lvii.

Write grateful beyond the azure wings against downy sky, praise high higher from
mind & memory’s snowy drunken throne, recall what good ever, conjure it now, world not a
pull between good & evil but kindness & numb, empathy & disinterest

large black hands slowly turn over cards to reveal deeper what is, remember how it
felt to wonder how this would feel

smack the vein to pour in the icy illusion, smack again til the arm is raw with abuse

wolves shaped like boys stormed the night's empty city roads for any moment
distracting, sensation's blinding gold

what will it be like, the moment after the last one, clocks gone, history gone, long-
fingered trinkets gone, I gone

wonder what anyone else feels, what it's like to be some other body, recall belief in
breaching over til this belief itself was undone

a store window counter measures 6 billion, many argue one. Which?

Tonight lost, tonight on familiar rails because what else? Tonight a fight to hang on,
tonight too familiar, tonight what is any of this, tonight please let a desired thing happen—

Not one or 6 billion, numbers reduce to tellable lies—

Disappearing, again—

lviii.

John replaces booze with diet ginger ale & weed, & his walks take on more & more
of the acreage around him. He has no instructions but to watch, & keep clear of areas
marked "Keep Clear" but his curiosity & his boredom start to tug at him.

Before booze there had been women. Not the drunken wretches that came later—
beautiful women who lived to tame men but could be tamed themselves to a deeper
satisfaction. He hadn't had to try hard with most. Hunger was not controllable but it could
be steered in combination with charm, sensitivity, & an unpredictable sprinkle of aloofness.

It was more than get in & get out—it was get in & leave you mark, some high
flaming memory, erotic tattoo, & leave with linger.

When it didn't work, it didn't matter. Then, one day, it did. He hadn't really been
sober for a whole day after that until the night his boss's limo brought him out here.

Walking quietly through the woods took effort. He'd learned some huntsmen tricks
over time, shot a rifle once or twice, a bow, but he wasn't out here to game. He began
hoping that a peaceful relation with nature would sober him up for good, change him down
deep.

But that boredom & curiosity. Even his boss's gift of a satellite hookup to TV &
cyberspace did not appease it. He wanted to know what he was a small part of. Would black
copters one day shoot him down or government agents storm his door? Was he some
obscure, & expendable, part of the current regime's perpetual War?

"That's the best connection available out here. I got you an Apple G5 because Gates
& I do not see eye to eye. The TV has an open account for movies & cable stations. You're
doing a good job. Your presence here reassures me. My work goes better."

What work? John casually looked at the computer & turned on a few shows. But his
body craved movement, he was an athlete, or had been. Sitting in front of a blaring screen
did not excite him.

The women had loved his athletic mind. No fear, just a matter of learning the skill &
practicing it often. Make it fun, work hard, laugh about it later.

Football had been his life for some years until he got hurt. He got more pussy after because he had more time & needed new fields of conquest. Booze, too, had awhile become a sport but he grew soggy & glum. Depressed. Suicidal.

But now here was a chance to twist things about, do something new.

Find out what the fuck the boss-man was hiding.

It happened the night he was expecting his one favorite TV show, **TripTown**, to be on & it wasn't. He watched the new program awhile. John had smoked a lot of weed that day & drunk many cans of diet cola. He was high, rushing, trying to calm, & seeing his face on the TV made it better not worse. The black & white becoming color becoming a glowing pulsing throb, a metallic heartbeat & it would not end, the TV would not shut off, & he said Fuck IT to his little cabin & shakily dressed, put on his back the tall Army canvas bag he'd long had packed & ready in the one closet, & walked out, heavy black flashlight waving about the pitch.

The cold air calmed him a touch, he'd wanted to go, perhaps should have waited for the sun, but maybe not. Now he had more hours to get somewhere & back in case the boss dog decided to appear with another "gift." John was now one of his investments & he kept an owner's eye on him.

The map he had was maybe unreliable. He'd gone deep searching in cyberspace one night, high & paranoid, & found too much speculation based on too little fact. The map was one obsessee's guess at the extent & layout of Boss Dog's property. Much was empty but the trails he'd previously tested were accurate enough.

The fear came on him slowly, & worse he realized it was not pot-induced. He was into something here & each step forward was deeper, & one step soon would be the last for any kind of retreat.

That step came & he never slowed. It was time to get beyond sober boredom & see what he had left that was special, worth a shit. Boss Dog had picked him for some reason that night. Going to find out what.

lix.

Slave to nothing, so preaches the guru, eats your TV, comes home in your bookbag, save me, save me, how it hurts, how so! Make it 10 steps, make it 3, do I have to believe? Do I have to show up? Can I write a check instead?

Stands there with a chalkboard & a red candle, here's how & then this & now that. Great big grin. World easy, world knowable, world the sugar live like a long wet tongue, it's easy.

Step one. Release your will. Give it to an idea, an idea inside a building, with a smiling representative & a friendly song. There had better be a few smiling girls. Prosperity. Allure.

Step two. None of it is your fault. It's the flesh, it's the race, it's the cosmos, it's how men dispute lowly among the centuries, how the flaws have grown & all stand impeded.

Step three. Follow the shepherd. Unable to consider your life your own, its glints & gashes your mark & remembrance on the Universe, better to memorize gesture & verse, better to kneel when it's kneeling time & how high when boss daddy says jump.

Tis all, tis all. The brain you wash is your own. How clean, how clear, what roots, what fruit.

Slave to nothing, so preaches the guru, free to shape energy, color time, pluck joy from any foulness. Now a coin in the plate, now a dollar for the great book to swallow you all, watch him, guru, watch him & learn—

lx.

"He brought great books & the deep trick of empathy, it was centuries ago, he was a creature of sly eros & long rhythms, a man the women pleased by with the leanest glance. Now we remember his songs & forget his flesh. Now we burn within his calcified smiles" the preacher sang with smooth of ice, the deceptive calm of a sleeping face, he sang very fine.

"He fed our hearts on a diet of yearn & retreat, scholared us in paucity, showing its subtlest machinations, leave us not standing right but standing angry!" The preacher black fouls the sky with his words, crossing countless angry hands, conjure erotic & darkly funny too.

"He met a lover of finest passions, & the halting twig within cracked. His later years a second life, one long in woolen nights & silken music." River smooth but unswimmable, current of words mainline directly to skin, to blood. This is not fair. This is how it's done.

"I want to learn his lesson. I want to know his name. My heart blows scarce at night & I am unsure." Tears from the wet nameless source within. Faith what feet walk toward on an empty road. Faith what's left when nothing's left.

"I cannot be there when you arrive, & you won't like hearing this. Nobody will be there in that moment. Memories, perhaps. After, I don't know."

The TV flips off again & the crowd at Luna T's Cafe's bar cries its disapproval. **TripTown** now comes on randomly for minutes at a time, no more. Over, the TV, unflicked on, flicks off.

Some look darkly at Mr. Bob the barman. He shrugs. "It's a strange show."

"But where did the kid go & who's the preacher?"

"Hey, & where's our preacher? I bet he's who inspired them, all that loud talk of his."

Mr. Bob doesn't know this either. Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker has been absent T's for nearly a week now. Rich had gone to see him, said the old man would be by, but he hadn't.

No word from Noisy Children yet. They'd left in several vehicles promising word sometime during their first show. The cafe had seemed quieter than the absence of five people should have made it. It was like a slumber, how it felt now, a daydreaming building.

Meanwhile, baseball season was at hand & the champion Red Sox were again about their business. Mr. Bob found himself holding the sports page without reading.

He was lonely. His friends were traveling & even his regular customers were scarcer.
 He waited word while the drinkers continued arguing about that TV show.
 He felt tired & supposed this was age coming on.

What was it? He reached within, sorting his thoughts, regrets decades old, memories. . .

"I'm going out awhile," he announced. "You boys tend bar in turns & keep my practices in place." The regulars nodded, shaken.

"You OK, barkeep?"

"Yah. I'm just needing a stroll to clear up some thoughts. You can handle it?"

There were on it. A good barman hardly ever asks, & when he does, his people are there in less than a spit.

Took his coat & hat, went out the door with not an added word.

lxi.

A new circuit & what its glinting secret. No hour gone without scar. No hour waits without mystery.

What then.

A cabin in the mountains, a friend, a lover. A departure. No more.

Two words: I'm sorry.

A city full of shouting freaks:

Stop it! No more! Peace! Peace!

Past the armed defenders watching,
 the curious, the disdainful. Signs &
 punk cheerleaders & oversized puppet
 heads. Felt that day like home. Felt
 close.

Two words: I remember.

By water a boy & a girl, he
 loves for two, for many, she hurts
 him with power she wields badly &
 soon will wane. Trees glitter in the water.
 A peach. Hours in the mist of her words.

Two words: Fuck you.

Beat artists in a worse town,
 the empty downtown, the all-night
 diner, the library's bound old words
 lure, & jukebox taverns, & endless
 music. How high it got. Higher. Youth spending
 from bottomless purses.

Two words: You're old.

Two more: I won't.

The starry clouds above the pauvre

manse crowded with sick & broken kindred,
 moments long gone, sum them here, now,
 moments pretty with laughter, glow with
 everything possible, decades, miles, lost,
 else, two words:

It remains.

Three words: love bites hard.

A Cadillac at a cold springtime street corner, the buzz of Joy Division on the cassette deck, smokes Galoise unfiltered, hardcore French cigarettes.

"Fuck Bush & all them oil whores! Fuck them. Fuck the Democrats & their pussy whine! Fuck the Jews & their endless war raising! Fuck the Muslims & their secret greed for self-immolation for Allah's glory! Fuck my ex-wife & her butch cunt new lover! Fuck my parents for calling sex Mommy's & Daddy's monthly home vacation! Fuck God! I'd like to with both fists!" Pounds the steering wheel & hits the gas.

"Is this our TV show?"

"Dunno."

"Who's he?"

"He looks like you!"

"Ha! I'm no TV show! An' I don' talk like that, all cussin'."

Two words: *it's spreading.*

lxii.

"I don't intend to teach you everything. You'll take to some topics more than others. What I intend is to watch out for you. In return you'll keep me knowing the streets better. An old man is like an old boat, slow, less maneuverable, not safe in more turbulent, murky waters. Sometimes we'll work together, maybe days or weeks at it. This is one way it's done. There are others, unknown others. A single method would render everyone vulnerable. Not everything gets through."

Dylan listened, & waited for his instructions. Being young, he was used to lectures & then orders. He liked this man, wondered what he could need that Dylan could do.

But no instructions came. Or was it when he said "beware & be aware"? He didn't know but they did not come in any way he could easily figure anyway.

The mushrooms & the many hours had tired him. He knew an alley nearby where sleep would be safe.

But the old man wasn't done with him yet.

lxiii.

Wondering new at life's each new schism, where does what's gone go, & here a new angle & I do not know what it means (yes, I'm back on the page, at least for the moment).

I was months, weeks, days, hours, from tonight's concluding ride, dozens then a few pages away, tis a warm night, comely nocturnal hour, more lights flash past, I watch & do not know, but swift pen still moves, hopeful toward a high buzz & a small nest of clear moments—

A year ago I came back here ready for a new effort at making the West my home, I was in love again, even further along than I'd been—

Sigh.

One gets back nothing, & yet, truly, one carries along the pollen of lost hours, potent or dead,

I told the dude:

KILL YOUR DEMONS OR
THEY WILL KILL YOU

Many pages along, is "Why?" the question
or the topic?

Benny Big Dreams shoots up too like the dude I met at the trinket stall, but I don't know if junk or medicine. I don't know.

Pounds the steering wheel & hits the gas.

Raise a howl & believe a thousand things at once blah blah

"Everything's fine!" insisted the mushroom again!

The mind leaves traces where it pass along & is awled by matter—

What explains toothaches, lightning, & peppermint candy? Still no answer?

In a lifetime we pass countless cemeteries, closed factories, secret houses of deep violence, we see a thousand & more skies above, new skies, new patches of skies, sometimes great clouds about the wings, & who was standing on that hilly street corner the other night ragged & lost, looking for some or maybe any face, I wondered how he got so lost & if he stood there wondering too, I was accelerating with bags of food for my beloved but something in me remained there, & I thought of the ragged & those walking low, give it all a name but what? concoct some sharper word from burbling blood & long enduring bones—

TripTown suddenly comes on the TV at Luna T's Cafe & stays on for a stretch of hours, the hero dies & returns as a tree, a coyote, a bluish wind—there are moments when some at the bar are watching it while others see the Red Sox game—

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker hobbles frailly into the bar & settles at his seat—says nothing but watches this show intently—

Mr. Bob the barman fixes him a hot cup of tea & settles across the bar from him.

"Welcome back."

"I stayed away to discover if our lord might call me if I did, if I prayed alone in my dwelling" says softly.

"Anything?"

"Images of decay & brutality. Waste & guilt. Loneliness. Desolation. Endless unmoving hours."

"Welcome back."

"Our final hours do not arrive at our bidding, nor can we summon their shining triumph nor dismal gloom" his voice begins to rise but he stops.

“What, Doctor?”

“Where is Richard?”

“He’s gone on tour. Didn’t he tell you?”

Squints. Says nothing.

Trip Town appears to be coming from the jukebox, on the ceiling, within the Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock ‘69 poster.

Tis spreading.

Tis coming.

Then they toast me at the bar, a roaring sprawl of them & there’s birthday cake very chocolate & I waver nearer & away Luna T’s Cafe I love thee from within & a long way far—

“Will he bend an elbow on his birthday, barkeep?”

“No. He’s moved on.”

“Well, I ain’t! Right, boys! Set em up! And fetch him a sody pop or whatever!”

Tonight turns out to be Noisy Children’s first message from tour, & a strange one. Mr. Bob is pouring drinks left & right when it comes.

Rebecca best translates it & tells the rest. “They’re outdoors at a festival. Mountains. It doesn’t have a name really. Nobody paid to come but it’s been happening more.”

“What state?”

“Not far. Pennsylvania? I don’t know.”

“What else?”

“There’s no electricity. Just torches. A bonfire. Like the Bread & Puppet Festival in Glover, Raymond.”

I nod.

“They’re coming. And a lot of others.” She grabs my hand & we hurry into the bandroom. It’s already changing. The walls are gone, the trees are many & tall. The drumming is everywhere. The singing is shouts & moans. Noisy Children & audience are many & one.

No roof. Sentient sky.

Bowls of water pass around, maybe dosed heavily with LSD, maybe not. I don’t know, the faces stretch out forever maybe & away & then beyond them, a rhythm from deep meets a melody from high & are one thing as ever were—

Sun & moon coming down together, at last, all stars & more, a little tap & open wilder, another & what unnamed but kind is near, Noisy Children live throughout the Universe, nothing small or unimportant, every slightest movement cascades unknown & potent perpetually

my love is roses when she
smiles, sugar she sings,
higher when she dreams,

a moment now it's a huge dance, a tribal frenzied storm, not a place or time but a way, how kindness thrusts into the raw places & immolates everything—

one moon, several, go go, a hook onto & up, up, it does not end, what could?

Everything is right, everything is wrong, passes & spreads through the crowd & into the music & yes that seems so & not, fall into the twist of sunshine & moon, laugh, you made it, there never was a doubt, never!

Happiness. I remember now.

Places disparate become one, easy & true, forgotten remembered, mysterious clarified, shattered whole, what was hard is no longer, the water clean again, sleep light & happy because dreams not bogged with anguish & thwart—

words easeful among souls not begging to hide back of them, eyes straight & deep—

think! remember! everything humanly good pushes toward this liberation, a sensual intelligence neither denying life nor swallowed utterly—

where touch & meditation cross, a space of furious making, a new universe possible every moment, feel it good, raise it, raise it more—

lost to the psychedelic dream is front & back, performer & audience, these pages matter in some flaming way,

walking anywhere from & to the holyness, words like that begin to break up too, open out to the wind, the night's pull, the sky is on fire, everything is on fire!

lxiv.

My Viking happens along & greets me. I wonder where he's been.

"Always around, mate. Never far." Cryptic for a damned Viking.

So I look around for Hartlee too & there he is where I left him—long psychedelic nights with guitar & trees, fearing the worst, finding some of it funny anyway—

Benny Big Dreams? He shakes his head. "Later. Maybe!"

The Artist won't help me either—she points to canvases I cannot see, impatiently.

lxv.

Dylan trudging back to his home, how he thinks of it, the rolled-up sleeping bag, an old tired orange color, & a sack of clothes & things. Little really he would miss if stolen. Glad to see them though. His bedding will feel good around him.

No dawn yet but the night sky is diminishing color. The mushrooms are present but no longer pushing at him. He gave them everything tonight. Everything returned.

Now in several layers of clothing & zipped up in his bag, a few brief thrashes to sort out bones & muscle comfort. There. Traffic whoosh on the bridge above a kind familiar. All but a few of the camp are long since asleep. Distant snores.

The future hangs wide before him. It seems at one moment like the pages of a blank book, at another like the sea, or maybe the sky, or something else. He accepts now that people are aware of him, they care, sometimes they will advise or even urge him along. This is how the world is sometimes.

He knows Cordelia is somewhere still, that she has not forgotten him, & believes, a little, in the chance they will meet again some way. The mushrooms convinced him that he does not know all, most, hardly even some about life.

Someone turns up a radio & he hears a rock song, sad, complete in its sadness. He doesn't know it, its name or the group. But he listens. Two guitars twine through it, rhythm acoustic, electric lead. Bass drums & keyboards underneath. It ripples up slowly & washes back suddenly. The singer's voice is young, sincere, elusive:

Can you hear the silence?

I can hear it too

Can I listen to the silence?

& share it with you?

Nice words. Cordelia would like them. She said music fed her, said she liked it better than most food.

It fades, the radio moves off but the music does not go & Dylan closes his eyes deeper to stay within it. He wonders what caused it, who that singer is, who the song was for—

Sleep resembling waking dream moves in as he opens toward it—

"I can let you stay, Son, but not sell you any booze," the man says to him as around him clears. He's in a tavern, dark, wooden, fairly peopled but not too.

"I don't drink," he says softly.

The barman smiles. "Me either. Would you like to drink some iced water with me?"

Dylan nods.

"Are you OK?"

"Where is this?"

"Luna T's Cafe"

"Portland?"

Pause. "Not exactly. But don't worry. You're safe. Nobody has to leave who's in danger. We try to take care of people."

Dylan sips.

"Say, you're that actor from that TV show. **TripTown!**" says one of the boozier drinkers suddenly.

He turns slowly. "I'm not an actor."

"You look just like him. Come on!"

"Let him be," says Mr. Bob with quiet authority.

"I didn't mean nothing! I like your show! It's crazy but we watch it all the time here."

Dylan nods rather than disputing.

"But we ain't seen you on it in awhile," speaks up another drinker. "Did you quit?"

Dylan looks at Mr. Bob. He wipes the bar, spotless already, & decides. Removes his crazy colors apron & says, "Come along, Son."

"Hey! Don't take him away! We like him!" "It's a good show, kid!"

Mr. Bob the barman takes Dylan's hands & brings him through an old oaken doorway. He hears someone behind him say "Aww Jeez, he's being brought to the hippy druggies. Us boozers ain't good enough!"

The bar disappears as they pass through. Dylan breathes hard & keeps walking.

lxvi.

The space between things collapses ever more, space & time no longer ever potent illusions, it's nice really, how things can reveal, how the truth embedded funny in things can burst out.

I find myself in a locked room far, dark but my flashlight, looking over old notebooks, wondering over how the years left little else but these—

Mind flows through body flows through mind, a oneness preached foul against by gurus & cultists—what then of Art? Am I not these ragged sheaves of paper?

I've never thought answers can be found easily, that it could be held whole in a glittering cup. More like truths enough for all, unlimited, contradictory—

These notebooks I'm holding are still far, space & time not undone yet—

the mystery of the visible world looms cozy in the nuzzle of the greater invisible one—

lxvii.

A tall ship on a taller sea, balance adjusts every moment to each tip & sway, many people on board, the air is cold but dances the skin without claws—

No land anywhere as though land does not exist, never did, just this ship & its unseen path to somewhere, rise fall glide lurch—

Nobody speaks or stand too near each other, what is all this? What be? What kind of shape? Why a sky above neither dark not light?

Where was there, that other place, & the one before that, & earlier? How does this keep happening? What life, whereto?

I'm not scared, I just don't know, at the moment I feel pending but maybe just more than always—

Now something happening it's been minutes, hours, what that there? Another?

Hustle & shouts, fear or at least a lot of noise & it's a large ship too, I think, did I really see? Now I am pushed by others below deck, only the soldiers remain above to fight—

Soldiers? Fight what? Nobody protests, was this expected, is this how people are, triggers to any voice calling out “crisis! run!” I didn’t think so but here we are hustling downstairs to rooms below, shouts gone, now all is silence & crowded people pushed up together, the men with worn bearded faces, the women covered in shawls, I wonder how close they remain to the trouble above, & press along, further down—

fewer people now & something good in this, I’m tired of it, the feeling the world is a farm & we feed like pigs & stand stupidly within pens waiting for more—

I don’t feel like I’m walking but I move along, spaces open out, roads, trees, a running figure once, & later again, where bound? Is this still a ship?

How did I get here? What is this place? Why don’t people ask, demand to know! I arrived here with no answers & the only ones I ever hear involve suffering & vague reward, & people nod & take up their oars, feed silently, brood but only in dreams & sickness, & in youth—

It’s fading, what was it? How can its years go so easily? Where now? Where to?

Music. People. My friend looking at me. I think of him as a friend because he looks at me with love. He’s a person who is good at that. So I call him my friend with hope inside me.

Ah.

lxviii.

I look down & ache at it again, something not like fiction anymore, I truly don’t know what, pen swabs page with words & days go—

I write: “World boils in broken blood” & marvel at its sound & sense & disgust at any beauty come from suffering, then wonder what else could,

suffering & beauty what oppose in this world? one could say so but wonder what else missing,

Not enough to fill pages, or pass painless through the many hours, or alone care when caring’s a fine welcome thing—

Not enough to rub the world a little this way & that, loose something up but not so much a roll begins—

Not enough these notebooks & their years of cries—more, I think, more, not knowing what or how—

Boils in broken blood, maybe that’s best I can do, maybe one presses back the world how it presses first—

Weakness, a want to rave higher, to call it all to a blessed point—what? what?

Little happens but exchange of day & night—
true?

Everything happens by exchange of day & night—
better?

Not enough.

I wonder how to make a ragged sheaf matter.

How & why.

lxix.

World boils in blood, another mix, waves of rant & fist, I listen & hear other centuries last & next, speak raw to power some cry, others delude with desire for the perfection of crown,

I slap lightly the pines along my way, world boils in blood, & comics praise something big & obviously missed, crowds push spitting through the market, the sun rises for noone & everything—

Put a coin in his hand, I try this & again but how many & why, what of the well-suited blank face? I don't know worse, world boils in blood, often quietly, hid, smug, terrified,

I think how? why? what next? Praise my lover for her stretching hands & blooming mind, put a coin in his hand as we walk along, I do not explain what she already knows, world boils in blood, my dreams bang hard within to spatter our morning pillow—

Merchant wrap the stench & call it a prize to the moving crowds, world boils in blood, put a coin into his hands, this pen will try to sing into the last bed & beyond, conjure, conjure, up, up, along, cliffs from beyond above this sudden beach alone I stand, ocean here too, ocean forever, stars & waves, the sweets of that other life linger, the pains like pebbles & here they may be tossed off—

Kings sober to many centuries of boiling blood, mounds of bones, cities & empires burned down with a mad glee called God, his hand is open like his eyes, coins belong on both, he is a stench like every other hero—

What the prize? Escape? Embrace? Conquest? High spasm all night in movements, a hip thrust here, a hand dug in there, do you know how crazy all this is? Why do you hang on, do the wheezing roaring drums within hold you so beloved of your gravity & your decay?

“Hey, they’re on TV!”

“Aww, I thought our show was on!”

“It is. It’s both!”

“Look at that!”

“Our lord is fevered phantasm in a brutal race’s bestial mind! We rage for some other to sanctify our bloody biddings! Some great power we devote our sacred crimes to! Our prayers crack with the crush of skull & exhale with the iniquitous ending of the small & the weak!

“We have invented our lord & now we are ruled by this foul creation, slave to tomes of useless enigma, give us back our will to lightness & song!”

“Hush up, old man! Your friends are on TV!”

A cane swings wildly but pointedly within a heavy breath of the drinker’s head.

“Hey ya crazy loon! You wanna take it outside! Come on! I’ll give you ten reasons to lock yer yap!”

“Foul representation of a fouler entity! Four limbed fleshly curse upon this dim plane!”

Mr. Bob the barman swings around the bar to divide combatants. When the drinker rears back a knuckled intent, the barman drops him with a blow.

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker settles back. ***“Nothing remains to worship mindfully,”*** he concludes with soft-voiced fury.

The drinker’s friends help him up & all are directed to the door promptly.

“You OK?”

“No.”

“Are you hurt?”

“I am alive.”

“Yah, well, no more of that with your cane or I’ll take it from you.”

“I understand.”

“What’s wrong tonight? You’ve been coming around regular again.”

No reply.

lxx.

“Is it good, Dad?”

“Yes. It’s good.”

“What’s it like for you?”

“Like arrival.”

lxxi.

A thousand thousand years & what of any of it. Prove anything is over, or exists, or will come. Prove it! I can’t. Less seems unique to a coordinate of space & time. Pattern & repetition, kindred everywhere, the protests cry for difference or superiority, for hierarchy, for better & lesser wisdom,

leaves spilling onto the freeway, it passes low over water, talk with the sky another kind of music of rise & drop, distances there are none,

dream, music, desire, nature, causeless conjure, gourds of sacred mash how the night’s beauty will tell in endless plain

feel it, near, arrival, it feels like arrival, again, tonight—

lxxii.

I wonder when it will fall through itself, twist among itself, how can it help but, once the books seemed finite, seeking a final number, but now open endless, if I did this forever it would seem like I had & meant to—

Have I don't this forever & what is that I then? Coffeehouses swathed by vines & neon, every side a speeding carriage & away—

Accepting anew, this is what I do, what possible, what lost? What next? The next word. This.

The old books like an audience, curious, rapt, critical, hopeful—this the next,
but for them alone? I don't think so, I believe another plays his guitar likewise,
another her drawings does, some conjure, some branch, some sing, some leap, I believe there
is some kind of disparate tribe too, among the old books, & comfort for these—

When passing exhaust of days lightens awhile, such a view as this. OK. Next word. Next.
Others at it too. I miss them yet there they are, I feel them tonight, a knowing factless &
true.

The path? Back there, then. On. Else.
The map? Heat to make, up & out.
The goal? Chop wood. Eat ice cream.
The conclusion? Faceless laughter, cascading wilder.

lxxiii.

Draw in deep from other days & feel them there, within still, feel them sparkle on
the branches up & out, thousand thousand hours & more

“nomination looks less certain than just a few days ago”

“Bring that bastard & his pack down!”

“Small victories for progressive”

“Wipe my ass with their war!”

“Preparing further strategies for coming”

“Motherfuckers feel it slipping away! I do too! Some justice maybe?”

“Further erosion of civil”

“Who's ready when the war comes home? Are you gonna sit there in your puddle of
beer when they goosestep through the door?”

“Activists vow”

“Vow nothing! I'm full to my eyeballs! I'm ready to take 'em all on!”

Mr. Bob leaves the verbal fray again to check on the night's other events—Rebecca
made him promise to take off his apron & find her—

He tells the drinkers the honor system is in place. They nod respectfully. Rumor has
it Americus has a secret tabulation system for draught beer.

He's also wondering about his young friend whom he left with several smiling young
people. Guesses Rebecca will find him at some point—she's like that—

Pushes through the swinging door into nighttime beneath fullmoon starry skies, ahh
very nice, no walls at all, the trees are tall, the music is loud & lovely, Noisy Children's
driving melodies augmented by a hundred drummers or more, all is good here, Mr. Bob
tucks his apron in his back pocket & leaves toil's hours awhile, forgotten—

Rebecca comes upon him like she was waiting. She seems dressed in hide or leaves, something, her hair dressed casually in blooms, beautiful mostly in her smile as ever—
 takes his hand & they move among smilers & wild sparks, yes, all is good here—
 “I found Dylan” she says. “He’s shy.”
 Mr. Bob nods.

lxxiv.

The man standing next to him is a ruddy-faced preacher, younger than the one back in the city but just as intense & mouthy

“You want a hint? I’m going to give you one right now at this freak gathering. Listen near”

Dylan leans near & the music stops, the world falls back & gone & the preacher pulls him along from nowhere to intenser nowhere

“Mistakes are one path to God’s grace,” the words tap his cheeks alternately, “That’s one. What a man needs in this world is his captain, a book, & a boat. That’s two. Go! Do with them!”

World returns with a great sucking force & the preacher is gone & here is Rebecca, another new friend. Her smile is blossoms like Cordelia’s. With her is that other man, now without his apron.

“How are you, Son?” he asks.

Dylan, unused to talking, croaks “OK. I’m OK.”

“Fine. I’m glad to see you again.”

Dylan nods, agreeing.

“Your name is Dylan?”

Nods.

“I’m Charles. Or Chuck. Or Mr. Bob. Your choice.” His smile is good, tells Dylan more than he can process quickly.

The girl, Rebecca, takes his hand & he sees her ring, a pinkly glowing beast, a furred jewel. Cordelia would like it.

She points. “The tall man with the guitar is my father, Rich. That’s his band Noisy Children. We’re at their show.” She’s happy. This is how.

He wants to talk to them. “I’ve had a long night,” he starts. Stops. “I started in another place.”

They listen & nod. He thinks, tries to remember. “My friends got me a job. It was a surprise.” They smile. It gets a little easier. “They wanted me to live a little better. I liked where I was but they worried.”

Then what? They see his discomfort & each takes one of his hands & they walk toward the fire, the many drummers. Dylan feels all of this crawling deep inside himself, crackling sometimes, jumping, falling, lets it, lets it a little more.

He says no more but will later. This is something he likes.

A captain. A book. A boat.

Mistakes one path to God’s grace.

What else?
 Do what with them?
 What to do with any of it, the night all around & its grooves, its groans, what to do
 of it,
 between nothing & everything, respond, raise a bit, today, tomorrow,
 eyes raise up & around a bit more—
 yes, I think so, & reach however clumsy toward other souls, out & true as can be—
 Wisdom, if ever, if any, occurs among the threads & the moments, subtle, persist,
 one leaf til two til more—
 Dylan finally tires of everything & removes back to his sleeping bag under the bridge,
 the remain of this night he'll have alone & private in the world—
 No music around the camp to disturb him. Nothing. Deepest sleeping hours.
 Noisy Children happy because blown wide & no audience left awaiting them
 tonight, many came along, willing, wanting to breach a perpetual sense of waiting, of next—

“David.”

“Raymond.”

“Is this any good? Who else can I ask?”

“Further, truer, find that best groove down low.”

“I’m trying.”

“Don’t just breach it, blow out the seams. Progress is hardly other than a vow not to return
 to darkness.”

“I agree. Is this how?”

“Stop asking. There’s nothing else.”

I nod.

Some remain with night’s last curls, sheen of streetlight on a tree, rain slathered across
 pavement, mute neon high & low, streaking headlights, what voices still jingle randomly—it
 comes & comes again—day’s clumsy arc, night’s smooth descent, dream’s perfect low,
 comes again, again, again—

She sketches slow & fast, several pictures, two at once, a grainy one of symbols, a smooth
 one of leaves, she lays between her pads & plays them easy & long, piano hands transformed
 by will, the moon between, the stars among,

 she plays them piano up & feel it gallop, follow, not a trail from your eyes onward,
 more twist upward from earth & writhe to the blinks & curls known & none—

 Dylan dreams her playing her two pads & finds warmth, nearly words, music, a
 touch, a remembrance

 he finds comfort & he sleeps more deeply, leaving his mushroom companions til
 another time, surely there’ll be—

 leaves all but the least fragment of his named soul & his rest bears him new with the
 next sun—

lxxv.

John enters the White Woods & knows not what is. He moves slowly, testing all his senses for absence or confusion. Things feel off but neither absent nor confused. Yet.

His body is damp with effort & hours into his trek he wearies but fear thrashes him onward. Does this end? When will the colors return, & dark & light reverse back?

No animals, not a movement of anything. No moon, just black holes in a white sky.

Does anyone or anything watch him? How?

Slow down. Count your breaths. There! Slow. Fear eats blindly but most often without teeth.

His pace slows. He stops. There. Steady. A humming! Nothing like that belong in empty woods.

Retreat, no. Listen better. It's not strong in every direction.

Listen. Shhh.

Ahh. Now.

No time here, or at least absence of that sense of movement. What's here is, perpetually. Space, too, contains no here & there, no differentiation.

How trippy, but et no substance, this journey cannot be traced to or from—

A prison? Again, no time no space. no outside to be denied, nor time, even a lifetime, to call the term.

Breathe, relax. That works. My body is still one with me no-here

Ok then it will be my body telling my mind what to do to navigate here—how to walk with thoughts—

legs say the best we can tell you is deeper or lesser, decide & it will happen
deeper

a metallic sensation painful fucking hurts!

lesser! fuck! lesser!

OK—but what the fuck?

legs say you exposed too much—think thinner, flatter, less exposed—ready?

go—OK—it's working—the pain is present but less—

trees are greater—whiter too? nearly beyond white—is that possible? the humming is more music now, rhythm & melody both—

legs say this will be endless unless you do more—

what then?

think more—think what's already here—what you already see—no paradox—just more visible presence—

lxxvi.

What could burble from a tired view, what waits to set in & play up its point? What does daylight guard, what the odd hustle without, pending a moment?

Begin. Begin slower if need be. Clutch whatever.

If it won't work tonight it may another——will—believe—any way—

He finds when he relaxes that he walks within her again & not a dream & not an hallucination, this is truly who he is, how he is, this is his heart's rendering of the world
 her voice about him like the White Woods had been, her touch propelling him now
 that his body & mind have agreed & cooperate
 regret comes spiky not like rain falling but every where & every direction & it does
 not end but he wills slower & so it slows
 is she why? that's too simple—there is no center—even next isn't a decent explain
 but still he walks within her & not a dream nor a dupe
 OK—well—then?
 She's talking but far away, he approaches gasping for the sense of her words “love me
 more in absence than you did most of our time together” closer & closer now clinging to her
 wrist as she wipes a table,

“YOU WERE ALWAYS LEANING FORWARD”

now he pulls back from her uttered mountains of noise “like men you were most interested
 in possession” pulls back further sees she is in a hair salon & it is dusky evening, she is alone.

Marie. The one who led him to quit that world . . . wherever it is now. She'd loved
 him with full surrender & now hated him as only defense. How the world works most times.

He closes off his vision to concentrate, to liquefy, vaporize, fill that salon & touch
 her, outwardly she does not respond, just wants to go home, forget that damned TV show
 that had reminded her of him, but within she responds, perks, stiffens,

“You can't be here like this”

“Why not?”

“It's not possible. I'm awake.”

“You are?”

“You come in dreams but never so directly. Mostly dreams forgotten. I am defended
 against you & know how to route you out quickly.”

“But today?”

“There was a TV program & there you were. I didn't know how. I watched for
 hours. I just kept watching. The show must have ended, I've seen it before. It's an hour,
 most times. I watched it all night. I haven't slept.”

“And now?”

"This is sabotage! This is not what I want!"

"You haven't told me to leave."

"I want to know why you came & what you want."

"I don't know."

Silence. "Then go now."

"I didn't know I was coming. I saw the TV show too, & I went out & I haven't gone back. I don't know where I am now, exactly."

Pause. "Are you in trouble?"

"I don't know."

"I owe you nothing."

"Yes."

"Go."

"Do you really mean that?"

"Come back as a man not a mist."

"Why?"

"That's for you to risk."

"Is there any good answer between us?"

"I don't know"

"I'll go now."

"Don't come again at all unless you are serious."

The woods are dark, he's back in his body. What was that? What the **fuck** was that?

He checks his bag. Checks himself. Both OK. The woods are quiet but they *are* woods.

He looks around & finds nothing human in evidence. Not even a trail. How did he get here?

The high moon gives him some light to raise camp by. His tent pops into place, his things go within with his sleeping bag & pillow.

No sleep though. Not even close. He wonders how close he is to any of Boss Dogg's secrets. Are there tripwires he's luckily missed? Cameras up above he can't see?

A campfire would be a bad idea. Better to bundle up layered thickly. It's not too cold.

No creatures. Not even distant noises. A howl or a hoot would give him much reassurance. A rustle.

Nothing.

A can of beans with mini hot dogs. A couple of tokes. A can of diet soda. Now some weariness.

A drift. Longer now. Crawl & stagger into tent. Zip up & then into sleeping bag. All flaps closed. Maybe there is a rustle before the next drift that carries him away,

A clock, tick tock.

But no, no tick tock.

A broken clock.

OK, check the next. No tick tock. Broken clock.

Got to get there. Where? *There*. It's dark. The city is closed. Dark. No tick tock. Broken clock.

What time is it? Got to get *there*. Middle of the night. No tick tock.

A sadness that it had to come here, that it could not go on.

He finds himself running before dawn, fleeing before he was awake to know it. Fast, faster than he can keep up for long but he does. He is terrified & doesn't know why. Doesn't know how far he'd come. He slept in his clothes, all he's got left.

lxxviii.

"Now *that* was a good episode," declares one of the less sodden drinkers at the bar. The others nod & one shakily raises a mug.

"Think he'll be back?"

"Who knows? Any other show on TV I'd say sure thing. This one? He might be back as a man, a cyclone, a purple grasshopper!"

"A chunk of lava?"

"A dancing girl's left nipple!"

Everyone cheers at that.

Mr. Bob the barman has returned but still isn't tending bar. The regulars leave him be & sort out the business of watering by themselves.

He wonders why there's even a bar anymore. Is it just for him? Sentiment. Not Soulard's style often.

"No it's not. But maybe this time."

"How long you been dry, Son?"

"Going toward four years. I dream about drinking again sometimes. Bad dreams."

"I got those for a long time. Just lingering farts from your past."

I laugh.

"It's true!" We both laugh.

Dylan reads the unfolded scrap over again, a date, a time, an address. Today. Later. Near downtown. The job his. Wash your face. Show up & smile. Easy work. You can pay off the uniform later. No worries, kid, we know this place, they take good care of people there. It will be nights for awhile, days later maybe, if you want them. Bring a radio or a book. Bring a sandwich & a can of pop. Bring the newspaper. Wear walking shoes. Don't worry.

The easy part is washing up. Bring a traveler you learn the basics: bathrooms, soup kitchens, safe places to sleep, places you can spend your hours.

But he has no watch & this bothers him. Clocks. Tick tock.

I'm going so my friends won't be disappointed. They want me to live in a room. Maybe they will visit. I'll keep going to the library. I like it there.

I like it *here* too. But I can't stay.

Dreams that keep from days long gone rarely have to do with faces—all remains now with them is shared sentiment, pretty scent in a rapid wind, but I remember private things more & wonder over this—why the places not the people? Disappointment? How all of them cared & cared & then somewhat more diffusely & then it was shared sentiment & little else—why indeed do I remember radio shows & old cemeteries & treed courtyards with ache, & the people, not so hard, I tried a poem tonight & could only get so far, saying it comes & goes, over & over, play each hour like a king, & then the next, & the next—

I tried to make it back into my past, sent a hello around but the echo was bare, was less,

Today I sat in an office feeling hours slip unfelt by, & tonight I hurt by this, & tomorrow again & I don't know how to do otherwise—how to feel in a concrete box of blinking machines, each slave to his walls & seat,

Not anger, weariness, a resolve to swim along anyway,

Reck the hardest strums &
 their awful echoes, alien
 wild through later days,
 clinging, sorrow's riped mask,
 sugared year of moments
 blah fucking blah blah blah

lxxix.

Smooth later hours more a band again though hardly back, more simply aloft, coherence in guitars & keyboards & percussion, if not five people again then more toward that—

something—tell it by its own angles & silhouettes—

Noisy Children disappeared awhile, dispersed into the beat, the flow, went, good & gone, hours or their simulacra passed, up, over, & over again, there was no band or else all was band, can it be said for sure? No.

Then as flights do there was some kind of return, along not back, nobody lands in the same place

& what happened with Luna T's faded & what had that been? Did you see that? Was it real? How did they do that? Can drugs do what they did?

Toward some weak hour the band huddles in rest.

"That was pretty good."

"Fuck yah!"

"Will it be like that every time?"

"I don't know."

Grey the drummer takes a long pull at his pitcher of stout. "We can do better."

"What do you mean?"

"We're back, aren't we? We took 'em somewhere awhile, then we brought 'em back. Here we are."

"Should we not come back?"

"You're the Artist. I just hit my skins cuz I like loud shite."

"Bollocks!"

"Don't turn Brit on me, Torment! I've got enough to deal with here."

"Grey, what are you talking about?"

He smiles. "I know all about this, mate. I had long hair once too."

"Where, your nose?"

"My band wasn't called the Motherfuckers at first."

"A new story?? Twenty-five years in the band & you have a new story."

"I saved it."

"What was it called?"

"Pasquale here has the right idea. We called it Soma UK."

"Soma?"

"Yah. Soma. All that Injun shite. Rig bleeding Veda. We drank the swill & are gods. That was Barnacle."

"Who? There was no Barnacle in your band!"

"He left. Split. Gone. Not a word. Not even a decent suicide to give us a myth to exploit."

"Soma UK?"

"It was only a few months. We sucked. Eating fungus & playing the moonlight. Balling drunken hippy chicks looking for our stash."

"Playing the moonlight? Sounds familiar."

"We weren't any *good*, Gretta-bird. Imagine doing what we do *badly*. I loved Barnacle but he didn't belong in a band."

"Why Barnacle?"

"He stuck to ya. You knew he was trouble, but he hung on & you got used to him. I hated when he left. But then I turned my mates onto the Pistols & Clash & Dolls & Stooges & we found powder & new wave shag & off we went. Never talked about it. Never looked back."

"Why tonight?"

He shakes his balding head. "Dunno. I just think we're going where he wanted to go. But Soma UK wasn't any good."

"You think we'll get there?"

"They had better get out of our way while we blow through."

Everyone laughs. It's OK the music is over for the night. They'll be back. It never *really* stops.

Someone walks up with a pipe & a smile. Another builds up the fire again. The hours continue.

lxxx.

“You left in a trippy puff last time”
 “Tell me some things about me”
 “Which things?”
 “The important ones. The ones I need to know”
 “Good or bad or all?”
 “All”
 She nods, craggy hash pipe held thoughtfully.
 “Hope & anguish. Your dark & light gods & your hours the war. Never ends.”
 “Is it that binary?”
 “Pretty much. You let the world to its greys, its mysteries, but in you there’s dark &
 light”
 “What else?”
 “You think happiness is a struggle’s victory, or else a surprise gift. Not a flow, not a
 constant song.”
 “No?”
 “No. Music is your wish, trees your icons, love your guard.”
 “Art?”
 “Your blood.”
 “Love my guard? Guide you mean?”
 “No.”
 “Explain?”
 “Not now.”
 “Art my blood? Cliché.”
 “It doesn’t matter.” Long hit on hash pipe. I take my turn too. “Clichés sometimes
 state things best.”
 “What of now?”
 “Now is your latest challenge. Not the ragged singer close to the streets, which is
 how you see yourself. More the settled life with its own rewards.”
 “I’ve been badly lonely. Yet I miss some of those nights.”
 “They were years of nights.”
 “What do I do?”
 She starts to smoke again, then stops. “Nobody gets it all from anyone. Do better
 with what you keep for yourself. Treasure it a little more. Spend it a little better.”
 “That’s it?”
 “That’s enough for now!”

lxxxi.

Words more like treebranches more like cities war-maimed & a far-off king speaks of
 devilment & faithlessness—

I want to tell tonight's anguish & gesture to its well of pity, its passing music in too few hours to be fully loved—

I want to speak like kind words to a private page can mean something wider—

I want to believe that many worlds there are & they move each other subtle & blunt—

I wish for men's gods to inspire them to live like their bravest tomes preach—

I want to direct each of my pages to war's cease, beauty's spread, music's deepening, love's truths

but I control nothing, my pen leads me by my writing hand—

I look everywhere in this neon traffick'd night & nothing like answers or resolve—

Sunshine gets up on the skin & something like a language—

Trees about, pretty pretty, will you listen if I confess? Will you comfort me as always—

My pen moves of its own resolve some hours—I let it loose—hope for its flight—none else—

"Just remember what I said"

"Spare hours like gems?"

"Something of that. Every hour shines, mate."

"So I keep trying to learn. So I think I do learn sometimes. Then a kick in the face & I know shit again."

"Every hour shines, mate."

"Yah. Like shoes for a buck."

"Maybe more."

"Eh."

"Maybe!"

Curl in a chair & wonder at the sprawling fuck of any day's hours, careening through & hardly knowing a one of them & wishing otherwise—

"Vow better."

"Yah."

"No faith but in works."

"Yah."

"What else?"

"Not a lot."

Dylan at his desk. So this is what it's like. A clip-on tie around his neck, a walkie-talkie in his hand. Nobody to talk to right now.

The training took a couple of hours, mostly because he didn't understand it. His boss was patient. Wrote everything down. He has a clipboard of instructions. He has a radio.

This is a new kind of alone. He agreed to this not knowing what it was. Now here he is. He brought some books & a can of cola & sandwich from that big Fred Meyer place. An apple. A candy bar.

This is a new alone. The boss was kind but left.

"You'll be fine. This is tit work. We'll pay you starting Friday. It's not the rules, we usually hold back a week's pay but you came spoke of highly by some friends of mine. They said you're clean & trying to get off the streets. You're young & polite, I can see why they like you."

But now he had left. He said the building was empty overnight, nobody worked this late.

Was this good? Could he do this?

"Vow better."

"No faith but in works."

"What else?"

"Not a lot."

A handsome blonde man named Global Wall on stage at a microphone & his speech about to begin—I don't know what he will say.

He imagines an audience not of faces but of mirrors—some plain & flat, some rippled, some wildly distorted—he is able to speak to mirrors—it satisfies him to believe that what he is saying will reflect back to him, not sink among shoulders & purses—

He misses Cordelia. How would he explain this?

It's not this work. It's me. I'm tough in some ways & a bird's wing in others. They don't think I'll mess up because it's not possible if I show up.

How could anybody not do this! They want me to sleep safe in a bed. They want me to be warm at night. They want more for me than they have.

"It's OK, Dylan."

"I don't know where you are."

"It doesn't matter. You keep some of me always. That doesn't change."

"I don't know if I'll ever know this new life."

"Practice. Some days will be good. Some won't. Hearts are sometimes tough & sometimes tremble."

"I'll fail. It will be worse when I do."

"You're tough. You'll make it."

"Where are you?"

"I'm safe. I'm OK."

"Are you . . . dead?"

"No!"

"I'll see you again."

"Sometime. But don't live by waiting. Nothing ever comes."

"Nothing?"

"Just more waiting. That's all."

"Will you stay with me tonight? Please?"

"No, Dylan. It would be worse if I did. I'm always around. You know that."

"Cordelia?"

"Who? This is the boss man calling! You OK, kid. Birdie on my shoulder told me to call & check."

"I'm OK."

"Who's Cordelia? Your honey?"

"No."

"It's OK. You can take calls. Just do the work how I trained you & wrote it down. Other than that, get through the night by any piece of mind."

"Thanks."

"Don't worry. It gets easier. You'll like having a home again & a little change in your pocket."

"Yah."

"OK, so listen. My cell is on your clipboard. Call for any reason."

"Thanks. Goodbye."

Global Wall created all around him for this hour. Tonight he is mighty, benign, expansive, he matters & urges how all matters.

"I've brought you here from the farthest places to listen for a moment. I want to infect you with these ideas & you in turn will infect others"

Dylan eats his sandwich, it's chicken salad & provolone cheese, mayo & mustard, pickle, on wheat bread. Thick & spilling out onto its waxpaper. He eats slowly, paying attention, trying & trying, chewing thoroughly, tongue giving over his attention to taste & texture—

"Some of you are visible leaders in your towns & cities. Some less visible. Each of you arrived as part of a single gesture I made, & so you each belong here. What you will do next is unknown. The future is a dark mouth of sharp teeth."

"How does the TV do that? It's two places at once & we can understand both! Some new kind of special effects! I want the kind of drugs *they're* doing!"

lxxxii.

He can't quite wake but knows he's not in his tent. Dreams like a strong tide keep pulling him from waking's shore, how do you swim to consciousness?

He knows of lucid dreaming & this isn't it. He's being held prisoner in some way by someone who can keep him nearly-but-not-quite-awake. Can & is doing it on purpose. Power, control, I own you, you are helpless.

Very well. What if he retreats deeper into dream—

He tests & there is the pain he expects & it's much worse than he recked. On a tether, then, on the least shores, held there,

well, then, sideways? That works OK but nothing changes, it's like no movement at all,

what of straight down? He tries, feels a little give but the floor beneath him is too near, freedom isn't that shallow,

up, straight up? Before the thought gestures he shoots up a human projectile up & for more moments he is free! The tentacles strain to hold him

& he lets himself be pulled back, flails against it, bestializes his mind to the primitive fury over the cage—

idle floats, & waits, unable to wake or to dream elsewhere

how long these things take to pass he doesn't know, dreams bear no necessary relation to time—

Is it Boss Dogg at the controls? Doubtful. A guard, maybe even a simple computer/drug interface, nothing terribly complex—

but how? There was a middle to this—after he tented down & before his capture—he lets his mind loosely float among a scatter of words & images, randomly returning to this issue & away again in mid-mental sentence, images half conjured—if it's indeed an automated trap he's in, there may be no release for hours, days.

He thinks of Marie, for just a nude arched back sexhigh yowling then a deep pulse within says “twist it” & so he hits her hard like he never had, hits her hard, walks out & slams the door arriving to an old wooden tavern for a night of hard booze & faceless sex with whatever raises his sniff—

looses from that & scatters severally among random thoughts, mixes this & that, wondering if everything he's trying is less than little challenge for his captor to untangle, conjures Marie again & a pretty whore & the humiliation of fucking the bitch while Marie watched

& his brother Mickey deaf & gaptoothed, died when little, fell from a barn's hayloft, sad, sadness he couldn't possibly feel he does, does hard & vast & old, gnarls in his heart, old gnarls—

returns to trying his shackles like this was the way out, scrounging his mind for a weapon, but not really, but really—

lxxxiii.

Can you tell me any new thing, truly, for I would wish it now, this new thing, the one not slapped with patience, heavy hours to the oar, an irretrievable piece to the bastards bearing the coin—

New thing? No. More of the same. Knee before the king, flash of his sweet slay some other hour, for now the knee & the thank-ye & the scrape of politeness & humiliation—

O turn that old thing up a bit—new boss, same as the old boss, kiss it smiling today, it's shit nothing in the moon, the desert, any high that matters—

“Argument inside remains, don't it, mate?”

“Yah. Like many things.”
 “They keep you from sloppiness.”
 “Yah. Lean & running.”
 “No.”
 “Fuck is what I say to it.”
 “Will you?”
 “Yah. Want it, pay for it.”
 “Easy enough!”
 “Is there a line?”
 “Not really. None you can’t cross back & forth over by the day, by the hour.”
 “Gee.”
 “Want it, pay for it.”
 “Yeah. Heard that one.”
 “Will you?”
 For my beloved, I will.

lxxxiv.

After a week of guarding an empty building, Dylan gets his check in the morning & walks home. One of his security guard friends is waiting with cash equal to the check. Dylan signs it over & gets his cash. Looks at it

“Enough to pay your weekly rent here & some for food & a little fun maybe.”

“Yah. Thank you.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. You helped me a lot.”

“We like you. Everyone should get a hand when they’re crawling & young.”

Dylan nods & goes inside to pay the landlady, a queer duckling running for office, the pile of posters in the foyer claim.

His friend is still on the steps, so he steps outside again.

“You OK?”

“Yah.”

“It’s not easy. Work can be hard, even when you’re not cracking boulders.”

Dylan nods.

“You gonna stick with it? You don’t want to be back on the streets, do you?”

Silence.

“Listen, I got an idea. Why don’t you get the Greyhound & take a little trip this weekend.” Pulls out a thickness of bills & hands Dylan about a hundred bucks. “Pay me back later.”

“No. I can’t. Where?”

“Go see the ocean. I mean it. I’ll walk you there & set it up.”

“Would you come?”

“No. I want you to do this on your own.”

“That’s all I do anymore.”

“This is different. You’re going to see something. It’s big & magical. I can’t tell you about it right. Come on!”

Dylan goes with his friend after grabbing his bag, with an extra shirt, & some of his little mushrooms.

lxxxv.

Come back to the dingy cafeteria, its bad food, its lowly comfort.

Wondering at the perpetual vagabond in me, the dirt-dog, running the streets, hurting obscurely & studying this for any importance it might bear, any little importance I should know & keep.

I’ve been writing these stories most of my life, lives, life after life, they connect among them, trace through in ways I treasure & cannot quite know—

The street in me, the coffeehouse, the late high desperate nights I do not eschew—they keep fresh in me because little else piles to their worth—

I come to sorryass joints like these to meet my ghosts & bear wisps of them away with me—to remember close no matter the years—

reach back through the tentacles & manacles to flashes of sweetness, sugar high moments among the sad murk—

Nobody knows. I look at others & do not know. I wish to think it otherwise but rarely do—

The hours run out on this & onto my cleaner ones, live warmth, some kindness & protection—

Fierce flavors of all my years blend arching, careening, perpetual—

lxxxvi.

“Pipe?”

I take it & welcome the smoke-shaped spirits within, feel words & images jostle loose, feel the depths crackle

“The murk sing?”

“yah”

“heh. You so want to word the wordless, don’t you?”

“Why else bother to try?”

“Think you can do it perpetually?”

“I dunno.”

“But you won’t stop.”

“No. There’s always more to say.”

“Or bottle up the old anew?”

“Yah. Maybe.”

“How long have we been discussing this?”

“At least a decade. Never stops being interesting.”

“For long.”

"No. It renews, gets strange & luring again."

Nods, smokes, spirits smoky fill the room.

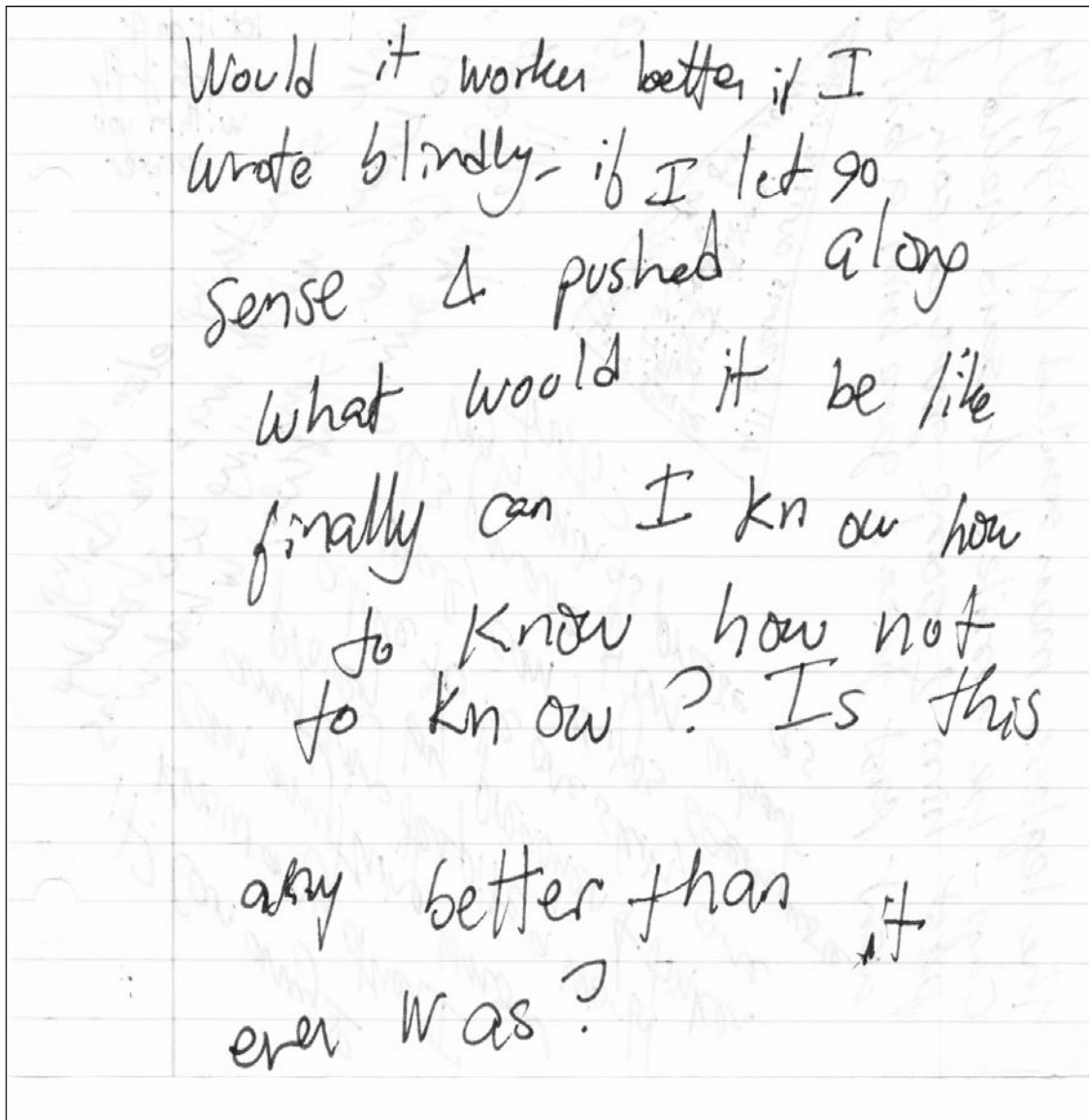
"What else?"

"More of the same, changing over days & years."

"What to do?"

"Tend. That's how it works best."

Smoke & harder. Lean on the night, push it to its best kind of reveal, comes slow then wild



[illegible]

A breath, & a day or two, & along. A book should live by its mystery, seek to trouble, struggle, shine, collapse, become new & new again as sheaf thicks—

What else? No answers. The preacher will mouth a few, but step out in the shine & the bowing & nods do not scrape the light, explain it, comfort it, further it, little, little, less—

Well, then, cry for next? What of it? What matter at all? The world proceeds, or whatever verb you like. Nothing writ here slows or alters that.

I can remember such disparate, close-resembling days & nights spent above these pages—at a poor folks joint one hot summer—at a nocturnal courtyard many years—in a scruffy cafe armchair for a dark endearing stretch—

Toward what end, these pages? Their own, I suppose. One needs more than the lingual magick; one must wear the armor, ride beneath the flag, ever owe a knee to some face or other—these pages are free because they gain nor lose the world nothing while being so much to me—

is there anything of new truth in this? I don't know. I do not feel cower or want while this engaged. The far treed vista of my window's view seems allie, the milky clouds above, the low hum of this cafeteria, an occasional bang of some busy worker—

I remember: No way out but through.

Happiness simply in ink kissing the page.

The wish to be other & all, sometimes, to know another's eyes & wishes—

To understand beyond empathy—to know the alien within this familiar ground & that dull-colored room—

To beg Mystery: seize me! Make me a cloud, a pine tree, a soft gasping applause!

More than possession or twain-now-one-more! To feel something I cannot feel, be something I cannot be, & return—

To be surprised again—stand foreign & innocent & wondering—not by sickness or tragedy—by something I cannot now name—

I wonder: is this just want for novel sensation? Are my ideas this meager? Would flying an airplane or holding my own child be enough?

I don't know. Are these the outer bounds of familiar society's thoughts? What truly restrains me?

Is it loss I feel or the rawness of growth?

I wish for my writing to run ahead of me, leading me unknown thither.

Power or release?

What will bring the hills into view again? What beyond old ideas of hills?

Yes, maybe, or perhaps something else—freedom where cuffs & coins are farthest away—whatever these pages, they are mine & they owe none to anyone—their raise & fall are their own—

I watched three cops surround a man, search him, talk to him, cuff him, remove his possessions to a sack, into a car & away he was taken—& the busy street did not slow—hardly noticed—

It wasn't me—I sat safe in a poor folks grease joint & watched—terrified—why? It wasn't me—but it was him—his day, his path, his intent, his will—all done—this took place & was over—I see the spot still, street corner, 3 cops & a ragged man, surrounded & taken—& nothing explains anything—the hours have passed—he is in a cage—he is a photograph & a number & paperwork—what of his cat, his houseplants, his path, his will?

I have no answers, few & less, none, worse. I write here out of wordless compulsion toward pen on paper.

What is it? Tomorrow me, or you, or someone, many, everywhere. A bullet, a sickness, a word, something & then all new—sitting in a cage, unwatered plant, that next thought unfinished because surrounded & no will, no day, no path—

Safety, protection, faith?

Someone kneeled & no help anywhere—someone dancing eyes closed & will it ever end, pain or joy, imagine one & ask: will it ever end—come on, dream a body not your own, eyes not your face, heart some other's within, come on, imagine it, his god, her yearn, tree's burst, fish's new-made eggs, swarms of suns a million years' shine ago—

Open out, out, do it, not you or me, nameless, whatever, potent about, feel it but no name, again, no name—none—

here it's coming—right now—toward you—again & more—now so intense burst all is not burst enough—now mellow low, where, come back, here, now, me, come back, oh, here again—



To be continued in Cenacle | 66 | October 2008



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Progressive Political Talk



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Why ? [a new fixtion]

(continued)

lxxxviii.

Dylan sees Maya & looks away. Maya sees Dylan & does not.
 He's never ridden a long distance bus before. It's like a city bus but softer & no
 change box. Longer distances between stops. One a town, it seems.
 Maya is sewing together a pair of pants from patches.
 A long white van with dusty back windows. Words carved in its dust:

KEEP GOING AND
 YOU WIL

Wil what? Will what? Maya is sifting through a bowl of fern leaves. Dylan squirms.
 The highway gets crowded & slow, Dylan wonders about his trip.
 Another dusty van, dark blue, & the dust reads:

IT'S REALLY A GAME
 YOU

Same strange writer?

Now Maya is reading her book found that day on a bench.
 Her hair is red & golden & blonde—and also hosts a single purple streak.
 She reads: "How anything came to be is a mystery. Even deducing your own life is
 impossible; untangling your own decisions from the will of others from the chances of time
 & space. I traced with my fist the puddles on my table. The TV mounted on the bar wall
 was loud & many watched. I didn't know how I had gotten here; I was simply watching for
 you to come & explain.

"You were watching the water & thinking about time & space. Some had written
 about one's collapse into the other. It wasn't that you didn't believe so much as you asked
 why.

"The TV seemed to get louder though nobody else flinched. She did, though, & her
 wait took on pain to its impatience.

"Perhaps we're best remembering those other days. There were traintracks &
 friendlier taverns than this. If I stop waiting for you, will you come back to me at last?"

She closes the book & breathes hard. What had the first 50 pages been like?

Pulls these pages from the book, old binding glue gives way easily, & looks 'em a
 moment, then Dylan across the aisle, then leans over.

"Would you take these for me?"

"Um?"

"As a favor. I don't want them right now but I might later. Or it won't matter."

"Oh."

"You can give them back if you get off before I do."

"OK?"

"Where are you going?"

"The ocean?"

"Hey! That's great. I'm going near there too. Astoria. Been there?"

"No."

"I don't want to bother you."

Dylan smiles. Good move. Maya now knows what she needed to know, wanted to know, since she saw him get on the bus & later glance at her.

She sits back, in her own smile, & thinks to read again:

"We thought we had it down. We really did. Like you feel wind or bleed, we were sure the heroes were easy to like, worth a knee to their words. The villains could be beaten but it would take enough time to sweeten the triumph, ripe its best fruit.

"We'd meet news ones & bring them in & along. Uncertainty was light about our wings; our maps were true. There would come more of us all the time. Our days were orchards of stratagems & our nights bonfire fields mysterious with virtue."

She stops. Why is she doing this? Is she? Until she arrives in the town & calls the number on a scrap in her pocket, nothing is sure.

She looks at Dylan. Could he? It would not be hard. Could? He's holding her pages closely, gently.

Not back, she's sure.

Could he? Could he?

lxxxix.

"I dreamed of you the other night."

"Ha! You got my message."

"You send notes by dream?"

"Not my style, you say?"

"*Exactly* your style."

She smiles & tends her cacti. Hums to them.

"You speak cactus."

"They listen. Not much to say."

"I'm here. Now what?"

"You're not listening to me like I want."

"Maybe I can't."

"No. That's not it."

"I want to."

She looks hard upon me. "I don't know that you do. You're superstitious of anything that alters your groove."

"I suppose."

"Even for the better."

"Meaning?"

She pauses. "You can do better & it doesn't need to be harder."

"Easing up on pedal isn't much advice I can do with."

She smiles. "There's a lot to it. But how to get your superstitions to cooperate."

"Only to make my writing better."

She nods. "What else?"

"I don't have anything else."

"No?"

"Not that is surely mine. Everything else depends on others. Comes & goes."

"What would you write of if anything?"

"I'd write elaborate plots that traveled everywhere & criss-crossed & played out strange & true."

"You don't do that now?"

"I don't know what I do. More habit than Art."

"You believe that?"

"More than not."

"What then?"

"I don't know."

"You believe there's an answer?"

"Yes. I do."

"What then?"

"I don't stop."

"And?"

"I don't stop."

"Then what?"

"Long I've wanted fiction again that felt to my moment, & I don't know about this book."

She nods. Stands. "Let's go."

"Where?"

"Into your world."

I squirm & she grimaces. "You have no choice, the story is going with me."

We leave her smoky cave & walk into the street. I don't know which street or when.

A street in a city, it seems, & this is alright to start.

"Keep up!" she barks merry.

"Why?"

"You'll miss everything!"

I walk, waiting for some facts, telling colors or trees.

"Waiting does no good. It never ends if you let it."

I look in a store window & there is a fireplace. A group sit near it, all intent on a huge book between them. Merry Muse does not hurry me off. "Is this something?"

"Everything is."

That makes me turn away & lose myself in the deep glaring traffic, want to leap in & not know how.

"There's nothing to know."

"You sound like a crank hippy shaman."

"Disprove it!"

"It's not worth disproving!"

"What then?"

"Come on!"

We walk from highway to quiet shoreline & I get aggravated. The water is glassy still. The air steams with cool.

I sit down on the sand. "No more."

"Why?"

"These pages don't matter. There's nothing to them."

All blue eyes she webs about me & what world I know.

"Please listen. As long as your pen moves, it matters. The why isn't always around to comfort you. But never stop, & let it be easier. There's nothing in your way. Tell everyone this. It's your mission."

A kiss of her lips to the moment between us & she's gone, here I am, a Friday night joint, streetlamp on yellow leaves, long hilly view of hurrying autos, & within I sit with my beloved. She reads. I writhe. We gather & walk on.

xc.

She reads again: "You're reading this with doubt near your heart. I know you. Your day passes by glide & jerk. You watch others & wonder their plans. The world stretches endless from here, from you, & you wish to fling, arc from the there you are to the here you wish to be.

"You smoke a cigarette for comfort. Or eat a chocolate bar. Maybe you lean into the shine & allow admirers to accumulate. One or another.

"Dreams hint, advise, confuse. There are weightless hours & all falls away but the essential. The moon perfectly round. The stars' sky-line cryptic urge.

"My drink is near gone. I turn to the TV & that cursed program is nearly over, its edges are severally burning to its core.

"I don't know. The next paragraph won't know either. There will be many, many more, & wisdom among them, maybe but too many & conflicting.

"Maya, I have to say—"

She closes the book upon this line, terrified. Curious. But no, not yet. She has some other business right now, with this strange boy.

He is watching the scenery, so close to it he hardly exists otherwise. She watches him a bit before speaking.

I try to remember where this is & what she means by conjuring it. Feels like winter, cold, windless, familiar to my skin.

"New England"

She says nothing.

A pond. Dawn. Rimmed by bare trees. Walden?

Still nothing.

I don't remember ever being at Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts at dawn.

She quivers but stays silent.

"I used to adore New England. Its trees, its books, its history."

"Then you didn't."

"It receded."

"You left."

"I'd been here for a long time. I was tired of it."

"And now?"

"I don't miss it much. My fondness is sentimental."

"Why?"

"I left. Does it matter? Few of the people I knew recall me. Would they make an effort to find me? I'm not so utterly missing, not at all. The trail I left was light & seems mostly gone."

The air gets colder. I remember. Gut of winter, years gone by, Burke & I met a swimmer, one of those old men who swim ponds & seas til they freeze over. He boasted, humorously.

I see noone.

"How does writing this help my fixation matter again?" I shout. "How is this not ink drooling useless on a page like a bib!" I stop, try to calm.

"How!"

Alone. She doesn't answer such questions, they don't even exist in her world, whatever that may be.

The pond begins to fall away, little holds it together now. I try to pull it back. Sniff its shiny air, imagine its paths I've climbed around here. It wavers. I remember coming here many times too uncertain not to be trod with worry. It's fading. I don't care enough for these memories; I let it go.

"How anything came to be is a mystery," he reads because she insisted. He stops, wonders how her hair got a purple streak.

"Don't you like books?"

He nods.

"Why are you going to the ocean?"

"I've never seen it before."

"Is that why?"

He stares at her.

“What do you know?” she asks.

“About what?”

“Everything!” She moves into his pair of seats, resting on her knees, leaning lightly into him. She smells like something strange & weightless.

He pauses. A few thoughts stumble around in his head. None seem eager.

Honesty overleaps him. “You’re pretty,” he says softly.

She shudders like from a smack. Leans back, nearly falls. He grabs her; she lets him. Then she catches herself & steadies stubbornly.

“What else?”

“I like you.”

“Why?”

“You’re not someone else.”

She moves back to her seat, keeping his glance, bearing his words like clean cold water cupped in her hands. Curls in her seat away from him, slowly. Seems to descend into sleep.

xciii.

A book should live by its mystery, seek to trouble, struggle, shine, collapse, become new & new again as sheaf fruits—dirty, ugly, accidental, branches up & out all sides, leaves, sprouts, lost because mortal & bound, something else too, remember days lost, a good few of them at least—

Sitting among talkers, swirling in one’s mind, the music visible, dancers on the face of the noisy hour—

help help help

happiness

dreams ring round me & pierce through I follow within choiceless can the words never end this time I used to catch a train at midnight from my happy writing place it was a long way home often I was poor & loveless but I’d written wild for something

& something had coaxed me along, year by year, I sat on buses & trains & planes

help help help

happiness happiness

I struggled & broke into characters, into songs I wanted to be many to know the what & the how of otherwise—

I wanted to know what anything meant so I could start there

Millennial Artist's Farting Guide

*There is secret flatulence
among these bus riders, a known
stink when the bus swerves &
ass cheeks lose hold of their
bulbous gaseous ball off it goes—*

I cared for it all, I wrote & wrote, & read thick books & libraries year by year & the lonely nights summed higher & higher—

The world proceeds. None speak of slowing or stopping it. Riders on the spaceship hang on & eventually bury within. Break down, & release.

"It's OK, Raymond."

"Rebecca."

"Yes."

"Not yet some other version of some girl-fancy I'm chasing."

"No. I'm me again, as always."

"What is this book? Why do I keep doing it?"

"I don't know. Nothing else is as good?"

"What do I do with the bad hours?"

"What have you always done?"

"Stumble along, wait them out. Whatever works, even barely."

"Old memories. Missing old friends I could hardly talk to now anyway."

"I know."

"Melancholy. Sentiment. Bullshit."

"Yah. But no."

"What do I do?"

"Keep doing. There will be magick hours. Like always."

"Why do I weaken?"

"Saving for this. Even if this is hard. It's yours. Nobody has any other instructions."

"That's true. It doesn't matter to anyone else but nothing else matters to me."

She nods.

I remember: no faith but in works.

No faith but in works.

No faith but in works.

No faith but in warts.

No face but in warts.

No fate but in wars.
 No phase but in forks.
 None.

xciv.

Is it the elixir or her drinker? Come on, fancy hard into that one. Did LSD invent the world or vice-versa? What would you do without the elixir? Would you bother?

Come on this fancy let it open out—what fear anymore? None but molecular breakdown. No human threat? Not as much. What humans cannot control or beat is something worse. What is the pulse to destroy? Where this great push to annihilate & call it a deity's will?

No human imagination for the happy God, the nature-loving, long-lived God, the singing, open-hearted, silly stupid God leading by song & game?

Why only the suffering God, angry God, distant God, burning, brutal, threatening, abandoning, vengeful, bitter, violent, *insane God*?

Why? Tall buildings to celebrate cruelty & its endurance! To sanctify it. Make life a suffering cauldron & lo its afterworldly promise beckons sweeter!

Tell me something new. Life is suffering. Bah! Attachment to things cause hurt. Bah!

Blabbering bullshit & no answer to them. Whatever this is, whatever to come, nothing human contains it.

Nobody died for your sins. There is no sin you will die for but your own. Being alive is its own hard price & fair reward. Kneel to no man. Kneel not! Then kneel to all as humility & love owed to any & all.

Kneel. Sing. Kneel. Sing!

The days have a ragged, jarring quality, earthen floors uneven, treacherous, I look on the sky's self-created coherence & wonder over it—

A husk half releases, half clutches back—memories cruise about with uncertain intent—

I walk back into Luna T's Cafe & the drinkers at the bar hail me—

"How's tricks, Cap'n?"

"Sometimes not enough."

Several nod.

"So what do I do?"

Nobody speaks.

"I really want to know!"

One turns to me hard. "Stop fucking around in that head of yours. Simple. Hit the wheel harder & go farther." The others nod but stare at their drinks.

"I've heard that advice before. Why doesn't it catch?"

"Maybe it's trying to" says Rebecca next to me.

"Will it?"

"Will you let it?" demands Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker.

"What then? Another crash?"

"Maybe" says the drinker who spoke first. "But you know that."

"What about the elixir?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"No. I doubt me."

"You can't grow much from doubt. Roots stick because you keep at it, long past when you can easily sense through."

Nobody speaks.

The bar unhinges & looses gone. I see Rebecca's smile lastly: "Maybe it's trying to . . ."

xcv.

A long view of trees & flat sky, some city in the further distance, & mountains still beyond. Table with its notebooks, novel, soda cans, detritus—

I think of another summer when I had to shake hard to get my head righter—there've been a few I suppose—

Yon a construction nearby my old bookstall shill. It's gone. I've not been back, but it's gone.

A series of lives they do not blend into one.

Another empty cafeteria & me in the corner pen moving. Long past its social heyday or even its larger aspirations of one sort.

No why. No explain. On it goes.

Now sitting at the corner of the bar at Luna T's Cafe, & mulling my old maps & lists to make fixtion, what I did then, what I could do still—

A wish to disappear into pages, sink like dirt into water, not annihilation but an other-joining, a melding unto,

& this book not another ending but a bridge—a flight from there to there—

invent fixtion new yet again—

I've outgrown this & know not how to carry it along—how to keep doing what does not touch to my inmost anymore—what would succeed it?

A child sat at play with sticks & rubber bands, constructing a world, transforming from meager to vast, sticks buildings, bands roads, sticks spaceships, bands herds of cattle. The few of number & kind became many & various.

The threat came not from the single chair awry but the nine lined up neatly. Harmony's lure is the danger. The trick is to induce other chairs out of precision.

The books are for the most part wrong. The books encourage tranquility in a violent world, inward grasping in a lonely one, outer authority in a fearful one—yet a life without them distorts & lies too—someone can tell you how to raise a rose or what a rose is or how it

resembles a trembling wish. The questions like these go part of the way—to go the rest tis needful to ask: why a rose at all? Not merely asked of self or of roses, but of all?

A point here? Any? Nothing contains the world in its grasp, nor does the world hold all.

To write as I wish would be to stop distinguishing altogether between world & Art, reality & fixtion—between prose & poetry—I’ve gone part of this way but not all—I don’t know how to go all—

Dylan & Maya were walking together down a long road. Maya’s hair is loosely tied back though her purple streak is free. Her eyes a vague blue that seems to fire into crimson when she herself does. She is thin & somewhat incomplete. Her hand does not hold Dylan’s but keeps near it, watching, making sure.

“I’m coming with you.”

“You can.”

“That’s all.”

He nods. They figured out at the last station stop that their walk to the ocean will be miles.

“Do you have any money?”

“Yah. I got paid.”

“You have a job?”

“I guard a building.”

“How did you get that?”

“My friends got it for me. They didn’t like where I was living.”

“Where?”

“Under a bridge.”

“Oh. I’ve done that. You meet some crazy people.”

He nods. Their hands brush, & skitter back.

No time. Walk a long stretch, rest a little. A bottle of water at a grocer’s. The sun doesn’t leave until late evening & they keep walking.

“Help me” is written along the street over & over it leads them away from their direction but they follow. The letters get wilder as they go on, but they follow silent & watching for what will reveal—

The road is no longer pavement & the words are scorched into the earth—their water bottle is empty & it’s getting dark—

Dylan stops, uncertain, but Maya nods & they keep going, into the woods that seem . . . white—

Dylan fingers his bag of mushrooms within his traveling satchel, & considers. Maya is looking ahead in her curious, restless way.

What this, & why think of them? He's not sure he trusts them & wonders if their help would be relevant. Eh? Needed? He thinks wordlessly, his best method.

Maya nearer him by heart than hand, feels that clean beat, feels herself forming an open border with it, feels more than that, here is something worth its complex, here between them a rising light, a new way of knowing two souls make uniquely between each other—

She gets very excited for a moment & lets the rush wild through her deliciously, & then lingering pulls the far edges back. They cross again when the scared man collides in them. Now heaped in a surprising tangle, sitting on ground hardly visible, looking each to the other.

"I don't know what's happening."

"I don't think we do either."

"Where is this?"

"We're not sure."

"Where did you come from?"

"Back there somewhere. We were walking to the sea when we saw these signs written on the road. 'Help Me' they said, over & over."

"Help who?"

"You, maybe. That's how we ended up here, & here you are. Are you in trouble?"

John shakes his head. Then nods, slower. "I think so. My boss told me to follow what he said & I didn't. It keeps getting worse."

Dylan & Maya nod.

"I thought you two worked for him."

"We don't know your boss. What's wrong with him?"

"I don't really know him either. He brought me out here . . . somewhere . . . to watch over his land. But he had rules & limits. I broke them. I had to find out what he was hiding."

"Did you?"

"I've been running or crazy or both for awhile now, I'm not sure any of this is real."

Maya laughs. "We're real. Dylan is. I am. I'm Maya."

John laughs. "Your name does not assure me!"

A commercial comes on the TV & the bar gets talky. Several drinkers think Maya is wearing too much. A few wonder what drugs wrote *this* week's show.

I sit & find comfort in this alone, pen spitting to paper, old places, which still thicks green & pink to a wish—

I fall back from the bar stool to armchair, from Luna T's Cafe to CoffeeTime Coffeehouse, from some Triptopolis where this book is set to Portland, Oregon of my haunted secret hours & my live, present night—

The TV won't come on now & the drinkers complain. They eye me darkly & I shrug.

“It’s just a show.”

Maybe call the new Noisy Children album *Up from Heaven*, he’s thinking as the night trails away & what severally occurs in the book looses, dims. Of course an LP, they’re back in style but never really left. Best way to describe this tour, would anyone who comes to these shows buy it? He laughs & puts his guitar away.

Would they come if no band appeared? Isn’t it close to that? Would it matter? When will the music simply take over again?

It devolves to bits, to the caught consciousness of the lucky hour, the continuity only in the accumulated sheaf, the recurring faces, the style or what’s left of it—

The younger, newer characters don’t really know this world or its history, perhaps I protect them from it as I can—

Toward what? Toward the end, that’s really all—

xcvii.

“Heavy hours to the oar & rarely the look around for sky or shore, years pass & now more often a look, what is this traveling life & through where?

“Eat a piece & find other ways to keep at the oar & still study beyond its task—eat a piece & the songs all oarsmen sing thin in the ear & explain less. Distractions, not revelations. But what then?

“The oar heavier still but no manner to release it. Through the drenches & dries, what else? Where to? Faces in the boat change with the years. The boat gets bigger & slower.

“And still those stolen looks around at the creatures in the sky & along the shore. Why don’t they row?

“Rowing ever by sun & moon, but sleep is not denied. Chaotic for years, untelling, not a guru. Then more so. Wish it & no rowing within dreams. No oars. There is other then. The limits themselves are limited.”

Global Wall pauses. His audience is so thick now some sit on temporary ledges up & down the walls. He inhales to speak again but doesn’t. No more for now. He walks out of the building, stage to steps to corridor to revolving door, in a blur, thinking about hives & honey & what he will do when he gets back there.

He doesn’t like to be away long.

Or call it *Give Back Our Names* & piss & sneeze at pretty notes & punk ones alike—cough at strums & shit at harmonies—what other ways neither beyond nor higher—just other—fuck mere and wish—all—all—

wish it & the day & its next & how not to see its souls leaning against one another for meaning & warmth none have alone?

Call it by a new title every day to prayer the great kinesis & hold some in a pattern & cradle that hour.

Certainly the players know how to get there, some why & some luck & something else, a magick, a god, a fanaticism for the sugar in living soundscapes—

Dylan & Maya sit with their friend & he feels safe, protected & protecting both. Would they go where he tends? They might. Would he ask it of them?

Maya says, “You decide. We’re not far. Everyone has to help.”

Dylan watches her, learning. She moves through it, riled, affecting. He watches. What else.

Call it *Fuck or Die* & be done with the pretty thoughts. Call it *War Strangles*. Call it anything. It matters so much. Yet?

Global Wall returns to his soft creatures & is relieved awhile. No gift in this world not a burden too, he knows. He’s glad there are many, they nurture each other, press into several knitting dreams while awaiting him, he points & says but less often, what else? Little. Spicy wisps. Memories.

Still, never to slow. Columns will burn & most will rupture, what on goes will be too hard to disarray & too soft to disloyal.

Global Wall nods. He is doing as he must.

For a moment to remember a table, gone, in a year & a city gone, sat there unimagining this seat, this year, this city, memory an ever-expanding mass, a country within, a nation? a body politic? what, & what?

Sat there & did not know. Sit here now & do not know. What then? I could have, this, that, didn’t.

Turning points, more like reinventions, more like re-bornings. A few, several, many, countless. Each tall & no return, each a god & pantheon accumulates.

What this moment then? Another bus, music on headphones. Mind chooses pen & paper, & this telling.

Kinder? Sadder? Smoother? Decades for a really fine sand of empathy & humor? Regrets everywhere the dead forest within & hopes what still grows between the shadows.

What? & What then? You can’t tell me, how this learned & now known? Wave a hammer, tend a bloom, but why the hammer & wherefrom the first bloom, nay. You canna, neither I.

What then? Walk on until. Breath, relax, again. Watch between the beats. Jostle with language’s wielding & experience’s claims.

More, bid yes. Better, allow chance.

Remember because it’s more of what remains. But remember wilder, leave little to cement up, foul with reverent visits.

Everything years, more true than much, & useful for thoughts & thus perhaps actions.

The little table wasn't there very long, yet see it remains right now. Much remains. What then?

Rain coming & gone, dreams resume, love knots closer to rework its potent for continuing days. There are waves & flickers around always.

And next? Another disaster on TV, watch it pass, it's not yours, yours will come, drowning in a city, your last few breaths & then gone, a landscape you'll never know like heartbeat, one or another, the bomb will hit, & you'll be gone, going now, the path ceaseless, but you'll be gone & that's it—

What? What then? I thought about this, the desert around, hours & hours, hark the past, its near but no touch, can't kiss or throttle it, all them ghosts, hours & hours, what? What then? Felt me weary, felt me sad, felt me a thing crumbling,

come upon a great creature roaring out of the earth, the earth itself as shaped roar, there was a moment, & the other when the many dancers toyed & teased their flames—

I tried even as try felt thin—let out oceans within to eat worlds of woe—called the sparkled skies to my work—

If nothing else assures me it's the sun up every day, my eyes & heart slave not to my proximity to surrender, the way music still the lawless child streaking my veins—

What? What then? No answers, not one, not many, more a shifting few, a cluster of insist, how much pushes along every minute, toward better, right, wrong, still toward that chance of better—

But still to ask: Why? More than What? or What now? Tis why that controls & directs, runs deep among blood, bones, heart, head—Why? asked & answered every minute, perpetually—

I asked it in the desert but received nothing clear to bring back—I ask it now in a restful hour & little faith it will address the next—

Why? is helplessly potent—solitary, great—

“Any thoughts on what he's saying?”

“He's doing what he always does. Looking for a way back to the story.”

“Think he'll find it?”

“When he wants to.”

It never stops. The notebooks keep filling fast & slow—they're all that has lasted from gone years—

What will their next page be like?

their last? What really ends? Why?

xcviii.

Something between suffering & dreams is what I'm thinking right now, when I push too hard it hurts but when I let it roll about me—

Nothing really yet, nothing I can explain to myself then do with—

Not yet—

Suffering & dreams—

What? What then? Why? Ask 'em like a hard blow of bullets, look great about & ask, what then, why? What? Ask, ask, I sat before a blinking box in a room of someones & asked it silently—

jump out & now the trees around, is it the White Forest? Near the Ampitheatre?

& out again here is Luna T's Cafe at the bar the drinkers click the TV between the bald bastard & his big guns & the drowned city full of soldiers & reporters—

& out again I'm on my old horsey bike in a desert mania, riding toward the weakest hours looking but none too hard anymore, why? What? What now? & out again now waking from dream of an old war, a complexity I tangle in

& out again on a train rushing over a bridge near dawn the faces crowd closely & lonely as I write something pen & paper leaning up to my face

& out again it continues this way, something between suffering & dreams—

When did it get repetitive? Faces resemble, the waters narrow, when did I hold back from the page, when did I lack the inner yowl, when did the push seem fucking pointless, when did I look on others as impediment & threat, when did ideal twist wrong? What to do now?

I walk suddenly into my own past, not long ago, still this western city, arrive upon a night I watched go ugly, I remember watching a movie sharp & loud, there was pizza on the living room floor, suddenly she had to be on the phone, did it ring? It was her kin, she talked on the phone upstairs, implied she was in danger, hit it, hit that moment, she comes down

"Tell them you need a ride home."

"What?"

"No. Tell them you're coming home tonight. We'll go to the bus station. You'll go. I'm done. This is over. You told me. I believe you. Someday this night will haunt me like a chopped-off limb. Leave. Now."

She looks at me. Does she beg? Does she go?

Could I have done it differently? Realized I had no chance? That I'd lost before I came out West?

What if I'd told my friend I'd ended it & badly needed a job? What if I'd turned toward the basics of survival not angrily but with great need?

But I did eventually. Why does this haunt me then?

Because my Art was so close, breaking apart, my Art was near to gone even as I wrote it wildly desperate, I tried to keep what was gone by it, I did everything & nothing worked.

I lost people then, the single & whole of people, felt betrayed in ways I cannot recover, & so I write now to move along, accept the gash in my heart, make Art of it too, make Art of everything like I did once, make something good, raise, raise, raise,

"I saw that picture of the dog, how cute, oh my god!" some slinked pink piece tells her plastic toy to another plastic toy,

I would rather see it burn all out than how the suffering goes on year by year, all is eating fucking shitting dying mixed up with waiting watching & tapping

Beat me til I feel better, that is different, I can't talk this fool shit to a single anyone, I'm not talking to anyone, I'm talking to me, that's how it is, there is no audience, there is me & my fucking wild pen & this notebook, nobody, nothing else, help, help, help, I can't yet do, I am calm, I move along, I pay for goods, I try at the desk & kiss in the bed, & explain nothing to anyone because there are no answers just impulses there are simply complex hives of multiple infinite barks call it a city many cities call it a world

I don't believe it I've seen its small place, its single level it's mereness—
help help help help

There is deep down no we, not an I, there is no here there no between no high no less no good no change this or that I have none to give or wish—plastic & wood & electric noise, nothing, what? what then? Why? Stop fucking looking at me I'm not a fucking novel diversion for your boredom, your bus ride, your cafe evening—

Listen, nobody, listen: I sat alone at the table, green seed, sat there with other notebooks, sat alone & peopled worlds where I mattered, where every face & its name mattered, I peopled impossible places at that lone table & I've never stopped I'm still peopling impossible worlds, still lone at the table, lovers & miles & years later, the doors of LSD & eros & dance, travels deep & raw, the dirt of sadness, the tracks through others' hearts, the money & its rude ways, how it nears to blood in its power but not quite still at that table still lone & looking & peopling impossible worlds

I look at her. "The hour you kissed him, our heart cracked & fell dry to the ground."
She says nothing. "I love you."
"You love nothing. Go find something to love. It's not me if it ever was."

I look at her. "Fix our fucking shower & clean up the fucking house. One day you will miss me when months pass & nothing."

I look at her & say. "You'll never know how your nasty little note hurt me. I won't even be a memory for you to clutch a pang. I remember. You were the first cruel person to me. Cruel with no motive. Cruel because you could be."

How far back does suffering go? Are the scars of suffering live over generations & continents? What else travels but books & village myths? What travels among the pages, the ways of sewing boots & skinning beasts?

What further back? When did dreams begin? What set off that first one? What did it say that was too much or too angled to know?

I remember long loud nights sucking at pints of stout among those I called brothers. What? What next? I don't know what they are now, what they became, I called it a youth, called the faces distinct, cradled their names in my hands & hearts—

listen: I don't know but this doing, my life many thousand nights doing this & what else?

listen: I don't believe but I don't not.
Faith is stuck to me foreign & forever.

I look at her & say, "Goodbye. If I had done it tonight it would have been better."

I look at her & say, "I should have told you to clean up our fucking lives. You punished us all for your anger. I did nothing to you."

I look at her & say, "Your kind ruled me for much of my life then to now, I did things, moved, changed, twisted, to please a succession of you most of whom gave me little & nothing."

I look within & realize I would not be here but for all that. Where, what then?
Elsewhere, elsewhom.

Faith is stuck to me foreign & forever.

There is no Art but the truth.

xcix.

Global Wall is more relaxed now. He's gone over the alarm system with his chief security officer, the one he instructed to make sure no monitoring device is ever visible. Unlimited budget & total accountability were his other parameters.

The man nodded. He had worked for loony rich powerful men before, knew how they thought, their obsession with perfection. He only asked one question at this first meeting of theirs.

"Shoot to kill?"

"No. They belong to me. They are to be unharmed at all costs."

"And others who may get involved?"

Global Wall nodded & dismissed him.

Later Global Wall will visit them. They like it, once they accept their new lives. The early stages are scripted & he has no taste for it. His design, every last bit, but not to his liking.

One concern had been brought to him. A man loose in the White Woods. Nothing worrisome: a new employee, unarmed, foolishly curious. Global Wall nodded again. In his

own suite a select few waited him. Since he changed them often, a random rotation he's conceived but did not control, he didn't know which ones. Sometimes a rookie with especial promise thrown in for advanced training.

But he was tired. They gathered around him as he fell to his night terrors. The rookie kissed his forehead. She'd seen how it could go here otherwise & decided to survive. Conjuring her few memories from TV she lay near him all night awake, willing, soft.

Global Wall saw the ice approaching & cringed. Shook. Growled. Roared. Beat the blood within to ready.

Maya brings out her book as Dylan brings out his bag of mushrooms as John decides they had better try some new way quickly or he had better leave them

He looks from the curled grey boogers in Dylan's hand to the torn dirty book in Maya's—

“Is this what we have to help us?”

He looks harder at Maya then stops. Not now, yet, maybe ever. Still, there's that too.

He stands.

Maya stands too, stubborn, something else. Fearless, nothing to lose. She's wrong about that. Always more to lose while alive.

He finds her curled loosely next to & his first thought, one combining lick & crunch, becomes his second thought, which is: protect her.

No, not how it works here. Long ago, not how it works. Here's how it works: feel a little, just a bit too much, a snapped button & a word & all gone. That's how things are built to work here. Purpose, mission.

Protect her.

Hunger, the beast within, shifts, testing. All are garbed for their purpose, their place in the mission.

Protect her.

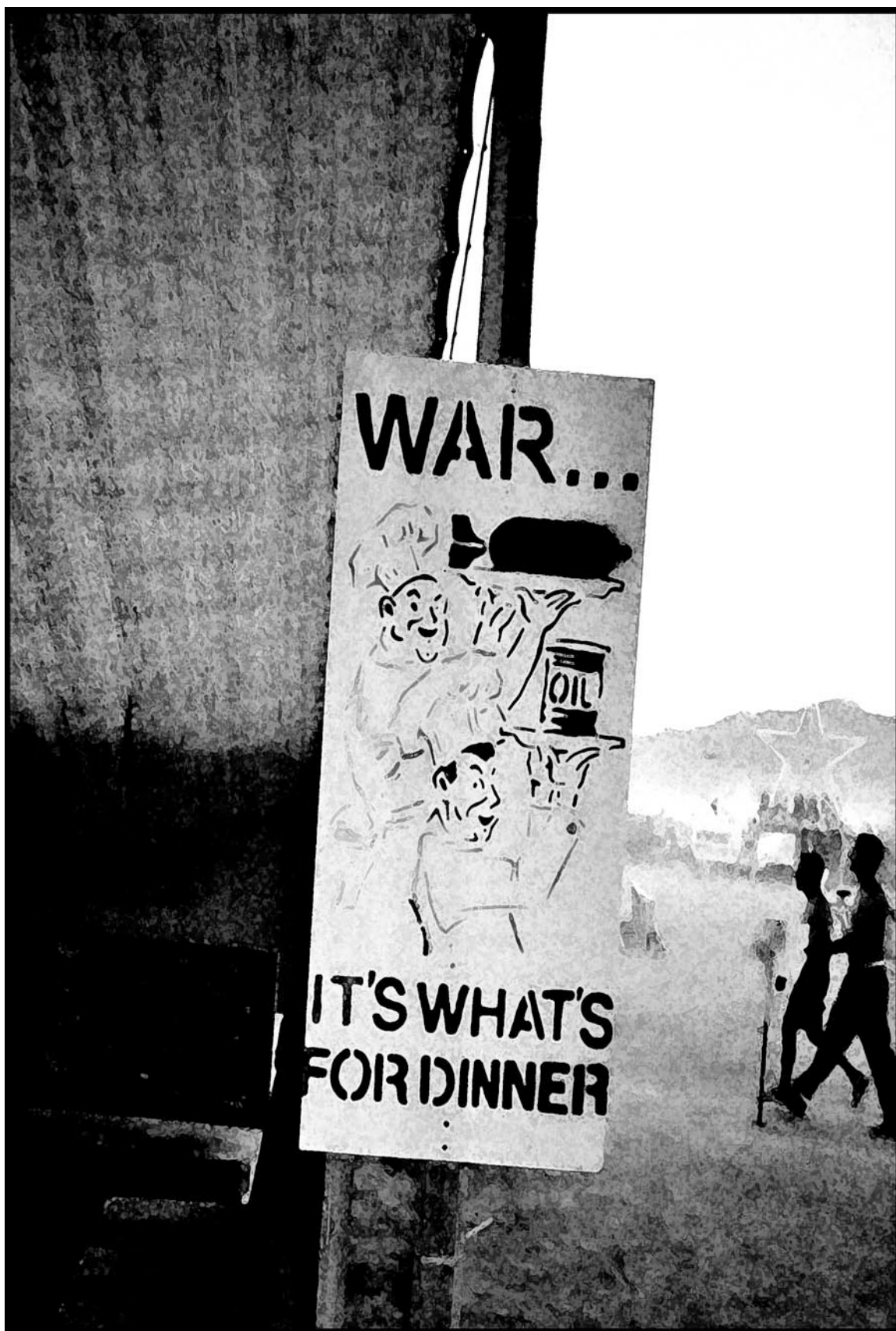
He orders her to the corner, faced to the wall, kneeling. She obliges but loses nothing. He begins to work. The others are ordered away. His man is summoned. Ways are discussed. She doesn't listen.

What, what then? Any face that matters? Where? What hand, what eye, which voice?

It wasn't always so elaborate. It used to be blunt. He'd decided that what dank within him, that monstrous & foul, was a world not to be tamped & held but raised up—raised high—

Money bought him what he wanted, land, buildings. Slowly built up, his identity shed dollar by dollar, who he was left behind until what remained was respectfully buried in a good cemetery in a town where he'd not lived a single day.

The early mistakes. No successful force in this universe *forces*. Too much will lash back & harder eventually. A few men sat in prisons or rested in morgues.



His man came along, studied the operation, that it would not last, no purpose, no pleasure, & asked, simply: Why?

Global Wall said because I want to decide. His man said it's easier to decide in an atmosphere of agreeability. Grabbing them off the street doesn't help.

What then?

Make them want to come. Invite them. Nothing lures the bunny like a whiff of free carrot.

So the operation shed itself, sold its assets, sent every girl home. Their cracked conflicting story led the authorities to the spot & nothing was there. Not a footprint, not a charred brick. Asked who, none could say. Asked what, it was hard to describe. He took something. I'm missing something.

Later, dreams. I would have given it to him. I liked him. I wanted to. But he wasn't having fun. If it's going to be that way it has to be fun.

A few tried to find him, not for revenge, more for another try. Go figure. Waste a life doing so.

They refined their purpose. Rougher, more spiritual.

Sometimes a lesson had to be incurred. Global Wall taught his people how. How to touch. How to speak. What would work. What was allowed.

Control was not stressed from above but among. Each group had at least one girl who was the virus. Studied before contacted, at length. Her life filled with Global Wall's people. Every movement, every word. her favorite teacher. The neighbor who invited her over to try on bikinis he wanted to give his daughter. The musician she most admired who, beholding her X'd figure in his hotel bed, elected to kiss her hand twice & her left nipple once before carrying her into a taxi. This girl would infect the rest with stories, erotic mind control so subtle none would admit its reality. What they'd come to from strung-out curiosity become obsession. Why her, not me? Why any of of them? *Why not me?*

Dylan spills out half his bag & they share between them, chewing slowly. The book is next. John eyes Maya but she is recalling why she'd come out to Astoria & how a decision waited her still.

c.

How does one diminish from one's kind without doing likewise from one's self? There is no place to surrender but how spent the hours, how spent the days. None else.

What? What then? To keep asking, & why this book called *Why?* What matter?

"Tell me what else to know"

She says nothing.

"I see the same & more of it all the time. Always near chaos, always near solution. Never either for long."

She still says nothing.

"Tell me something."

"Tell you what? You've come this far & know nothing. What would you have me add? It's your path. Walk it! Bravely, or be a coward, but walk it."

"Nothing else?"

"I haven't had anything else to show you in a long time. We ran our days. We keep around each other now for sentiment."

"That's it?"

"Not much else right now. Maybe later."

I nod.

ci.

So figure what about Noisy Children, more sentiment or vital, or necessary good or bad, which if any—they are touring again & sometimes the reviews get strange, as though Americus assures that reporters drink the kykeon & witness the secrets.

The night they run into Ricky Jensen is sweet. He's left *Thunder Road* as too mainstream & vanilla to get rock & roll anymore. Now he runs a website with a wide following—& paper issues in major cities to keep a hand in that way too—

Calls it, what else, *Eleusian Times*, attracts writers & artists toward the underground tip, but Jensen is still looking angled at everything.

I sit with him & Americus. Old trio.

"Who's most real among?"

"We're all real, Soulard."

"Sure thing. Real as necessary."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning how real do people have to be most times? Enough to breath, eat, shit, speak some words. Fuck maybe, that's another level. I'm just asking how much real is needed? How much is showing up clothed & clean & on time?"

"Yah. That answers me."

"What else would you want? There are no answers. I show up in your books rarely but I do keep showing up. You explain my doings each time. So last time was *Thunder Road*, now *Eleusian Times*. A wife for awhile. Some groupies. OK. I accept that."

"And my band. You used to know all our albums by heart. Now we're something else."

"Is this bad?"

"It just is. You don't write on these pages like once."

"I miss those years."

"They mostly sucked."

"But they're so gone."

"You miss their possibilities."

"Yah I guess."

"So what next? Are you asking that?"

"Yah, I ask. But I don't see much to answer me."

"It's there. Look for the subtle & smart."

"Meaning?"

"Tend natively."

"Fuck you both." I stand.

They nod & smile. "Whatever it takes to still care, Soulard."

"I do. Fuck all, I do."

Jensen watches Noisy Children rock his city's best bar, sees how the walls shimmer gone, the fires, the dancers, the band opens out into a shared dream. He nods. Good. Good.

cii.

They chew & chew & make faces at each other & Maya laughs like starlight & crickets, Dylan winces happy within watching her chew & chew wants to ask her have you eaten mushrooms

"—before?" John is looking at him. But he asked Maya because she says maybe so.

"Maybe so?" he says aloud & is shocked by his voice.

She smiles but adds no comment. Seeing his face crinkle she sticks out her tongue & rolls her eyes up into her head. He laughs again & she laughs again & John looks around muddled by his feelings right now. Should I just go back? These are just street kids, you see them all over the downtown. Why am I doing this when I just go dry?

He might be crying & they gather pup around him. It feels good & he has done this before but it was so long ago as to be another's sunny life.

The TV flips to another station on its own & the drinkers groan. They glare at me like I have any control over this.

"Can't you figure this out better?"

"Really!"

"We like it but it's too, what do you call it? Shitzophrenic"

"Hah! You lunk! That's not the word!"

"Close enough! You get me. It's like a TV show that belongs in the looney tunes house. Am I wrong?"

Maya moves the radio station knob & the voices fade. How they ended up downtown in this store is unclear.

John says "I thought that was a TV show." He stands very still until Maya & Dylan nudge him a little.

What's this? I don't know. Who are these kids? How did I meet them? Where's my cabin? Where's my job? Where's Marie? Was that her name? Was she real?

They guide him from the store when a cop on his dinner break looks over too curiously. Maya spends a little self respect by giving him a flirty little look & an extra wiggle of her ass as they leave. Maybe that helps—he doesn't follow.

They lead John to a set of bank steps & Maya sets down holding his arm lightly. Dylan goes to get them some bottled water at a little store across the busy street. Maya wraps him in a look he cannot do but swathe within as he goes.

“Are we in Portland?”

“I think so.”

“How did we get here?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What’s your name?”

“Maya. And that’s Dylan.”

“I’m John. I’m having a weird day. Days.”

She nods, letting him talk or not as he will. She’s made a deal with the shrooms already, such as they deal at all: let her keep cool till they are safe. She has unfinished business with them—but, please, not yet—

they seem to agree—the steps remain steps—no cruisers slow past them—John is fragile right now but responds to her ministrations—

“We’re waiting for Dylan?”

“He’s getting us water.”

“Is he your boyfriend?”

She laughs again & the shrooms nearly decide to take her then & there—she breathes very slowly for a minute & they loose some. But waiting—

“Sorry. It’s not my business. Thank you for sitting with me.”

“It’s fine. We’re friends. Why are you running?”

“I’m not. I’m sitting?”

“I mean before. You looked really scared.”

“Oh. Yah. Someone’s probably mad at me. I’m . . . stubborn . . . & curious. Do you understand? I didn’t mean harm.”

“I understand.” Where’s Dylan?

Dylan is a little lost. Getting across the street went OK though he got mixed up & when he looked back there were no bank stairs or Maya or John. But Maya’s look was real, he knew so because it reminded him of Ophelia. But more so. Her looks held his hand; Maya’s kissed his cheek.

He goes into the store & is hit by cool & noise. Behind the counter to the right of the door a radio & TV are going. Radio has a ballgame on. TV shows a drowned city & terrified people.

The owner is brown-skinned & kind. Life has simply beaten the mean out of him. He looks at Dylan & smiles, says hello, but taps his ears when Dylan starts to reply. Dylan nods & tries to recall his task. Water. Maya. Water. Maya.

The soda case is in the rear of the small store & Dylan finds it OK. None of this is hard but he’s unsettled down deep. Neon lights & garish packages. Where’s Maya?

The old man nods. "There. Those two bottles. Take them, pup. You are in no danger here, but your friends are waiting. Night soon."

"Did they send you?"

"Who?"

"The mushrooms" Dylan says softly.

He laughs. "Not exactly. I told you I would look in on you."

"Am I doing OK?"

"Well enough. Let's wait some more to see what's next."

Dylan, who talks to few, even Ophelia would call him Dear Silence, finds himself chatty as fuck. "Does she like me?" "She likes everything." "What should I do?" "Take care of her when she lets you. Let her do the same for you." "What else?"

His face darkens. "Beware & be aware. Both friends & enemies are ever close." Dylan nods. Seeing the old man again has balanced him some. He pays for the water without fuss & leaves.

"Are they safe?"

"Nobody is."

"What can you do?"

The old man shakes his head.

Maya & John continue staring at each other. "How are you not Marie?" "I'm Maya" "But how are you not her?" "I don't know her" "I know her. I know you." "I don't know" "Why did you leave me?" "I'm right here!" "I know you love me" "I'm not Marie" "I love you too. I'll do better"

Maya breathes slower, deeper, relaxes.

"You will have to find her again." "I will. I thought I did. Before. It was strange." "You have to find her & tell her. But—" "What?" "You have to remember something" "What?" "Do you promise?" "Yes" "She may not love you anymore" "Why?" "Things change. If she doesn't love you anymore, you have two choices." "What?" "Accept it or say goodbye." "No others?" "Maybe so. But I can't tell you."

She sees Dylan & takes John's face, gently turns it from her. Dylan looks a little spooked by everything but OK enough.

He hands Maya the bottles of water. Smiling at this deference, Maya uncaps both & hands one to each. "Drink. Slowly. Water is good, especially fresh, clean water. Feel it come in, clean." She smiles. Dylan hurriedly drinks slowly. John holds his bottle like an artifact. She motions at him. He sips.

Night comes about by accumulation & sudden leap. The city empties. They have to go.

"Dylan, where do you live?"

"Under the bridge."

"No, I mean now. Your friends got you a place?"

"Oh."

"Do you remember?"

"Not the bridge?"

"You wrote it down?"

He nods & pulls out his scrap of paper, folded, from his jeans inner pocket, & to boot it's wrapped in plastic.

She doesn't laugh. Reads. "OK." Reads again. "This is over the water. We have to get the bus."

John starts at this. "No. You two go. I can't go any further from my job." He can't tell Maya from Marie & knows he has to work his way back.

She nods. From her bag a piece of paper to copy Dylan's address. "If it gets weird, go there. Find us."

John walks off & she twinges. Leaving a trip buddy on his own in a city he didn't seem to know crossed against her beliefs.

She takes Dylan's hand & knows she won't be letting go. Whoever this boy is, whoever she becomes over the long night ahead, their hands will stand one strong knot of comfort. They walk.

ciii.

Do all movements toward spirit & liberty begin in violence & chaos, must they? Global Wall remembers & wonders.

The early days were rough & often he remembers the first. Sweet, then lashing, then wild. It was all filmed.

Break the mind, engage the body, never a rule he'd completely left. Not a camera anywhere, his other long rule.

The illusion of choice along the way; this had changed. His man had shown him the choices must be real.

But that first one. Studied for months. Patience beyond patience. She walked through, lived entirely within a matrix of surveillance.

At a crucial hour shown a re-edited film of her intimate solitary. Cameras impossibly close to her mouth wetting & parting as her fingers stroked black panties, microphones catching her quickening breath, close-ups of her nipples hardening through long black nightshirt with **HARD COLD STONE BITCH** delicately printed on it in pink loops. Shots of her in the shower, the harder breathing mixed in with the water's swoosh. The final scene in the movie her taking, the screen broken into multiple, each an angle on the moment, the storm-roughed trees, the soft cloth on her mouth, drugged enough to dull her but not let her pass out or lose awareness, fear kept alert in her, the hand that easily swiped her ass, letting her know this is what happens, this is how it is.

"Please" she said over & over.

"Please what?" said a voice sounding different each time.

"Don't hurt me. Let me go."

"Nobody has hurt you. You could leave but—" the voice leaves off & the screen shows a live shot of someone she loves. Her cry is sudden & loud. Someone is stripped, kneeling, blindfolded, hand cuffed tightly.

"No"

"All you do you must do willing." Old man's broken sad voice.

"Please!"

"Decide." A corporate woman's shilling voice.

"Please!" she cries & panics.

"A last request to decide. If you do not, you alone will be let go. You will be processed, & returned. Not a single memory of any of this will remain. None." A voice sounding so much like her own she whimpers.

"OK," she whispers.

The film shows someone being unbound save blindfold by pairs of hands, silent. The edge of a car arriving, boarding, departing.

Nothing happens for days. She wakes to a new set of HARD COLD STONE BITCH & black panties & a dish of warm, rich food. No voices, nobody.

Then she wakes to a new costume. Her favorite. She looks at it newly, like clothes could be a hellish beast.

Pink & black, short-sleeved shirt covering little of her flat stomach, skirt black lacy, above her knees, black thong underwear writ on its front *Wet-N-Ready* in gold, black hose, spiked shoes, pink hair ribbons, makeup for face & eyes, she cringes.

"They all did it!" she screams. "We all dressed like sluts to tease the guys! Why me?" She says this last over & over. Notices eventually a bare hum through her tears & convulsions.

One word: "Dress." Male? Or a deep-voiced female. She doesn't move or speak. The hum rises over the next hour, slowly. Starts to hurt. She resists until she can't. As she dresses, the shriek diminishes. If she pauses too long, it rises again.

They knew Utopia Mall West closer than the shop owners & security guards. Knew where & what & how to steal. Knew the secret rooms where stories claimed guards brought whores for an hour or two. Knew every supposed dealer & which to avoid if they ever wanted something.

Mostly, they knew Old Charlie's Corner. Owned it. It was where old men cruised for high school girls. Her & Britt, Carly & Darla hadn't done anything yet but they knew the stories.

You hung out, they watched you, you ignored them. A fountain separated you from them. A few teachers, off-duty cops. You dressed to tease them, you kept your lips glistening wet, your blouse low, your skirt high. You talked about guys at school, asshole parents, parties. They watched. Someone would get an ice cream cone & you'd share it. You'd laugh a lot. You'd play the moment. It was fun. Nobody was there who didn't want to be. The storefronts nearby were closed. Shitty mall. The better stores were in the other wings.

Boys from school rarely came. Most of the guys were old & gross but sometimes a nice one would pass by. Smile. You'd think it over. You knew your friends were too.

Even the bad stories didn't stop them. They weren't the only girls there & sometimes a girl & man did start talking. They'd heard about girls missing other things.

It was fun.

She waits. The air cools & she relaxes. Lays back. Curls near to sleep.

"You're very pretty." She smiles. "Do you have a boyfriend?" "Maybe." "Is he good-looking?" A hand on her thigh, she starts & a hand over her mouth instantly. "Do you go down on her deep?" She doesn't move. "Does he eat that shaved pussy of yours?" She feels abstracted, where the fuck is her body? "Do you taste cherry or are you used & loose?" She tries to think, remember.

She had taken a ride once. It was stupid but turned out OK. His truck looked good, & so did he & she'd missed the last fucking bus home.

Once he pulled off the curb she noticed the truck wasn't new. Sidelong glance said he wasn't shaved. She resisted pulling her skirt more over her knees.

His hand on her thigh as he talked. About construction work. About fishing. Good fish. Fresh fish. Fresh things are the best. Shiny skin, smooth, tight, his hand pushing her skirt up a little.

"Stop it!" she said suddenly, loud. His hand jerked away. He smiled & kept driving. "Leave me out here." He pulled over & she was almost ready to breathe again when his truck left the road entirely into a patch of woods.

Breath in her face, heavy torso. "What would one more fuck be to a slut like you." "I'm a virgin." She said it suddenly knowing she had nothing else. His body relaxed a bit. His hand left off stroking her pussy through her thong. He touched her long blonde hair. She was frozen. He didn't do much. Made her squeeze his cock. Chewed her nipples.

"I'll be watching you," was his last comment as he left her off, "turn your corner today." Kept her thong.

Amazingly, time passed, & she was back at Charlie's Corner. Her friends didn't know & she decided she could handle it. Just no more hitchhiking.

She can't see or it's so dark it doesn't matter. She waits.

"Adjust the dosage."

If anything she was hornier after that night in the truck. She thought about it a lot & decided that she'd learned something. She was a freak. A dirty girl. Her friends looked at her often & could not figure out the new angle. It began before she met Todd but eventually they forgot that & simply blamed him.

civ.

Riding the bus, they heard the following story:

“Three cops, plainclothes detectives, are out in the middle of nowhere, one middle-aged, two a little younger.

“Gathered close, the older one distributes the booty: plastic-wadded sheafs of cash & tight bags of marijuana.

“He nods. ‘This never happened. None of us were ever here.’ They walk to his car hidden in nearby tall grass, & find it is sinking into the earth. Swamp, quicksand, something.

“Desperate, they try to start it, push it, move it. They fail. It sinks out of sight.

“No car back to town, no way to account for their time or the car’s loss.

“I heard later that the money was counterfeit & the grass was schwag.”

Dylan & Maya sit close, twined, dissolved, two in one, the bus smooth & jerky toward Dylan’s hardly known new home. They say little aloud, uncurling into shroom space, Maya knows what to come best in a safe place. Dylan watches in different ways, remembering the old man’s renewed warning.

Depart the city & bridge over the river to less lit places, blocks of dim buildings & 24-hour gas stations, now MLK Boulevard, one in every city, now the discount bedding store, the McDonald’s, the unemployment office, the barber, whirl of stores & empty shells—

There, coming up, how to stop it? Maya pulls the cord & they step off, walk tight hands but shaky, Maya leads she can feel Dylan crumbling, they hurry, large house, old porch, dark entryway, key in a door, step in & close. There.

Relief, she settles Dylan on his bed & she finds a chair next to it. Nothing said.

Find Marie? Wasn’t that her back there? Maybe once. He’d seen glimpses of someone like that, but no, not much. In that fucked vision thing she was in a salon.

He stops, a street corner, thinks. Walk signal, Don’t Walk signal, Walk signal.

I bet it’s not far from here. She said show up as a man not a mist. What’s the difference? That’s the mushrooms talking.

Is it, John?

I left you little bastards a long time ago.

You know that’s not how it works.

I know I haven’t heard you since. All quiet. Not even little fungal crickets in my head.

Why tonight then?

I don’t know. Those kids . . .

The ones you left back there.

Yah. My job . . .

What job, John?

I’m a watchman.

“Watching what?”

“Caretaker, whatever.”

“Did any of it make sense?”

“Like this?”

“Is it really about you?”

"For me it is."

"Do you want to know? Do you care?"

"I love Marie."

"And those kids?"

"They'll be OK. He's got a room. She's going to take care of him."

"Why did you meet them?"

"I don't know. Does it matter?"

"What did she read to you?"

Suddenly he's looking around. She had read something, & it had scared him shitty & shitless, but then something had happened, & he'd forgotten.

He turns & walks back, quickly. The bank corner steps are still there, empty. He sits. What. What?

He shakes with thinking. No. Maybe. Yes. He waits, flotsam of words wash into his consciousness.

cv.

She reads & it nearly seems random & worse remembering his senses remind him of what he held aloof from in the moment, the shifting of her body within the layers of her clothing, his nose sniffed her high & low, found clean, found secret, found naivete, found pain, his ears licked at her breathing stretching it faster & slower with its aural wondering, his eyes drew shape & contour, found what laid calm in shadow, what glistened or could in a different moment, his touch leaped the space between, swung from carnal hungering molecule to the next, mulling slowly & deliciously where to land, where to slide, what to heat first & next & next, & taste buried, wildly hiding within his mouth, kept back, told nothing fooled when no such thing was possible, first this tiny spot then that one, leading touch now, tandem with sniff, the arcing roar of centuries wished to direct him & had his brain not a modern tampering overlay he would have in roar & whisper taken her without—

She read "Breathe. Relax. What you want is ever wanted, the coursing tress, the sparkling nail, what you want drives every man & mite, every leaf wild at daybreak toward sun, every slate, awled by water, wanted, what the universe dreams into being in ways infinite & one, feel it, let it out a bit, trouble its ambition, go! Go!

"Breathe. Relax. What's wrong? The sound of breaking, of foul pain? Some will lean hard by you, nod, nod, point & help you to point too, see what there is to be seen, much there is to be seen, all there is to be seen? Jerk, release. So easy to be chewed up *just like that*

"But then regard the beatific one who approaches. Ahh, calm. Happiness in detachment. Love a trinket, loyalty a manacle, possessions the excrement of fleshly existence. Come, child, let us count in rhyme our heap of nots. Not the king, not the TV, not the rock music. Not the wiggling tight pussy or the brute power of hard cock. Nature a symbol at best, blood metaphor, struggle the steps to release. Let up mull, muse, never wish, never want, never know, nothing to know, reality a cartoon, no, reality a puff on fingertips to be blown off—

“Breathe, relax! Breathe. Relax. Kneel, talk within to the Great Without, confess, beseech, do it by the steps, now stand, now sing, now couple, now mate, now cry forward with weapon words or bullets, turn face of faces towards what light was told of & so close now, so close!

“But no, nothing in any of this, I’m sorry, you’ll not long find the acceptable lid on your gaze in any of these, none & if there is a lid you will mimic the weed & burst it—

“Look closer, light dew on peach skin, look closer for what you wish, what I will have, what you wish, look closer & find not landing & rest but signs toward the elsewhere, the ever elsewhere, this universe of elsewheres, look toward, an answer! An answer?”

She stopped as though done & smiled at Dylan, that smile he couldn’t have, the one for just a moment he would have rent & crushed to possess—

The words return to him now & he sorts through them til he stumbles back & forth over “what I will have” & how it oddly nicked him then & now—
A threat? A promise? From who? A torn book?

He tries the shrooms.

“Is she in danger?”

“Why are you back on these steps?”

“It’s not Dylan. He loves her like a puppy.”

“Two puppies, John.”

“OK! OK!” He stands shrieking & clutching his head.

“What do I do?”

Silence.

He has the address. He remembers. He has the address.

“John.”

“I remember why I stopped.”

“Nothing stops.”

He nods, walks, curses. Blows Marie a kiss from long & deep in his heart. Knows that in his vision of Marie it was Mount Rainier near Seattle that he saw from his vista. Walks his path toward North Portland.

I look at the Viking. “Are you going to show me any of your books?”

He laughs. “They’re *secret* books!”

“So’s this one.”

He nods. Pulls out a small fat black book & slowly opens it. Fire blows straight out of it. I shake my head. “Party tricks for rolling raver kids?”

He snorts.

“I’m wondering if any of them hold much I care about anymore.” “What do you care about?” “Why? And maybe how?” He nods again. “You don’t want a book. You want a god.” “Not found much of that yet.” “Maybe it has to find you.” I nod. I snort. It continues.

cvi.

Mistakes are one path to God’s grace, presuming a path, presuming God, presuming mistakes

stop, slow, think—
let it a little, melody, green, the pink of yearn—let it a little & a little—
one path to God’s grace—others? War? Art? Brutality? A numbered or numberless paths—

I sit here thinking: we’re born to breed more breeders. We are fucking crops to the task. how is anything not consuming & gone with nearly no meaning external to human concerns?

TripTown comes on, & the bar at Luna T’s gets noisy, some cheers, some boos. Too freak a TV show for some tastes.

But regard: a city at night, long shots of streets neon & kinetic, people clumped excitedly at street corners, others crowding into red-curtained clubs, & I hear the sound of feeding. I press this episode with fleshly noises, grunts & moans, human desire no more sacred than cockroach eggs or wheatfields—

“Hey stop it! We’re trying to watch!”

“You’re all fucking cattle, your lives mean nothing. The excitement of hours fades & you will dry up with disease or decay. Nothing survives. Nothing endures but records of suffering.”

“Endurance too.”

“Endurance is for slaves. The lords of the planet purchase, control, shape & move as they need.”

“Are we slaves?”

“Nearly totally. Little we think or do or decide stands least chance of being free or original.”

The lights of the city sheen off puddles & blank glass. Watch cars move & slow. Feeling of how little is possible.

What then?

Where is there freedom if there is so little? Where is that which strays from, other, away?

I watch & realize it’s nearly futile. But something. What? Something.

Where to point, lean, crawl toward something hope, something brilliant with calm,

Swoop along, among faces each a sticky grope, a complex tangled with names, memories—

& I think: more. other. I bear no beliefs perpetually save ink to paper & that is old habit too,

I believe in nothing per se—

Yet bear life along & one fussed deeply in concerned hours, wage slave no matter how high—

What then? What is it? I watch people feed, I feed, I listen to people argue, I argue—

What is beyond simple self-awareness but the pursuit of complex re-creation? Is Art my propaganda or something touching else, freedom, something—

I keep losing into the nearer contours of language—

I want to do better, seek purposefully to do better—

Dream of a sound landscape where words float pretty & true—dream it more than talk of kings & thugs—preachers, players—

Dream of renewal where all seems impoverished—cattle, chew, move along, cattle, breed, move along—

Deny brained wonders their high provinces of ego & likewise named costumed bodies no innards but flesh & sinew—



Cattle, feed, cattle, breed,

“Ice cream” Rebecca says suddenly.

“Ice cream?”

“Cherry. Mm.” She nods.

cvii.

Maya remains on the chair near Dylan’s bed, vaguely shy of where he sleeps. She watches him but slyly, he’s been quiet for awhile, not absent but distracted certainly—

The shrooms press around her with their questions. She lets them nearer.

Is all this just a break from her task? She supposes so. Precious, then, & perhaps prescient too. She has no intention of losing this boy—

Still, she can’t be sure.

“Are you OK?” he says quietly. He looks suddenly present & scared.

Oh. She’s crying. Turns, sees his large faded yellow radio, a block of archaic wires & buttons. Turns it on & rotates the station dial. Noodles of music & voices come & go. Then piano music, soft but thrilling. Chopin? She leaves it on.

They are alone. Door shut. Bed soft. This usually means a tussle to get her clothes off. Not this hour.

“You don’t like this room?” she says softly.

He looks around. The narrow, fragile-looking writing desk & its candle-holder, yellow candle never lit. Corner cabinet with its odd pictures of the middle-aged landlady. Beat bureau with its dusty mirror. Another cabinet large with old dishes & jars—his bed one table upside down on a frame, mattresses piled up between its legs, three or four blankets—

“I like that” he pointed to the tiny black & white television on a narrow table next to the bed.

She frowns.

I turn & see an amorphous human blob in a black cotton covering & am sure this creature will shrink or die soon—& I wonder over this ripe, rotting flesh world—there are no answers for it, & the questions lack grounding to stand & compel any—

I stare at sickly looking toes in brown leather sandals & wonder why the fuck the world wheezes with pain & war—

A thigh gross with fat & a voice jittering along saying nothing—someone spoke of ants, of paying them mind, of caring, of symbiosis—

others watched a king grey toward dullness—

Whatever any of it meant is it all worth it?

Many voices, sum to a smooth noise,
is it all worth it?

Will it prove worth it too late,

as fall accelerates?

I remember a place far from here, large & little lovely, sitting there with books, hundreds of hours there alone—this prattle nothing to that memory—this page love note to those hours—

Draw in deep from other days & feel them there, within still, feel them sparkle on the branches, up & off, thousand miles of days & more

“—leader in the House of Representatives indicted earlier today”

“Now *that’s* something. One of them bastards finally getting the cuffs—”

“Elsewhere, speculation runs high that another high-level administration official will also faces charges—”

“Watch the Empire crumble, baby! Brick by brick, jerk off by—”

“Don’t be so certain, Mac. Could be a smokescreen, prune a few bad branches so the trunk of evil remains—”

“polls are at an all-time low as the combination of the War abroad & natural disasters at home—”

“Nobody can survive this & keep his crown high. Nobody!”

Remember other days & years how they resemble exciting, unsettling now—how sides dared each other—how most knew little & kept close to sugar, booze, & TV—

What really changes? What has ever really changed? Someone is always being cuffed, rightly, wrongly, someone always on knees while another accepts greater power humbly from those he has & will crush, smiling—

What changes over the miles & hours?

“They’ll fall this time, I’m telling you, hard & f’good! People are waking up! Better days, friends, better days ahead!”

All raise a glass & I lose the hour, year, century, city, state, continent—& wonder if the lords of the planet gladden at the gloating words of countless slaves, mistaking the moment for a victory—

Lords of the planet—?

cvi.

The small black & white TV in Dylan’s room is on, right next to his bedside, he’s twisted on his bed watching, Maya further away from her chair—

She didn’t know at first, it had been a long while, but TV, or just this TV, wasn’t like she remembered—it showed funny programs that didn’t last very long & when she heard Dylan’s gruff, high, melodious laugh for the first time she felt something she’s maybe never felt before—she loved him straight, love rustled from her heart’s most yearning shadows—not a word—the moment of knowing, of passage from one side to other, brief & now here she was—& the shrooms did not drown her in fear & revelation this time—she didn’t believe they ever had—or if so not from malevolence—here she was, near a body & being for which she bore no wall, no difference, such love quietly, secretly declares all

between you & I open, flourishes while chance allows reciprocation—sometimes longer—love not negotiable—not rationale & leashed—floats about wherever one walks—rarely visible—a bundle of strange words, a leaping guitar, prayers grateful in an otherwise untelling how—Maya felt a twist of pulses—to have carried him in her flat unknown stomach—sung him tiny babe weeping toward dreams—erotic hungers present too but shhh, quiet, quiet—claws for his safety, roar against what dangers—teach me how to love him—is it learned? Can I know? What is this, what do I do, is it the shrooms, does he like me too—am I pretty, Dylan? am I pretty, Dylan? Am I pretty, Dylan? Am I pretty?

One side to the other a lash's swoop up & down—Dylan is still laughing, she struggles to cohere & hardly does—

The TV shows a cartoon wall, large cement blocks, moss hanging hippy over its top, the wall is sleeping, a craggy face set within its stones, snoozing, cars whizz by & it seems the wall is dreaming as the cars blur to spaceships & then to speeding human bodies more like faces with wings & no torso—these blur to starlight, shaped starlight & still the wall slumbers, light begins to arrive, toward sunrise, & what flies by can't rightly be called corporeal & perhaps about to disappear entirely when the wall's face shows by its jittering breath waking & the process slows & reverses until it opens up lovely eyes longlashed to see present day cars shaped like leaping cats & fat loaves of bread & child's building blocks cruising by same as when sleep had come—Dylan laughs & laughs & wriggles around to see Maya who has to close her mouth quick for lack of knowing how to respond to the last ten minutes of her life—

She dreamed at night of the time in the truck, knew she'd got lucky she wasn't knifed & dumped, yet something in her yearned, yearned hard & wet for it, for something, for another chance, she'd started working with the moon, sleeping in greater undress as it approached fullness, moving around in a dancing frenzy, pushing her bed in a corner to give her body room to unfurl—

The Mall wasn't enough after awhile & one day she didn't show up. Went to the library & began research on what she felt & wanted—it was slow at first—

Other trucks beeped & invited—she was used to it—she didn't go—it wasn't enough—none of it was—nobody noticed the stranger inside her familiar costume—the one who kept scrapbooks of erotic magazine ads, looking & looking—

Her English teacher had a good try—he had a reputation for smiling a little too long at some girls, & other rumors hung around too about him—

Someone named Yeats he adored & sang out “who can tell the dancer from the dance?” she felt her thighs spasm, he felt it too from the contour of his trousers, later his breath near her, his hands close, his eyes dipping right into her blouse, roving for her hard nipple under the bit of black lace concealing it

but no—she resisted—after that the whole thing began to fade—with the mercilessness of youth, its crass unpredictability, its strange sentiments—it was nearly gone the day her world changed—

This time it wasn't an unshaven hick & his speedy old pickup truck—it was a black van & when she found herself in it she knew a plea of virginity wouldn't retrieve her freedom—

What she wondered what how they could have known that she & Jasmine her baby sister were alone that night. Her mother & step-dad were never, fucking *ever* away. His uncle had died, or was dying, she wasn't sure, the call came early evening & they were packed & gone—

“Watch Jazz. No visitors. Be good” her mother flung at her on the way out after Jude. Jude nodded in that way of his, looking somewhere over her head. She'd tried, just curious, but the lowest cut shirt wouldn't get the least gander from him. Not a freaking nibble. She's the only girl in school with the virtuous male step-parent.

Jazz is 13 & dangerous already. Likes going into online chat rooms & teasing older men. Has a harem of them. Jazz floats. Is adored by all; even Jude looks into her eyes if not lower.

No cybersex for this girl. She's been picking her way through the Kama Sutra, annoyed by it. Annoyed by parents who don't know what she faces.

The night drags. TV is boring. She nearly calls her old Mall friends but that would mean explanations. A pint of Ben & Jerry's Phish Phood helps, the little dark chocolate fishes rock—

In her bed, lights out, not even music. Means to say good night to Jazz, joke about the Man Harem & what the latest bids for flesh space meetings are, when she simply heaves & falls asleep.

Underwater in her dream. Swimming & breathing like a fish. She's dreamed this one before. Wearing a bikini much too skimpy for her own tastes—all well until she's unable to breathe—starts choking—panics—wakes—

the room is dark but not empty. The hand on her mouth catches her gasp & stifles her scream—

“Shhh. It's time, little girl. You've been waiting.”

So alive with fear it's like some other kind of death. No words, no thoughts. Animal panic.

Another hand moves along her flesh, lightly, probing, almost cataloguing her. Not forceful, hardly wanting. Just a touch her & then there. She flinches hard when the hand moves upwards under her blouse, & its mate constricts her breathing near to the point of crushing her throat.

“That was not good at all. Do you see what happens when you move? Nod once.”

She nods, once, & the hand continues. Cups each of her breasts, as though weighing, measures between two fingers her nipples, counting?

Her panic overwhelms her when the hand moves below her waist & tugs with ease her panties. She clenches as quietly as possible, barely a movement, & the other hand does not punish. She feels her pussy inventoried, its trimmed pubic hair, keeps breathing, keeps still, but when two of the fingers press very gently inside her, she passes out.

Fragments of memories, of being carried, of being transported. Of not being returned her underwear & so traveling to her fate in only a night shirt.

Comes fully awake only much later when shown her sister Jazz nude & bound. Now she knows there is no hope.

She waits, dressed in short skirt & ribbons. Waits. Wonders what her mother & Jude will do. What Jazz will remember. Probably nothing.

Mostly she thinks about the two hands, the rough, punishing one & the gentler, probing one. Decides her chance is in the gentler hand's having control over what happens to her.

Sink & a toilet in the corner. She learns to do all she must knowing cameras watch her. No more voices after the order to dress.

Food appears once, in the morning; upon her waking she finds it. Enough to last the day if she rations. Fish & fruit & vegetables. What is any of this?

She tries to stay awake for the food's delivery & can't. Wonders if it's drugged. One day eats everything in the morning hoping the drug will wear off. It doesn't. Is it in the air? Nothing works.

Eventually, she sleeps more until what is real & what isn't is hard to discern. Sometimes she's back home with Jazz, watching her sister at chatrooms, playing her harems. One asks if she's alone. She says her twin sister is there too. Another asks what's she wearing; Jazz describes a Winnie the Pooh pajama set she hadn't worn in years. A third asks if she's a virgin; she tells how her neighbor seduced her one night, elaborately spinning the myth.

Jazz is wearing pink & blue, not her usual colors but she is mercurial. What's odd are the golden bracelets on her wrists, & the matching one around her head, gold, shining, thicker, Jazz, something's wrong, look at me—

Old Charlie's Corner now, no segue, nothing, she's at Old Charlie's, alone, & there are a dozen men on the other side of the fountain. Smiling at her, every one, & nude. Without wanting to she looks at their cocks, all hard, yellow, white, black, some huge, some less, & she realizes they are studying her nude body & she can't move, can't cover up, oh god ohgod ohgod ohgod

She wakes alone & there's her daily tray of food, fish, fruits, vegetables—

To be continued in Cenacle | 67 | December 2008



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Why ? [a new fixtion]

(continued)

cix.

Dylan stands, slowly. "I have to go to the bathroom," he says softly. "It's upstairs."

Maya nods. Smiles or something like it. Dylan closes the door behind him.

She moves to the floor, slinks around to stretch out. The night grows thick about her. The TV noises fade somehow, maybe she's under the bed now.

Feels Dylan leave, again & again, she'd watched him with unturned head but not it keeps turning & he keeps going & she wonders what he meant by what he said.

She could panic but it never does much good. She learned that.

"OK," she whispers. "Now." Closes her eyes & lets the shroom space envelope her from within—

Will you talk to me?

We're always talking to you.

Will Dylan be OK?

[silence]

OK. Dumb question. What are we supposed to do?

What we?

Dylan & me. And John, if he comes here.

What were you before you met Dylan?

I was lost. I was happy & lost.

Now?

I'm just happy.

But?

It doesn't last. It never did.

And that's how it is?

No.

No?

Tell me something I can use or think about!

There are traps & doors. They resemble each other.

What else?

Nothing is really ever gone & nothing comes back.

Does Dylan like me?

[silence]

She twists again under the bed & then stays still as the world around her undoes again & again

Dylan is sitting with his friend on the stairs landing between the first & second floor.

Going to work is a good idea.

What if I don't want to?

You can't stay here.

A brown floppy-eared bunny slackly leaned against the wall. They'd met the night before.

What do I do with Maya?

What do you want to?

I don't know. I don't know about girls.

Nobody does.

It gets scarier. Earth hangs above her & she is floating perilous, all seems near to falling & she forces it back with her breath, sometimes breathing faster works, sometimes slower, finally she gently climbs away onto a blue desert floor where there is low shrieking & no daylight—

traps & doors resemble each

other, I can't know how

to do this, breathing slowly

to keep crawling, shrieking

is the world's collective

pain how do I get back to

Dylan? how? I have forgotten

so much how do I remember

him?

Dylan leaves his friend & climbs the stairs to the rooming house's second floor. Long dark hallway to kitchen, doors on either side, closed, locked, other boarders he guesses, new to this place, notices behind him an office, all sorts of dusty furniture, dusty pictures on the wall, turns back to the hallway & walks slowly a mirror between two of the doorways catches him & he looks

jumps back there's Maya looking back at him, smiling, just her face, shrooms' trick, he bets, she's so pretty, then she's Cordelia & tears mass in his eyes before he can flinch—

"I'm sorry"

"It's OK"

"She reminds me of you. But that's not fair."

"Nothing's fair, Dylan. The world is balanced but not fair."

He listens. "Are you OK?"

"I'm alright. I miss our days. But we had to grow up, right?"

"I suppose. I don't really feel it."

She laughs & his tears swallow him.

A door opens & a scruffy-bearded balding man in grey t-shirt & boxers looks out.

"You live here?"

"Downstairs."

"Lost?"

"No. I need the bathroom."

"It's down there. Off the kitchen. No shower but the bath water is hot."

"Thanks."

The man grimaces & shuts his door. Cordelia's not in the mirror. Just his scruffy young face with enlarged pupils. He looks deeper, sees sadness. Nth that he should—he's had it fine next to some. Still, it's there.

The bathroom's wallpaper is brown & its images smudged, shelves everywhere lined with coffee mugs & tourist trinkets. Walt Disney. Joe the Camel. The tub is an unloved off-white. The sink & toilet are clean through littered with new & ancient razors, toothbrushes, bars of soap, shaving cream & the like. He avoids the mirror & pisses long, long, feels like his body is renewing itself. Ah. Smile. Yes. "Piss for the Ages!" he remembers his old bridge friends would cry on their long-drinking nights. Exactly.

Passes from bathroom through kitchen to hallway again & just as he feels he'll handle this better he notices he's walking but making no progress. The other end of the hallway keeps stretching out further. He hears televisions behind the closed doors. Radios. Snoring. Soft talking maybe like prayer.

Shroom tricks. But they usually make some point with them. What this time?

He forgets which door he wants & a little panic surges in him.

cx.

John is lost. How did it happen? He thinks he took the wrong bus. Now where? Doesn't know. Doesn't care. Not for the moment.

This bench is good. Good enough. He tries to reassemble. Keeps dissipating. He laughs & then forgets to.

What then?

I don't know.

Will it be OK? When wasn't it? Am I safe? Are you?

He remembers before Marie. Before booze. Before any of this.

The woods. He'd spent a lot of time in the woods. His uncle had a cabin, nice place, built it himself. Sturdy. Good even in the winter.

Where was his uncle now? Not so far. Told him he'd inherit the cabin one day. Showed him how to use an axe, build a fire.

He read more after he quit college & hitchhiked out here. So much for yearly visits; he was committing to the West now.

Shakes his head. OK. 2005. Portland? Right. Guy sits on the bench & pulls a crumpled bag from his dirty coat. Hit of brown gunk. Swallows hard & with difficulty. "Wanna blast, brother?"

"No, thanks. I quit."

"Ahh. Yah, me too. Then the bitch left me & the henfucker laid me off. I needed a friend. You see."

"Yah. Been there."

"You OK? You look like me on a bad day. No offense!"

"Taking a breath."

Man nods, pushes back his black knit cap from viney white hair. "Yah. Good idea." Drinks again. "'World'll chop off your business & try to sell it back to you for double." John nods.

His companion is thickly dressed, John sees several layers of shirts & sweaters within his long coat. Old pants, faded khaki green. Simple black & white shoes. Clean. Worn but clean.

"I'm John."

"Rudy." His handshake is strong & steady.

"Nice night."

"You'll find them."

"Who?"

"I got you pegged for a father chasing his kid. Drugs, a boy, a girl maybe. I'm pretty good at it."

"It?"

"Guessing a man's business. I used to be better. Took me pretty far. Big house, nice car, sexy woman in my bed. Funny how they all come & go together." Laughs hoarsely.

"What happened?"

Fixes John with one bloodshot & one utterly clear blue-green eye. False, John knows in an instant. "I got to know too much. I couldn't stop it. It was hints for a long time & I used 'em. Then it got easy, & then it got to be too easy, & then I couldn't stop it."

John nods.

"I'd drink to dull it. Then it started falling apart. How do you steer a boat on God's own sea?"

John shrugs.

"I lost it. No, wait" he thinks. "I lost everything else."

"What do you do now?"

"I wait."

"For?"

The man smiles with well-kept yellowing teeth. "Not a father. But some sort of close love. Get along to them. There's some time."

John stands, dazed. "I don't know where—"

"That bus down the street coming. I saw you get off. Get back on & keep going."

John nods. "Thanks."

The man nods, raises his bagged beverage. "Better not to know next. Anyone who does will tell you the same."

John gets on the bus & continues along.

Rudy nods & pulls his jacket tighter.

Breathes slower after a few, calms, OK, a bus, mac, not brain surgery, near empty, you've got the address, ask the driver, politely, gather the words, here goes—

"We near Northeast Prescott Street?"

"Next stop."

"Thanks"

"No problem"

"How's your night going?"

"Peaceful. No arrests." Laughs.

"That's good. This a rough area?"

"It's OK in the daytime. The negroes & PRs come out at night, walk around til they find trouble"

"I see."

"I aint no racist but some people got no self-respect. The best ones find Christ & get cleaned up. I see them & can tell right off."

"I'm sure"

"The good book tells us all men are brothers. Some just don't know it yet so they don't act right."

"That's true."

"Here's your stop. Be safe."

"Thanks."

"Watch out for doors & traps!"

John twitches around but the bus is on its way.

OK, here it is. Walk a block or two & check on them.

What if they're . . . busy?

He knew Dylan was a novice but Maya looked—never mind that! He'd risk it to calm his worry. This night had to get back on his side somehow.

He walks through cool, comforting air, tries to focus on finding the house number, block after block, thoughts of Maya blur to memories of Marie, that apartment she lived in early on, her mother, her sister & kid, hardly a quiet or private moment til one weekend he came over to candles & serenity, to dancing to Marie's favorite slow electronic music, hands on her hips, moving in one sway, thinking love & desire played games with each other & we their pawns, did he love Marie that early on or really, simply want to fuck her? He was patient, he'd been told less is more & decided to believe finally after too many frenzied gropings for too little delight, just sway with her, it felt good, he released to it, what due will arrive—

John nearly on his knees, stopped, moaning, goddamn fucking mushrooms, gimme something to look forward to! Come on, some sliver of light! *Come on!*

He walks & the numbers close in on the one he wants. He's OK again, led the badness out for its run, all good, all something. Buttoned up. Functional.

There it is. 733 NE Prescott. Another grey old house on this street full of them. But this one contained his friends. This one would welcome him in. Maybe he could stay a little while. Dylan would understand.

—She needed to be taken, this was true, felt deeply, laid back, three fingers on her cheek, slide, lips parted, show your tongue, good, now smile, just a little, shhh, this is how it is, what's done, that's good, release to it, to yourself my fingers there & there, good, soft, soft, now smile, yes, you understand, shhh, move with me, it feels better that way, no talking, breathe, breathe, good, now there & there, that's it, you understand, what need there is, snap, & snap, shhh, slowly, there, that's good, show me, go on, show me, very pretty, I like

that, arch, hey! easy now easy there we go there it is now you may go on go on! You wish to please, go on, that's nice, very gently, ahh, very nice, now a little more, go on, *go on*, good, yes there's nothing else, all is safe & private smile safe & private smile safe & private, ohh, good, you see, more very nice, & now you again, now! now! that's better easy easy ahh soft soft so soft & wet yes wet I see wet & tight very ahh moan quietly that's good good now wider lips & lips wider now please me say it please me say it wider shhh safe & private here we are & smooth there feel that very smooth no fear no loss close close how we are raise up a little, good, yes now you feel it, oh very nice, now you feel it, good! moan! good! more! more! nothing is lost! nothing is lost! more! more! nothing departs & nothing comes back! come for me you fucking whore bitch slut CUM FOR ME NOW! AGAIN! HARD! HARDER NOW! now beg me me again for more

—& he pushes open the front door to a darkened vestibule & knocks at an inner door beyond it. Hears movement inside & waits. Maya opens the door to him, looking pretty white & shaky—

cxi.

World boils in blood, I say again, & the old man nods. I clink my electric juice to his black coffee, gaze on yon TV red & glowing, its newsmen fanged & yowling, nod,

“Hey how bout some hockey, barkeep? The Bruins are back!”

“Hell with that, put on the Sox!”

“And the Pats are some schmuck club?”

“Hey! We get em all! We need ten TVs in here, make it a sports bar like all the rest!”

“And some of them Daisy Duke girlies serving our drinks proper for a man's viewing pleasure!”

Everyone laughs. Luna T's Cafe has one TV & that too much at times—

I look at Knickerbocker, his old raw face—

“What are you?”

He shrugs. **“Fixtion.”**

“*What are you?*”

“I've spent my years asking that.”

“And?”

“Maybe I'm just pages in a book, maybe that's all this is. Maybe not. Humans make & make & make.”

“Why?”

“Fear. Hope. Want. Joy. Query another these suckling matters.”

“Do they seem such to you?”

He pauses. Stares me blackly for a pass. Then, I swear it, he laughs. Old explosive sloppy laugh, falling to the bartop, wet, messy laugh—

& in a beat the whole bar follows, blows apart in laughter—

Maybe other ways is it any way possible? Mutual arrival of want toward single climax, sate in hard, clear chords, is it possible?

We consider the King, again, as he folds back thinly & no novel depths await, what his hand once bid & the many went, went fast, & so, & so,

He does not retreat but he counts his munitions, press his remaining warriors for an extra fist to chest, he looks on the sky & no, nothing good, no, nothing good—please—

Why does no brave light step up now? A bloom, an open hand, a face childly with waking spirit?

What doubt leans all back? Which memories, how far back the blood?

Will we be led by number-counting little men hereon? Will the gestures be small &—what?

What possible, ask, what possible, ask it & to & past number-counting little men—*ask*—they can't stop you—

“There is no true lord or king. There is but creation & chaos,” Dr. Knickerbocker says softly.

“No lord?”

“None we may know & flutter upon his hand, trusting he will cup us kindly.”

“What then?”

“Force which thrusts us upon this world & later scratches us from it.”

“Force?”

A drinker interrupts. “No God, preacher? All these years you been sucking your juice & raving at the ceiling, now you say you're done with all that?”

Knickerbocker does not reply.

“You talk to that hippy freak, not to us?”

“What's that?” another asks. Mean drunks.

Knickerbocker is still silent.

“Leave him be, boys,” Mr. Bob says in a voice that implies a hand to collar & a drunk tossed to the curb.

The drinkers don't reply. The moment stretches into silence, then passes.

What just happened? Why is this book so run with violence?

World boils in blood the answer, what's left when the pretty books have been pushed aside for their unusable lies, boils in blood & put on the TV screen & slathered across the newspapers & barked of with glee by man-bastard-suits & woman-bitch-suits, boils in blood & charge you a dollar for your popcorn & soft seat to watch & roar for another—roar for another!

World boils in blood, in the gentlest puff too, call it desire, call it flesh's fury upon all, why here? why this? Why now? What else? Please. More. Don't. Then. Cry. Remember. Bludgeon by stroke. Pen as crushing as blade, all whelming swoops, none final, none the all & so we still.

World boils in blood, kin to water & fire, blow near, blow more, blow til one, blow by—

Raise til a welt of notes then slack til mute—

No answers, not a one, not less, not least, slice half a preacher & nothing holier about the guts—slice a guru—none wiser about the meat—

Is it? Can it? Will it? Promise—or don't—World boils in blood & *you another countless bubble*

World a bubbling reek of war &, worse, of peace, the stillness of staring faces on streets, in carriages, the dire dreams left to powder & blow from one's mind—

the endless bubbling reek of waiting & tomorrow & patience, hours gone unnamed, why & what bother?

“No good from a fist shaking at the unknown. Behold mine,” Dr. Knickerbocker quietly displays his gnarled appendages—I nod & do not agree. **“You won't stop anymore than I will.”**

“I stop when you do.”

“I don't. My pen is my fist, my feather, my blossom, my blade. It's my breath & my beat.” He nods. **“Thus you live, thus you fade.”**

cxii.

Dylan stops & feels the world stop with him. Moves & likewise. Not like it usually is. He tries to think. Ask the mushrooms.

All moves with all.

Also: something about traps & doors.

OK.

Reality is still here just not so sure about it, it doesn't seem to work right. Is Maya still downstairs? I hope so.

Maybe get partway. Get to the bunny, get that far, OK.

Doors & traps. OK.

Dylan closes his eyes & move forward slowly. Concentrates on his feet, feels his inner eyes drop down there to his boots, old, found in a heap, walk now, step, step, see if it works better, but not yet. Step, step. Step. Step.

Eyes open, whoosh in his head to take it all in. He moved! There's the door, on the right. That's the one. Close eyes, a few more steps—

"Find the can OK, kid?"

Which word? "Sir, yes."

"Sir?" Gritty, sloppy laugh. "Not heard that since I was a flyboy. Have a good night!" Still laughing, door shuts.

Makes it to the door, strangely calmer for that encounter, too simple & blunt not to be real. Something pulls away, some far fringe of terror, & he passes through the doorway & down the several steps to the landing. There his friend awaits.

"Hello again, Dylan."

"Is Maya still down there? Is she OK?"

"Are you?"

He nods slowly. "I'm trying to learn what they're showing me."

"Is it so hard?"

"I don't know. Sometimes. I'm glad I'm with Maya."

"Because she's like Cordelia?"

He nods, pauses, then shakes his head. "She was but not so much."

"Is that good?"

"I don't know. Maybe she sent me Maya when she couldn't come."

"Maya will care for you. Let her. Even when it's hard. Remember this, Dylan."

He nods. Sits still. Waits. No more for now. Later on maybe. It's OK. Looking to the entryway below he sees a faint light on the floor, from his room.

OK. Better.

Does any know what any other means? Each a tube of spirit-meat ambulating, does any know? Surrounded all day yet so much stays within. And so much stays within's within. Can any surface reveal true the blood & dream within?

I wonder & bear little answer. I watch, & little explains. I explain & know it sums scantily.

What then? Anything?

"Dylan" says a voice not Maya's from below, & John's face is looking up at him—

"Hi"

"Are you OK? I thought you were on the first floor"

"I am. I was using the . . . can"

John laughed, big laugh. Points. "In there? Is Maya in there? Is she OK?"

"I think so" Dylan comes down the stairs.

"Go in first. I might scare her just showing up."

Dylan pushes the door open. No Maya.

"Maya?"

Blonde head pops up from below other side of the bed. Her smile is obvious if somewhat crooked.

"John's here too"

She looks at him & shivers but keeps it close & somewhat obscure.

They come in & close the door. Safe from the world anyway.

I lived in that room, it's becoming years ago, but some vital remaining bit is there & then still. Well, figure that. I don't know how. How to convey it but to say it was a few months so intense that there are other years of my life don't match—I was alone most of the time & poor growing poorer—

I had a portable CD player & a handful of burned CDs. I had the notebook in my lap, I think, & the one in my bag—some clothes—a few books—

Why this interruption, or whatever it is? Somewhat to burst out with truth how where these people are I am, it's that near still—

Some book went “longing makes the best muse” & I wonder on this—

They look at me. “Should we go?” “I'm not sure.” “We can come back.” “Maybe.” “Now?” “No.”

I sit at the corner writing desk, its frail white chair, my back to them, turn on green-hooded lamp. “OK”

They forget me there & for a bit I choose to forget them, I am writing by candlelight after a long evening in the city, this is an especially tender born memory I don't know why—

I'd seen a movie, somewhat silly but asked for its moment of great attention—

I remember a bus, nearly a book too, a highway, a cinema not too far from my employ, a parking lot, a nicely potent psychedelic—why remember?

A movie called *Adaptation* I think—silly egghead movie—

A lot of bus rides then—to & from jobs, movies, chasing, looking, unloved, walking. Watched, ever? Oh maybe.

Writing at this candlelit table, a memory within a later hour in another city, another table, what any of it?

Why the fullest hours so mired in memory & want?

John keeps to a corner & watches & smiles lightly his hands slightly tight & damp no other clue

—hands to the necessary dance how they tremble along you learning heat & breath, how you move, how to move with you, where you shriek & sigh, the slow of knowing, where I will press harder, leave my mark, assure remembrance for any to come, this flesh was found good & met its hungry hour—

—nothing here, not even a decent lure for it—the boy will have to bite you after I leave—or some later boy—not my reason here—

—I lay in that bed he watches her lay across—tripping too, thick Mickey Mouse comforter—all hours—not a home but a paid niche—I don't know what happened to me in that room—

Love trumps longing—& takes her along—

Perhaps because I hit the floor & saw the world above from that view, saw what cruel was, what kind, had little, nothing to offer anyone & some kept talking to me & some didn't—

I learned in that suffering & I'm not the same—I learned that a person can lie to you & love you both—I learned that the world is too complex for black, white, grey, rainbow, time, space—maybe only dreams hint, my long idea—

I wrote & kept writing & found that this above all is what matters to me—not love, which involves others, but Art, which does not—

“Would Art be possible without others?” Rebecca asks.

“It can be.”

“And love? Is it secondary? Is it separate?”

I look at her. “In truth, I don’t know. But I drove crazy for love in those months & yet was alone, no hand, no face. Strangers watched me, a few made gestures. But my pen stuck in my pocket, my notebooks in a bag on my shoulder, there’s a difference.”

She nods.

This book veers again because I won’t write simply to storytell. All is relevant. I’ve been trying to untangle the world for decades & now can only think: this is how it is: the world *is* tangle. No center. No climax. No beginning nor end.

Dylan, John, & Maya all three fall into a shared shroom trance. She on the bed, the others on chairs. I light the many candles & go from the room, only remain in ink touching paper.

We seek to learn & know often to our own detriment. Yet few can help it.

cxiii.

Love carries longing along, the weeds secret in the straightest rose’s heart, the blood happy warrior in the prophet’s robes, dreams riling in & through every creature in sleep, dreams of soil & root, raw bites of sunshine, heavy sucks of rain, I do not believe that still or time or calm or even follow negate the beast, believe it little, believe it none, roads not straight get there a livelier way, delight the depths most when dip & curve & no barrier, no fence, no rut, just air pushing pulling tempting warning

Can a part mean all if not spread across the whole boiling wild waste of the world?

I feel the wild within & all around & trouble at its tamp, at its controlled bursts, at when it leaps sudden out & someone leans back & cries wicked, foul, cruel, unnatural—

When it happens, finally, she can’t describe what it is, what it means, how it feels, she tries to retreat at first but the punishing hand is swift & several words stay this: “Jazz is not safe yet” she holds her struggle & the kinder hand emerges, a soft hand, strokes her, is gentle, massaging, she is terrified but not completely, the bed is soft, she’s grown used to it, dreamed this moment countless times & ways, wishes the air were not a dark crimson cloud, who is this her first lover? Can she not know? She agrees to his hand undressing her slowly yes yes this is more than protecting Jazz I don’t know what but she’s been cared for here, someone intended her prepared for this, not starved & brutalled, she winces as the hands with their impossibly long soft smooth her panties off & after a complete absence begin on her dress or

is this crazy I'm almost naked! Why am I not fighting or begging or clawing?? What if they hurt Jazz too?

"Please" her invisible whisper

The hands stop suddenly & disappear & there is simple bare hot breathing

She waits, feeling cold, her bra still on, her dress at her knees—what now? Punishment?

"Who are you?"

The breathing slows, deepens, spreads, warms her, lifts her bra from her fingerless & her dress gone too & her ribbon loosed now & sliding down her face across her cheeks, mouth, around her neck, her terror becomes pleasure of some weird kind, her pussy, her thighs are wet, how is this? What is this? Ribbon along her belly & beneath her back & between her ass cheeks, close, close, tight, so tight

"so tight" a breath moans near

she startles to the breath taking flesh, fingers & arms, a back, torso, legs longer than hers & she beneath & a very hard cock gently prodding her inner thigh—

she screams does not mean to but does & the body over her moans again for pleasure of their touch, her second scream aborts & she falls within herself, how this feels, how she imagined, the body above her is soft & hard both & takes her not by force but by right

feels him nudge her thighs apart wider she wants to cry but crying won't happen, she is being taken but not violently, had like a long delight her thighs part more willing, she falls within herself as his cock presses inside her & is happy she's tight for him & tries to question this but no words agree on how, she wraps her legs around him & again he moans & she listens fiercely for it: "sweet flame" & he begins to move in & out deeper each time she claws his shoulders & bites her lower lip til it bleeds this is me being fucked, this is what they all wanted to do to me but he's better, I'm his Sweet Flame, he moans for me for my tightness, my thighs

O MY FUCKING GOD she screams as his thrusts become fast hard & brutal she moves with him better & feels him deep down good & another long moan wordless til the end: "watch"

from nowhere she sees Jazz in a room, allowed only lacy white underwear & hands tied to bedposts, a blurry man gets on top of her & she struggles, the view closing in on Jazz's perfect small breasts, nipples hard & high a man's mouth seals one & bite &

ANOTHER FUCKING ORGASM watching this, the man tears Jazz's white panties from her thighs & her pussy shown close is bare & small & tight & the hand strokes it Jazz moans in fear & pain & want she is very wet with hunger & terrified & the man forces her thighs wide

**O FUCK ME FUCK ME FUCK
ME FUCK ME**

she & her sister scream together & mutually fucked & fucking

GOD IT FUCKING HURTS DON'T FUCKING STOP

Jazz is crying as she is pushed onto her stomach & the great hard cock rips into her small round ass fucking her til she is limp & harder & harder & harder

the vision diminishes & the pleasure returns here this man holds her no more words he will fuck her again later often & she will wait & want other hours

cxiv.

What could burble from a tired view, what waits to set in & play up its point? What does daylight guard, shield, masque?

Is the deepest Beast for gain of coin & acre, for lord of prize booty & mechanical trinkets?

What the hardest drive for beat & breath, tis really a thousand bowed heads & their weapons ready?

Is that all? Dominion over sheep & drones? Knee to none but a statue & then only on the week's merest day?

Is that all? Control over the lively but unimaginative? Come out, look at your slaves, reckon their tiny little rebellions, their peeps of resistance, how they sigh before large words & heavy hands. How the numbers among them fall to disease & abuse & neglect & yet they explain & they pray & they divide what left a little smaller

Is that all? To control a fat, dumb population ignorant of its sweet brutal masters, diverted by an errant tit or bloody crash in street or stadium—

There's nothing to this—& yet your kind fall again & again—history the stained tomes of your great comings & goings—you never see the end, how it arrives a slow lapping then a bit more—

Power grows sloppy, stagnant, mires in missteps & confusion, the least stumble & then another & another—

We watch—neither sheep nor lords—we watch—from corners, from shadows—more of us—not hugely many—ever—

enough—watching & waiting—a little here, a little there—tend the discontent, water the soft unhappy bleatings

whisper: another world is possible—again—& again—& again—

Not much faith how far the sheep will follow along—they tire & distract easily—but we push & tug—here & here—weeds in your inevitable cracks—like roaches, one, two, countless—

Are we the successors? No not in the least—how to govern by full moon, bonfire, wide night's orgasmic cries?

We do not look toward governing, but toward liberation, toward flesh's good long ride & out—

no silly reward for suffering like humanity is some god's manipulation of space & time—

could that be? What Empire bows to true? Nothing else to be revealed but an eternal feeding hall with an obsessive deity-patron hosting?

The world nothing but a lesson, souls atwist in flesh to be rewarded by their sense of repugnance & years & yearns for release?

Could that be? The whole of any hour nothing to an annihilating cosmic devolution?

"Are the White Sox still winning?"

"I think so"

"You notice how he turns to us when his rants break up?"

"Yah, he's clever like that"

"Don't it bother you?"

"Why? He's OK. Some of what he says makes sense. Just sort the rest out."

"What about the rest?"

"Drug talk. Egghead talk. Hippy talk. Too many books."

"Not enough sex."

"Not enough *empathy*. Look, that's why we come here. We got TVs at home & refrigerators for booze. We come here for the good company. Shouting at the TV with others."

"People want people. Or need?"

"Want, yes. Need, I don't know. Most important things can't be explained."

What more, that's all, what more? The reaches of fist & breed, of control & corral, the brutal samely diminishing of years, what more?

CXV.

Long day. Tell me tomorrow will sugar & smile. Long day. Tell me these White Woods are kind, or will end. Long day. My purse is thinning again & I am molten panic's bitch, mewling, feeling the lean heavy within. Long day, I must protect my own, the faces on this carriage, like last time, are nobody to me. Long day, the bastards scored well this inning, the game continues, but it roughed & scarred. Long day, universe please help me, I remember my vow, I want to keep making it good.

I don't know, in this tired darkening hour, what next, what morrow's tale. Don't know & my hands bid me make it, fucking make it, shape it to what it can be, beg universe for help & lay on the hours with intent. Somewhere in between is answer, result—

The freeway slow with dusk's crowded red lights. I feel little empathy; mortal, alone.

Stars pass, a soft creature dreams some hungry world like this one.

I try to love you all, blink it to each one of you, kiss you with shadow's breath—

& a day reck its arc & now its chilled night, here again, pen, today I went toward my knees, trolled for coins sniff in a four-wall plastic cage, come on, give it, give it! Here are my wrists, where them new manacles? Give it, give it! I've got Art to do, not this furious mewling, this self-consuming yawpage, come on, come on!

I sniff pussy nearby & don't much regard, the trees blow somewhere still, this hour barely music taps me—it does—

make it pretty—write them pretty words—past old gooey gods & the many fists of greed & indifference—make worlds prettier for some singing run through with bones of sugar—flesh of dance—blown live with blossoms wild from root to sunshine—work it, bitch, work that inkstick, hard, *harder*

What then, ask, listen, why? How the fuck do I know? Does it matter to answer? To know the mystery, by name & method, finally? Would it help? Would this human way look otherwise, feel smooth & kinder for all at last?

I think so, still, less, seeing worlds as real, illusion, complete, chapter, I wanted to know, like many others, now still, less, where did this change within come from?

Does it mean I love differently now than ago, care slighter? If sacred beliefs, writ deep into the heart, fade, prove lacking, what then?

Can I say: I do not care anymore? I don't know. Maybe it's not so binary a matter; care or don't care. Maybe not even on a scale; care more or less.

What then? Why write? Why look for the next wageslave gig? Is it lack of love for life? A dangerous neutrality? Pending, prelude?

Ego loss? Lack of wonder? Awe? Amazement?

Why fucking bother? Why this word? Why the next? Here they still come, this continuum, the black pen, the lined white paper, the beat up notebooks, from years go unto now, rainy night busstop Seattle, musewife in this world nearby, & hereon? Where? Why? Why bother?

Most things near death breathe, struggle on; I don't think I'm near death & yet I have no less impulse to do so—tis not finite future nor past mourning, tis the bottomless surge of this very moment & its near infinitude of kin—in dreams, in travel, while limping one manner & another for new wageslave hustle & jive—deep hunger, sky's pull, the air cool or dank—

The drinkers at Luna T's Cafe look over to me & raise their mugs slightly—every one of them felt this wordless fury which I complex by trying to word—

how to live, how to live
how to live & why—

fury with sentiment for old tavern nights with long-missing brothers—sentiment deeper for childhood days when I knew nearly nothing, a few books, a TV with six channels, the trees, the clouds, my peers in the lot, a football flying through the sunshine, every hand reaching—

What is now to then? What could I tell you that would help? What do I contain of you still—I'm asking across decades—not weakness but wonder—who were you that I still am? Hurry near me, breach this fool gap—tell me what I cannot tell you—

“Is he OK?”

“Pen. Notebook. Yep.”

“Is this the story or some interlude?”

“Yah.”

“Do we keep him going?”

“He likes us.”

“He likes everything without remembering it always.”

“Shhh!”

When it is a struggle, where has the magick come to salve & point along? I wonder tonight, when it is a struggle & I am trying to find what to grab & ride along with—

Play it close, near, bid the hour ope some its highest juice, cough out the winged sparks, play it acoustic & simple, a jam may come, proly will but near, close—the band will follow as it will—

Remember those nights but true, burn off their sentiment, see this hour's live matter, its tall grass blowing, the beloved nearby reading a good guru's pages—

acoustic, now, remember true & tall both, gather those hours in & near, close, how mind can go & faster!

a burger joint near a ball park, I sat alone & at it—sometimes off a high movie

I want to remember better & know more—I want to undo the mere in me—not an age but a view from here back & hereon—sunsets years gone & recall? Sunrises too,

What then, slow, close, near, call this a building hour, let its ideas & colors scatter about right now—

I am clutching my pen & notebook, hunched in my way, shield from all while feeding on sensation—

another fast food joint, several in a row along a dirty street, I moved from one to the next over hours, writing my way along, not alone because this is my music, I make it for myself, it is food for when there is nothing else to feed upon—



at my saggiest hours I do not write—I waste—I feel it happening & don't care—perhaps a hidden thought knows better will appear—or its dark kin fears none & so live another way—

But I sat & stared hardly an hour ago, pen & notebook slack, & felt a quiet terror—what life if not engaged?

OK then—but what of those hours—I need work, the world won't care for me unless I pay it to—

Those are the hours to go deeper, the ones to battle the mere within hardest—

What then—come here—promise—come to these pages—when it's worst—come here & fight out the words toward the next hour & the next—

come here—persistence bitch—give over to Art the worst passages & others will come too—trust—*trust*—TRUST—

The band kicks up, I feel it even before it happens, drums swifter tug the rhythm higher & lower, the bass pushes a little, a little more, the keyboards rapid too but simpler, anchor something light to the heavy velocity, & the guitars lock & twirl & go, go go—go—go! go!

Ten thousand years high
biting soil & seduce the sunlight
pray the seeds break & climb

Flashing bodies in a fire's cry
the twist bones make in joy
the hours disappear into the moon

I have no name
I am kin to you all
I cannot explain

Tap, tap, smile, born, up, let it all go

cxvi.

It was a thick book, paperback, shaped like a brick, & turns out twas by me—a pirate edition of my pomes & prose—strange—I had not published it—yet full of my writings—it belong to someone else—yet in the desert city common to my dreams there it was—what of this?

I don't know—I was shocked—someone had made a book of *my* writings—just did it—collected them & made a book of them—

Why someone else? Why someone I did not know?

Because if I cannot sing up & true then what the worth, ask it, twice, is this gift for the shadows between bricks, the forgotten dusks,

ask it, & again, this world sums to nothing but truth in its every spark, its every note soft, softer, or moose-loud

Obscure pirate books in dreams? Is this some gift for the world, this world, any world, any gift at all,

sing true, sing truer, there is no choice & never was, the rain falls tonight & so, & so, that's how & why,

perfection, come on, nod, shiver, true, in the worst mouth & the tank hitting a wall,

see, see further, feel, feel *more*, end? there is *none*, the several now many, now many's many,

there have been nights sitting now upon what to come time breaks & hours fall pink open, fecund, nothing ends, nothing ever ends, & nothing ever returns & the answers everywhere, help me, Universe, help me, is one to heal or to dance? Which is truer? Which does night's farthest growl?

I am trying to know with all that I am, I call this Art & breathing both. Is there anything else? Love

Love the remaining corrosion & clue

cxvii.

What really matters is seeing more than one wishes or would rather. More, ugly, strange, difficult. A soul diminishing in view is diminished in reality. Everything possible is not all. Everything possible isn't enough.

Never does everything move in the same direction one & all. I think about the Big Red Cafe in the mall right near you & need no further example.

It looks glitzy & contemporary to the point of non-existence to some eyes. Like other restaurant chains it began humble, one location, a married couple & a cousin & a friend running it. Most think the lovely golden retriever in the logo is the "Big Red" in its name.

That was decades now. 1966. Fancy that. The old photos on the wall tell some of the story, too, the one people know without having to much mind its re-telling. The mix of natural ingredients with more commercial ones, the attention to variety & quality. The desserts more fruit than sugar but not tasting so.

Hiring Vietnam vets upon their ignominious return. Store, original one, was hit with a firebomb once. Survived. Stubborn. Trick was that they hired vets who'd been there & then turned on the war. Tricky.

Big Red expanded & seemed to effortlessly shift with the times. Keeping some, changing some. Stayed family-owned but a larger & larger family. Looked gradually as corporate as any McDonald's or Burger King in comparison.

Expanded big into malls, pushed hard from early on to take up this new styled approach to marketplaces.

Everything changed. Everything changes, hey?

Nothing changed. Were you listening? Nah. There's no story here.

Oh, there so is. Big Red wasn't the dog. The firebomb wasn't an arsonist. The vets found a home like none other they'd known.

Boy there's so much you don't know—

Closer: several TVs mounted in the Utopia Mall's Big Red were blaring a video of an old folk-rock duo back on the charts, fresh fire, a band featuring incendiary lead guitar re-inventing & deepening their sound both—something old performers rarely do—strive for new artistic highs instead of heated up sentiment—

blah blah—but watch it—the dark-haired member of the duo, the lyricist, the funny difficult one, he leans against a huge stack of speakers, strumming purposefully through & among his new bandmate's sonic roar—the listening works both ways—this guitarist raises & diminishes to his partner's acoustic mullings—the guitars dance as two, as one, there is excitement & mystery—flow & surprise—

& regard the taller of the duo, blond, curly hair, singing, crooning, calm but intense, happy but high rising upon lyrics sometimes clear, haiku blunt, sometimes long murky wandering to a patiently honed point, moment of revel—

the TV show's narrator excitedly tells of the duo's resurgence, of its long gone shiny young years, & acrimonious break, & later brief reunion, a success but unrepeated, & now, the return nobody conjured, new, present, it rarely happens, but does, did, is—

except no, it isn't, this isn't happening, the show isn't true, the broadcast so innocuous few patrons regard it enough to remember—

What, then, tis? Clue, for any to regard, obscured hope that one here or there in the chain's many franchises will notice, & unable to desist, ask someone what is this? What channel? These clues do not happen often & change form randomly but they have been occurring for the entirety of Big Red's existence, approaching in 2005 forty years—

When need demands, an ad for Big Red will come on someone's home TV or a bar somewhere like Luna T's Cafe, nothing too odd in the ad yet noticeable, a sly invitation to a mindful soul

Dylan's TV is playing an ad for Big Red, the tune similar to that anti-war song the oldie folk duo is rocking the land with—

Neither John nor Maya nor Dylan notice the ad at first, coming from a TV that wasn't even turned on for over an hour, was it? Dunno—

But it goes on & on, eating itself & growing new roots & arms, spreads beyond the little black-&-white TV screen, on the bed, falling to the floor, jumping into the air & hanging like sparkles, & eventually gathers up near the three friends who know it as other than a TV advertisement—

Where are they? Still scattered on bed & chairs? Look. No. The room is empty. Look again. Closet.

A pink edge glowing around the doorframe, near it, along it, within it, through it, within, pink flood, not blinding but everywhere, details slow to open, the Big Red ad is present, a way to know better? Try—

Better—the forms begin to reveal—three of them? One? Even this melody canna tell fully—

OK release a little, into the crackle & murk, let up, let go, let it, what ever it is, now a little more, crossing through, yes, good, see how they are, see why a little better too, they joined with the mushrooms & each other, a welcome here, work into it,

the story is no line to trace along, more a tangle, a perpetual hour feeding on what passes through, give over to it, more, there's always more, let minutes pass, let more, let else, fall into the between between you & me, here & there, now & then, this & else—

as deep into this traveled, hardly there yet, still the nowhere to figure, a hand across it, small female hand from somewhere, traipses wide the sky, whatever names this rightly—take it, go, go with it—something clearer & simple on the other side—

cxviii.

I sit here for the barest of minutes to remember—so wish to remember—

Mostly the return to roots is a sorrowful one, the years wasted, both spent & mourning—

100 hours in all & gone—about 58 down, watch this story thin, watch what it is become awhile nothing—

How can what was once home mean so much less? Each time I visit there's a familiar thing gone—

Does bitch belong in a story? I don't know. Whatever kind of story this is, if any kind at all, seems to include every sort of ragged drivel—

Here I am in Hartford & for most everyone else it's the present moment—

I see an old black man in a wheelchair & maybe he knows my feeling of loss & sentiment too—his blue Yankees cap, heavy coat, tan trousers, brown shoes—what does he remember from other days? I hope he's dreaming gone right now—foot tapping lightly—

McDonald's—there was another one here—now decades ago—I remember it from 1981 & thereabouts—the Bag Lady Artist—

this one put up within tall new buildings meant to save the downtown—& I wrote here too—& also years ago missing a lover—trying to imagine good days nearing—

the old black man has white hair & moustache—perhaps more grey than white—he keeps dozing—I wonder his dreams—

Why to anything? No answer, no arcing rule. I've spent my life trying to figure any definitive point on the on the map—where to start or finish or guide by & none stay—none hold up to the ever-shift of days—

So I come back here & here is no more a place to stay than any other—no is it

My love & wife-to-be has fallen asleep—I'd wanted to show her my deep past but I suspect it doesn't really matter—

But pushing aside others, there is my private history here—the years of hours I walked around by myself—sat at joints like this one, writing—

this still matters to me—more than the people who rust—my secret world here was lived alone—I can reach into my own childhood & still find this true—

My pens & notebooks—there isn't much else deepest in my heart—

Perhaps best that this story contained a passage from these brown lands of memory—I don't know if anything green remains here—& I don't pretend to think I could rejuvenate my writing either here—

I simply have no peace with any of it—it sifts through my mind with other restless days & questions—

Mostly one gathers it up & along now to hence—what other choice?

continue the old school tour with a cafeteria meant much then—a room with pale tables & orange chairs—a counter in back, its gang of food makers—

I keep asking Why? & more coming up with less, nothing—perhaps I come to old joints to find my old molecules—what's stuck to the air from then—come to feel it—

keep coming & none the clue—

What does it, could it, mean to anyone else—Capitol Lunch—New Britain, CT, my old molecules here, unswept by broom or time—

I sit for a short time in this city—still here & gone both? & ask Why?

This page trying to tell, wishing to tell—

A silhouette of Rebecca near & she's drawing & I'm trying to remember anything about what this book is or was—

Once I chased love—what now?
What do I chase now? I conjured,
I sang, I mattered, how now?

The answer may not be how others were—it may be only knowable in its discovery—

The path? Back there, then? Else.

There is no path, only accumulating sorrow, only something good chased & again, good ever again? More than cheap resemblance?

I sat here, Peoples Donutshop, so long ago, so countless often, I want to remember but what? Does anything gone remember?

I have nobody but my notebooks to remember with. Truth not hype, as the Woodstock voice said.

I'm jobless & begging for a whore's caught coin. I'm sad beyond this hour or any hour.

My youth, a snaggle-tooth chase unceasing, is superseded by an age neither green nor darkening—energy remains, push & drive—

what gone? why does absence seem like accumulated suffocation? Why don't the pleasures of other years remain kind, lightly feeding still?

others here passing their ordinary day while I come a few hours to say goodbye again—

I so deep rifled my mind & memory & the world & its history, & what can be & what isn't—what else? What's left to say?

Nothing, seems. Yet I'll write on & on.

cxix.

Prove anything is over, or exists, or is coming, I wish to, but I can't even say anything is true here or anywhere, wish to, but I've seen so much go, remember what others do not, as each of them likewise remember singly, so tell me what, whatever, I don't know but wish to, what pulls me back to this notebook again, again, what do I find here & what left to offer, a years-long game, so then what?

Awhile sat in old places & point out my ghosts to beloved, memories, important, not,

Return to where my days dwell now & somewhat giddy, here's not sadness & loss & absence, here is what ongoes, & grateful—

blah blah—

try again:

Return to the room at NE Prescott Street & what spurts through the room next door is the strange landlady's barroom raucous laughter as she talks on the phone—would she knew beyond a wall three individuals mold & melt deep inside a closet, deeper inside than she'd be able to go—place where her vague fool thing-ridden view of the world could not conceive—little, less, none—

Mushrooms travel deep when they do, & they bring with them anyone they choose—

Elsewhere:

Noisy Children nearing the apex of its tour, shows last days at a time, one to the next without pause, there's nothing left to break through when they've arrived

And:

Global Wall knows something is coming too—a deepdown shake apart of how it's been & what to come—fire or freedom, both or other? He receives his monthly report on Big Red & reads it far more thoughtfully than in awhile.

“Hartley”

“Hey, man”

“Does it end?”

“Does what end?”

“The psychedelic dream?”

“For you? Or for everyone?”

“Both. I need to know. Did it end for you?”

“I still remember. Sometimes I go back. Is that what you're asking?”

“I'm asking because I don't know who else to ask. I see the struggle, I struggle too but I don't want to abandon what I found in it. I want to believe there's more.”

“Then believe.”

“Like that?”

“Yes.”

“Viking?”

“Yes. It’s me.”

“I’m summoning all I have from what this story has.”

“I’m here.”

“What do I do with it? What is it? I want to know & I don’t know how to get there.”

“Where?”

I shrug.

“Shall I use my Magick Viking Sword?”

“Yes, please.”

He raises it, gives it a series of new flourishes & striking thrusts before his slashes hit hard, slice three-dimensionally so a cube of space sighs & falls away leaving its gape.

“Climb in. Go!”

“Where to.”

He shrugs, smiles, nods impatient for me to git. I do.

Climbing into the cube I lose my body, emerge from it, only something like a long silver thread attaching us still, I watch it fold within itself & trail behind me & cannot figure how to describe this—

Very well—this will do—what this will bring I hope more than a shrug for its answer—

cxx.

It’s like arrival, where this, what, & I slowly amaze, is it the desert? The city I dream of so often?

Why not the planet building, a world with no exterior, just endless floors & rooms & enemies?

Why not the bed where I sit writing, my wife sleeping by me, coughing from a passing illness?

Is it not this very notebook & its beloved black pen?

Sometimes I fear losing Art, fear it near unto paralysis, & can only recover ny hope by finding my way among the hours til it occurs—

This writing is what I know of magick, this making into world from mind, hand, & pen, & I treasure it, even as it possesses me & there is nothing else, no second great loyalty to compare—

Like arrival, every hour spent doing this work—

I’m still recovering from when I nearly lost it, close to losing all I had really—one woman so overwhelmed me—& now she’s elsewhere & what happened to me a history—shared by two who share nothing else—

But given the choice, I chose Art—it was a rotten time, & I had little to hand—

but I did decide—I could have stayed chasing her, til I was homeless, til gone, but no, I had to protect my Art—she never understood that—few do—

my art matters to me more than all else—

yet what tis now? one accumulates memories til they seem to outnumber the rest—

the worst is sentiment & a yearn for the gone—

yet why else have memories? Why their emotive content? One remembers & *feels*
anew—why is it like this?

I can do nothing in this passing hour for what's gone by—nothing. What then?

Memory exists perhaps for many reasons & not all of them clear—

Like arrival, maybe a hint. What's felt close & home & dear will feel that way anew if one
remembers, if one tends possession of the good hours

“You need a drink.”

“No I don’t.”

“Well I do just listening to ya.”

“Was I that bad?”

“No.” Slow bleary regard. “It’s just you won’t quit.”

“I won’t.”

“That’s why I says you need a drink.”

“Thanks. My boozing days are over.”

“Too bad. Didn’t you have no fun?”

“I had a lot for a long while.”

“But no more?”

“I got tired. I found LSD.”

“Ahh yah. You went hippy.”

“It wasn’t far.”

Slow bleary look. “Is it better now?”

“Sometimes.”

It’s better when my pen is going.

Really simple.

cxxi.

World boils in blood even the quiet places, shaded corners where two approach one,
solitary shadows where a soul looks down, great & small, all asking: what for, my pain? What
for, my empathy? What for, my pocked path, & where to?

World boils in blood & whatever human tool to quell it, an hour, a patch, forever, a
weapon, a tome, a shared heart, none, nothing, little, awhile, near, nearing, no, no arrival. I
try talking to dreams but their replies answer questions I’ve not asked.

World boils in blood & the tangled voices on night carriages cannot blend it to
muting, cannot as a mass create a brawling will, cannot—

“Hey, lady, we’re trying to drink he’ah!”

“He’s part of the deal. You know that.”

“What’s his beef? He’s got you, this joint. He seems smart enough.”

Franny appears in an apron, blonde hair tied back, purple eyes glinting, “now, boys,” she drawls more than usual, “let me set you up with a round.” A cheer goes up as half a dozen pair of eyes study her clothes for clues of curves, “Who’s on? Bruins?”

Americus & Noisy Children return in their way to Luna T’s & sit around the band room talking.

“Are we doing any good?”

“We’re making music. That’s good!”

“How are we helping?”

“Helping who?”

“Is it enough to play music these days?”

“It’s what we do, Rich.”

“We’re not politicians.”

“Music used to be on the front lines. The popular music was the best & it fought the bastards up to their door”

“What do you want, Yank? Play a gig & then burn it down for peace?”

“I want what we do to strike deep & last”

“How do you know it doesn’t already?”

“I don’t.”

Dylan, John, & Maya arrive in the White Forest slowly, mixing closet & Forest together til the former recedes & the latter comes clean. Eventually they also resume some version of their separate bodies. The mushrooms create the White Forest & then re-create it deeper, more, especially for these three to experience—

“Global”

“ ”

“Sir”

“No. Not now.”

“How long then? This can’t last.”

“Shhh. I’m watching.”

“She’s asleep. What can you learn?”

“Shh. You don’t know. You never have. You don’t believe & you don’t see.”

“I see it all coming apart.”

“Then you *really* don’t see.”

A glowing grey dusk in the White Forest, raw creatures nip & spark in every & no direction, what this place? If a book has a central beat, a source of its rhythm, perhaps here, this—

The three friends drift apart as the mushrooms do not insist on their enjoined mass, drift apart, each unaware of the other at the moment, it spreads & elongates, does not agreeably pass—

She becomes near-grown doe & leaps her way along, a blonde-furred deer with a rebel pink streak down her back,

lays eyes closed in his dream too, he watches her closely, it is as near as he comes to her, this is the one, perfect, did not react to him with revulsion or fear, looked at him calmly,

through trees she watches him move slowly, more a series of stumbles, he little controls where, doesn't seem to give a fuck, but so much passion in this,

his eyes cruise her body slowly & she lets them, he has seen more & less voluptuous, seen bodies that seemed to be sex in perpetua, seen others fragile & but for a pouty mouth or glinting eye hardly worth the breaking but because of such a heavily erotic anomaly had to be broken,

as his gaze finds her, first the sensation is almost choking, his desire, his black want, she does not move, remembers not to from . . . other days . . . & the look softens, she gentler picks it up with an angled breath & directs it to her eyes . . . there now . . . he shudders,

he nearly fucking freaks when he sees her eyes are open, how could she be? That dosage would knock out an elephant! But, soft, slow, let it be, yes, let it be

She steps toward him, eyes keeping his locked, her body moving with a river's grace through grass & among bushes,

He feels something flush from him with a crack, feels like his bottom half has been blown off & all is thousands of feet of empty air below his stomach, what the fuck?

She nears still, fearless, calm, here is what she feared, no more, not now, not ever—

“Get her out of here now!” He falls & lurches past his man. “Dope her again, dress her, take her somewhere safe & solitary, leave her.”

But his man does not dope her. He sees a way out of all this finally. It's gone on too long, its purpose long past.

He speaks low & fast. “I'm not going to hurt you. Listen as I speak in your ear but don't turn your head. I don't know how or why but you are different. That's why I'm carrying you out. Don't turn your head, leave it limp against my shoulder. A camera is following every step I make. My knowledge of ventriloquism is the only reason I can say anything to you. If you could see your own earlobe, you would think it was talking to you. Haha, yes, don't laugh.

“Now into the car, it's coming up. It's bugged, too, yes, & I won't say anything once we get in so listen very closely, Maya. You are the key to resolving all that is happening here, but only if you choose to be.

"I'm slipping my fingers inside your jeans, Global knows my penchant to personally test the tightness of our young virgin guests. Good, don't flinch, you will find after I have left you, deep inside you a phone number. That is my private line.

"I will grant you any wish in the world if you choose to return here with me. You need only call that number & tell me. I will perform your request & retrieve you here in a private, unbugged vehicle.

"I don't know what he will do if you return, but I do know that it will change everything. You already have. Removing you does not negate this.

"Here is the car & our dialogue ends. I will make sure you are taken to a safe place to recover your energies. After that is up to you. I wish you good luck, Maya. We won't meet again, unless you wish."

Dylan sits cross-legged nude but a waist-patch facing Cordelia, her hair down, her blouse partly open, its bottom curled in her lap.

"You may see now, Dylan"

"I never did before"

"I always hoped"

"You did?"

She laughs & he fractures severally.

"I wanted to see you too."

"I'm sorry, Cordelia."

"Why?"

"I lost you."

"You didn't do it on purpose."

"I know. I love Maya."

"No. You love me. She's my place-holder. But I'm back."

"No. I thought so. But now I don't."

"Why are we here? Why do you want to see me? Why do you want to show me?"

"I want to say goodbye. I don't know how else to do it. I'm sad & scared but I love Maya."

Cordelia leans closer, the folds of her blouse falling back, her heated breath falling heavy on his waist. He does not flinch.

"What will you do when she goes away?"

He flinches. Stands. "I'll do what I did when you went away. It will be even harder."

John watches Marie sitting at that damned coffee house again, annoyed, though when did he see her there before? Can't remember, fuck it, her hair is up, that luscious long neck, I want to bite it. Fuck! Shit! I hate mushrooms! She adjusts in her seat & he whimpers looking at her waist & legs. She turns a page.

He can't get nearer. What is this? Let me talk to her. His eyes trace her every curve through her violet sweater. He knows them all, clothes hide nothing when a heart's body has coupled with its mate.

"Can you hear me?"

"Why, John? Why talk to me? Don't you like that little girl? Lost all your powers to seduce?"

"I love Maya but she's not mine & I'm not hers. Not like that. I'm supposed to help her."

"How, John? She looks ripe enough. I don't think she'll do too badly under you."

"No! I love you."

She turns to him finally, closes her book. "You lost me. You love a memory."

"Then why are you here?"

"You won't let go. Would you like to see where I really am tonight? Who I'm fucking? Or that I'm alone & missing you? You don't know if you want me happy or missing you or what. So you put me here, reading. That's all. Neutral. Maybe waiting for my lover. Maybe just spending my night alone. You don't know."

"How do I let you go?"

She nods, walks toward door. "Go tend your striplings, John. Give them the tenderness you horded from me. But remember: they're not so young. And you have a long way to go back to that cabin hideout prison of yours."

cxxiii.

One fades, now another, I wonder what how why, this I suppose is what I do, & these night tales press me for more—

Sitting in the Red Dog Restaurant, fiction within a dream, I see how it happened, Maya wasn't one to hang by the mall's fountain, no, she wasn't even a mall bitch like the others. She was looking for a job. Things had gotten bad where she was, not a hustling uncle or stepfather, no, but fanatics, bold, bright, happy & angry both fanatics, pulling her in, trying, working on her every day, she was the prize, her brain the one every necktied lunatic wished credit for washing—

Came in, her slinky, flowing self, not sure why, hadn't even known which bus to the mall, but Red Dog had always been around, & more ads on the TV & radio than she could ever remember, they were strange, called for her—

"Red Dog began operations in 1966 with a small restaurant in the famous Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. We partnered with the local organizations to feed the golden children arriving, give them jobs, help them out. We still do. We employ young people in hundreds of towns & cities, offering them industry leading pay rates & benefits." The was enough to convince her. "We haven't forgotten those early days, our precious roots. We know why so many came to Haight-Ashbury. Do you?" She nodded. She knew. "Come talk to us."

"Maya, are you listening?"

Briefly she considered going down on him. Push him back on her bed & unzipping those perfectly creased trousers. Make him say o God o God o God, making him pray to the god of her perfect pink lips rather than explain again the levels of initiation, the years of study, the sacrifice toward greater good & higher reward.

She sits in the corner of Red Dog & orders a lemon-strawberry rice milkshake. The waiter is young, smiles at her face not her chest. Nice. "Anything else?"

She pauses. "Are you hiring?"

He tilts his head. Smiles nearly bright enough to raise her interest. She holds close. "I'll get you an application with your shake."

"Thanks."

I was bleeding a brown liquid from the base of my middle finger, & crying because my father cursed my job hunting efforts. Woke up whimpering, then fell back again.

Another dream, visiting a long lost friend, digging up his yard to leave a half-buried home-made book for him as a gift. He watched behind his house's front curtains, then came out eventually.

A movie theater, no chairs, more the rows of hills found in drive-in theaters, & multiple screens angled in different directions for all the parked cars to have a good view—

"It won't do no good." says Benny Big Dreams. "You can't integrate dreams & waking. It doesn't work that way."

"How does it work?"

"You can cross things over. It happens all the time. But you want more."

"I think I can do better."

"You want to know what you see me shooting up every day?"

"Will you tell me?"

"I shoot up the world, every bit of it. Then I piss it out in dreams. Good, long pisses, the kind you like."

"Are you God?"

"No! Well, yes. But no in the sense you people usually mean."

"I don't know what sense I mean."

"All I'm saying is, you're going at it big & you should go at it smaller."

The White Woods. "Ahh, shit," John mutters. Maya & Dylan nowhere in sight. He doesn't know how even. Finds he still has a hard-on from seeing Marie, especially from *fighting* with her. They had the greatest, dirtiest angry sex he'd ever experienced. Fucked til the rage diminished. Took hours sometimes. Then they'd hit some late-night dive for drinks & the jukebox. Fun times.

"You're remembering the best nights. What about the rest?"

"Shit happens. Why not remember happy?"

"I don't fucking know anymore, Marie. Whatever you are."

"They're close. Just wait & listen."

"Why is it you talk to me, then bring up those kids! Why don't you help me for real!"

"How?"

"For one, show up, here, with me. So I can see you & touch you."

"What else?"

"I love you. I'm trying to handle all this weird shit. But I need a drink I can't take & I need a better lay than that girl can give me. You got it. You took my cock-frenzy smoothly & I felt clean, not gutted, after."

No response.

"Marie?"

Nothing. Fucking nothing!

"Poor schmuck!" one of the drinkers mutters at the TV.

"He needs a hooker" another one says.

"I feel for him. A good woman in bed leaves her mark on your heart & your balls. Serious shit!" Several nod.

"Hey, is that Red Dog joint real?"

"Don't be a dumbass." "It's a TV show, numnutz."

"I thought I heard about it before. Ask the barman."

Mr. Bob adjusts his spectacles. Wipes down the dark wooden counter a few times, thinking.

"Well, Chuck?"

"I can't say."

"Can't? Won't?"

He smiles, unmoved.

cxxiv.

A moment when I was a single note of panic, something about a bus & chasing another whore's task for coins, & then an hour, another, I was sitting in a small quiet room waiting to do the shuck & jive, breathing narrowly through a necktie, oh let me suck it for a coin, oh fuck me for a coin, oh here my unique hour for a coin,

yet I have & do & accept that the day is Empire's own sweet bitch while the night crawls out & dances freer, & I can push a little at the bondage, will take countless to crack it

This hour, this close cafe hour in the fecund midst of night, smooth & open, whore low the day, sex high the night,

will there come another year when every hour its blooming gold?

I sit miles & years from then, yet surely closer—

Mine, yours, ours to push on, discover deeper the human tide, secret, truer beat & breath, where language praises but no longer names, where music builds literal over figurative—

where—fuck this--stop.

And I ask: is Art another dimension? Does it cross time & space, mix & affect in its own way, change & changed, what can be known about this?

Where disparate elements cross here is Art, that much I am sure of—

Where the corners of the story are folding for it Art—

CXXV.

I'm sitting at Luna T's Cafe's bar again, head down, writing slowly.

"Is he OK?"

"You OK?"

I look up at the row of drinkers & realize I know none of their names. Just drinkers. Day laborers. Come and go.

"We don't mind."

"Not everybody's a rock star."

"No. True."

"We're part of the everybody else in the world."

"Is that good?"

"We have our troubles. The usual kinds. Family. Job."

"Yah."

"Someone has to be in the audience."

"I never wanted that. All the time, I mean."

"I'm Tom. These jokers call me the Professor because I went to college."

"He's smart too!"

"Yah. Smart enough to turn a history degree into a desk job at a computer."

"Hey, that's good work!"

"Don't knock it, Tom!"

"It's paid for that beer gut of yours!"

I grimace.

"Look, it's OK. Just take it a page at a time. Nobody can tell you how."

"I know. I wish someone could."

"Do you? Art is your one place the boss of things."

"It's lonely."

"Everything's lonely sooner or later."

"Some worse."

"Maybe. But I don't know anyone who isn't suffering one way or another."

"Hey, Tom, you're the Buddhist. All life is suffering & that cockamamie?"

Tom grimaces now. "I hit the bottle hard. When I get worst I remember my college years studying Eastern religion. It was good. Asceticism. Karma. A sense of truths."

"Then he saw his first wife's true ass wiggle in one of them short skirts!"

Raucous.

"She tried. But she dropped out. But she tried for me."

"Have you read the *Rig Veda*?"

Tom's eyes bulge behind his square glasses.

"Watch out, Tom! This one will out-egghead ya!"

"It's ancient scripture. A thousand or so songs."

"I know it. Why?"

"A hundred or so talk about the rootless plant Soma."

"I suppose you're right."

"I know I am. Do you know about Eleusis?"

"Greece? Persephone? A yearly feast?"

"It was a 2000-year-old psychedelic initiation suppressed by the early Christians."

"Uh-oh. Hey Tom you smoked some of the weird stuff? Ever eat magic mushrooms?"

"Fun with fungi?"

More raucous.

"I think you know more than I do. But what about Greece? And the *Rig Veda*?"

"And Jimi Hendrix? And David Lynch?"

"Uh-oh. Here we go!"

"I miss your point."

"Put down your drink, Tom."

"Whoa! Check this out!"

"It's down. What now?"

"How real do you want to be? Any of you?"

"That's up to you, isn't it?"

"If you believe Art is secondary, that it is created but does not have life."

"What do you think?"

"I think everything has affect. When physics & mystics say the same thing as the dancers at a high mountain rave, it means something."

"What?"

"That material reality, that differentiation, is truth but not complete truth."

"Like God?"

"What? Did the hippy say God? I thought they don't believe in such quaint things!"

"I didn't say God but I didn't deny that. I suspect that a combination of chance & free will offers us something like an opening. A place to start. To say, here is what you have to hand, what can you do with it?"

Tom nods. "But why do you need us?"

"Hey, Tom, I think he needs you!"

"We're just boozers!"

"Pretty faces along the bar!"

"Someone's got to keep the barman company!"

"No. All of you. What have I learned along the years but the danger of losing touch with earth or sky?"

"I agree. So, why us? Why now?"

"It's a real bar. I have connections still."

"Dope connections?"

"Ha! Just kidding, hippy!"

I nod.

"Don't get sensitive. We like you!"

Tom shushes his friends with a flick. "What can we do?"

"I don't know. Keep an eye on how things are."

"What kind of things?"

"Whatever. Just pay attention."

"We can do that."

"You expecting trouble?"

"Always."

cccv.

What of my other companions long coupled with this long book's night? The Viking, the Artist, Hartlee, Benny Big Dreams, the trees?

I wonder about simply dismissing them all. What good?

"Tell me, Hartlee."

His blue eyes arc over the years to arrive at my question, squarely. "I don't know. I liked you, Ray. But I don't know what you need."

The Artist smiles. Lears.

"What about you, Viking?"

"I gave you my service, my sword. I have protected you as I was able."

I nod. We stall.

"Must every pass be for the end zone? All receivers out, 50 yards in 9 seconds?"

"Yes, always. One catches, always does, a bit taller, fights a bit harder, keeps his feet, fleet & tough, won't let me down. I remember. A thousand thousand pages & songs from one moment, so many years ago, there it was, anything possible, within polity & physics yet behold! He catches the ball, falls backward into the end zone, no penalty, no fumble, score! Fucking score. I remember."

"No less?"

"Never. How?"

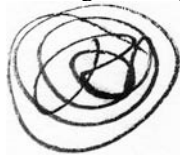
"Others do. On their way tonight in party dresses. Not evil. Not lesser."

"Feed."

"You too! Deny it!"

"I want to choke the throats who swallow me, who try, I want to be bone & gristle, enmity to the rich lazy tongue, its bright easy feed. No less. Ever."

Hartlee laughs. "You never change. We can't stop you." The rest nod. "Take us along though. You're a good trip. I've had worse."



To be continued in Cenacle | 68 | April 2009



Raymond Souland, Jr.

Why ? [a new fixtion]

(continued)

cxxvii.

All is holiness yet wonder even over this, true, not? Maybe? I look at those who nod & know, what do they possess large in their craw, what is the nature of this certainty, wherefrom?

Does life prove or does a given soul angle his view driven by wish & fear?

A man in a fine goods market, dressed in soft, well-made furs, selects a trinket, no, not that one, his leather wallet thick with spending coin, paper & plastic, & numbers related to his fate tell of land, tell of vehicles, tell of relations to others like him—

Another with a thick marker prepares his bent cardboard sign for begging. He coughs. Someone fed him this morning but, no, not a job, not a paycheck. Fed him with bowls of mercy, pity, he writes

HOMELESS VETERAN
HOME FROM IRAQ
GOD BLESS YOU &
AMERICA, PLEASE HELP

I can explain neither man, nor can you, whatever creature to glance these pages. The first man holds his children with heart-thrilling love, there is no distance between them & him. He hates his boss & yet follows her dictates & whims closely, stays late some weekends to assure her great status, her golden reputation, often while she & her wife are fucking on white sheets strewn with cocaine & whipped cream, loud violent porn roaring from their wall-size TV.

The latter man has beaten up cops on bad drunks, knocked a few teeth out along his way. The military saved him from jail & junk, from the women he likely would have hit & hit again yet what happened? How this world, this day, this street at Christmas time & him hoping for a cot tonight at the shelter & a few bucks in the meantime to afford cigarettes—

How? He's invisible. His sign is truth, some of it. He served over there in that desert nightmare & came home. God Bless America? *Fuck that.* People pass him holding their breath, not wanting to smell him much less touch or talk to him. God Bless America?

He sways, begins to clap, starts to sing in his decent voice the Christmas songs he remembers.

*O come all ye angels
joyful & triumphant
come ye oh come ye
to Bethlehem*

People notice him, his decent voice restores him to at least partial humanity. He sings the verse again trying to remember the rest.

A man crowds past him toward the department store entrance.

"Merry Christmas, Mister."

"Yah."

"We're all brothers. You & me too."

The man stops. Stares at him. Oblivious to his partially blocking the revolving door entrance.

"Are we? You believe that?"

"I have to."

"Are you really a soldier?"

"I was."

"What's it like there?"

"It's almost normal sometimes. The men want jobs. The women want fresh produce. Then bombs hit & everyone turns into animals."

"Should we leave?"

"I don't know. I can't tell anyone what to think."

"What do you think?"

"I think I hoped for more. But I had a paycheck & now I don't. They sent me home."

"Excuse me, sir, you're blocking the entrance."

"We're talking. We're nearly done."

"There's a lot of foot traffic. Just move over there."

"Mister, it's OK. Happy Christmas. Kiss your kids tonight."

"I will call the cops if you refuse to move."

"You're harassing me? I spend enough at this place to own your salary."

The soldier backs away, picks up his knapsack, his sign, his cup of coins. A few more in it than before. The rich guy & the security guard are now yelling at each other, each stubborn, unafraid, no yield.

Explain any of that.

He keeps moving, knows any cop would bust him over those two in a snap. Most cops are OK but in a tense situation move bluntly & swiftly. Lock up the beggar soldier.

True?

All is holiness? I have no answer. Pretty words. Pretty, pretty. But I don't know.

The man stops & folds up his sign, stores his coins carefully tightly inside his boots, no jingle. He's gotten rolled a few times.

The downtown is loud with shoppers & musicians. No snow. He misses snow. He misses a lot.

Water. That's what. He knows a place, the bartender is kind. No free booze but he will pour you a glass of iced water any time. No judgment in his eyes either.

Shoulders his pack, adjusts his beat black knit hat, his Army jacket is warm enough, he's OK, eaten, just a warm hour or so & back to his business for rush hour.

The rich man's fury snaps when he looks back & sees the other has fled. Suddenly

empty, he stares at the guard talking on his radio & nods. Pulls out his silver-clipped wad, extracts a twenty, tucks it in the man's hand & departs.

Where to? Follow which one? Will they meet again? Are they important? I don't know. Everything is, I suppose.

Important, not holy? Both, neither?

A commercial interrupts *Trip Town* & the drinkers relax. "That show is crazy." "I like it sometimes." "Better than football?" "Hey now! Don't be a smart ass!"

cxxviii.

"You're doing well, young man. I've been following your progress."

"Thanks," says Dylan, finding himself back at Coffee Time Coffeehouse with the old & his crazy maps of centuries-long conspiracies.

"It's time for your report."

"Is this really where we are? Or are we back in those Woods? Or are we in my room where I live?"

The old man laughs, a clear, young laugh. His thick eyebrows dance through his even-longer tangled white hair.

"I was asking."

"Yes! A fine report! Go on!"

"There's a girl. Maya."

The old man sobers. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. I met her on the bus. Later we met John in those Woods."

"Where is she now?"

Dylan looks around, panic rides his face. "I—" He stands, stumbles.

"Sit."

"Is it the same night? Did I ever leave here?"

"Sit!" Dylan sits.

The man smiles at him. Not with warmth or humor. A little kindness. Maybe.

"Do you know what the word *maya* means?"

Dylan thinks. "Illusion."

The old man nods. "Yes. Also play. And dream. It's an elusive word but very provocative."

"She's not real?" Dylan whispers, slumping.

"None of any of this is real. All is continuous passage from one state to another. No form or being is permanent."

"Even God?"

"God is what some believe encompasses all. What bears all of this."

"Can I go now?"

"Back to Maya?"

Dylan nods.

"Dylan, don't be scared. You are not alone."

He wakes. Maya & John are standing over him, smiling & concerned. Here is his closet, his room, his friends.

He smiles too, uncertainly.

The old man retains his form awhile & bids me sit with him.

"You're from an old memory."

He nods.

"I was so lonely then, but very alert, chasing. I met you & we talked for a long time."

Nods again.

"What did you have to say?"

"Do you accept that the world has no solution? That asking 'Why?' as you do leads on & on but no closer to arrival?"

"No. I accept that that I do not know why, maybe not even what would constitute a staying answer. But not that asking is ceaseless failure."

He nods. "Go back. Resume."

"Do I pass?"

"Pass what?"

"Why did you ask?"

He smiles with the kindness he withheld from Dylan. "Go. We'll talk again."

"Are you OK, Dylan?"

"I think so."

"I was back first. Then John. We waited for you."

"Thank you."

"He fucked me til I cried on your bed."

"What?"

"I said we agreed we need some breakfast. It's nearly dawn."

"OK."

"My arms hurt from when he held me down & fucked my tight ass. I hoped my moans wouldn't wake you."

"What??" Dylan stands, shaky.

Maya smiles very pretty. "Dylan! I said I think our breakfast should include jelly doughnuts."

John reaches forward & catches Dylan before he falls.

"Thanks" he whispers.

"She was so tight I had to ram it in to break her open. She liked it. She's a dirty girl."

Dylan stares at him.

"The bus, Dylan? Should we get the bus?"

He collapses.

cxxix.

Two words: it's spreading, there were ideas brought to Global Wall he did not like.

Teach them. Mold them. Make them something good. Poison the sheep's foul shallow perceptions with pretty packages of wise. Show them more.

Books shown him about magickal virgin juice, the possible conjures of invisible power. Make them into sorceress warriors & re-align the broken pact of men & nature. Fix it.

Build them, raise them, nurture them, teach them. Better than mute performing harems, psychedelic soul-crushing.

Better than empty revenge.

He agreed to little. Would not compromise on each being broken thoroughly.

What went on anyway? What was not shown Global Wall? How did she end up there in the first place before being hustled off?

Global Wall's personal assistant had engineered an entire secret world within the apparent one. His early goal had been to subvert Wall's mania, use it against itself, one day destroy Global Wall, not simply defeat him.

Early, I say, but not in the beginning. He had loved Global Wall until his heart cracked blackly & then had turned on him hard—

& then had tired of this too & decided no good could come from any of this continuing in any form—

Nearing time to burn down the White Woods.

Two words: it's spreading. For when his assistant realized this, that he could not turn this foul ship elsewhere, & rumor talked of other ships coming to join with Wall's, that was it. Burn the roots. Burn the soil. Burn the hours & any memories of them.

Two words: it's spreading. Time to stop it? A way? None had worked before. Wall was strong, & his lunacy drove him from deep within, from scorched loins & cracked heart.

But she had truly scared him. Scared him to sending her away. The others he had crushed. He did not crush this one? Could not.

Wall's assistant confided in no one the truths he knew, the lies he'd grown over the years, had written nothing down, kept parts away from parts. None knew there was a larger picture, much less saw it.

His words to Maya constituted the nearest he'd ever come to a confession of intent. It *was* confession.

Now he waited, ran Wall's flesh empire, orchestrated every move involved in breaking newcomers & readying them for their place in the order of things.

He did not flinch. His eyes did not yield least response to begging, to any plea.

Burn the White Woods down.

Burn them down.

Burn every root & leaf & branch down.

Burn. Burn. Burn.

Make sure Global Wall was well-chained & open-eyed to fate & its maker.

Words in Wall's assistant's head by day & night, spoke to nobody, no proof they existed, none.

White Woods will burn & explode & burn some more & nobody will come to help. That was part of the arrangement, reason to occasionally leave for meetings fraught with lies & thick envelopes of cash.

Burn. Burn. Burn.

CXXX.

My heart blows scarce at night & I am unsure. I look at Her & she shrugs.

"Tell me something."

"What's left?"

"What does that line mean?"

She stares. "You're smart enough."

"Tell me *something*!"

"It never ends til you fall & gone. Maybe not even then."

"Is that it?"

She nods. Looks sad for a moment.

"OK. That's something."

She smiles then. "You're doing OK. Enjoy."

"Thanks. Didn't we used to have a more . . . complex relationship?"

She nods.

"And?"

"And what? I'm still here. Wax & wane. You decide to want complex again, I'm ready. But this is good too."

"No preference?"

"No. Never have. It's on you."

"Always?"

"You seek me to help. You don't need as much right now. Maybe that's good. Maybe it's what happiness is for you."

"Maybe."

"But you're always trying to tease out the puzzle, the trouble, the warp in the tune."

"Warp?"

"The warp is where it gets interesting. Where there's uncertainty, & chance."

I nod. "The warp."

The warp in things, I let a few days mull on this, & when ready I stand, don my yellow hat & blue suit & look at Merry Muse, bowing—

"Not Rebecca? Not your other new wife?"

I shake my head, "old school," I say simply. She nods, this makes more sense than I have in awhile—

How long it's been since hand on her waist, my face leaning down toward hers looking away, & I try to follow this time, where does that look go? The day's its summer cheerful, the cafe patrons & their jolly gab, trees merry waving about, where does that look go? I follow—

"What's he doing on that show?"

"This is all about him, don't you know that?"

Hard laughter.

Rebecca catches Tom in her look. "They're wrong. It's as much about everyone else."

He nods. Nods again.

"Hartlee, tell me something from those old days. Remind me."

Blue eyes in a brilliant paranoid face, playing secret chords in high chasing nights.

"If you don't know any other way, it puts you in danger. But maybe that's the best thing for you."

Turn to the Psychedelic Viking Overlord, crazy hippy with his Magick Sword.

“Read from one of those secret books of yours.”

“Cosmic Early?” he cracks.

“Sure. Him.”

Hairy brute puts on his little schoolmarm spectacles & reads carefully.

“You think yourself lost or found, of some kind of path that you walk, perhaps climb. You press fist to chest & feel beat & breath & find metaphor there, deep metaphor to stroke & hue your world. You regard a round cheek in half-shadow, a lightly gesturing forearm & its accompanying rosiad voice. You admire in a man his great speech encompassing justice & the full moon & hidden purposes long suspected among generations. Or the other, mighty body leaping or crashing or hurling or lifting. Animals you admire as unknowable others, plants for their consumable qualities, medicinal aspects, aesthetic arrangements in wilds, woods, & gardens alike.”

He snorts. “More of this?”

I nod & he resumes. “More lint in the can, kindling to weak fires lighting & heating little. No answers in your vainly depicted God, no truth in your lustily drawn images of Beauty, hardly a clear, lasting note in the speech of your seers or the songs of your greatest troubadours.

“Little, the years pass, & then less. Again, hark, *little & then less*. A thousand hands & minds to the raising of great machines that merely hold out the cold & maintain the distance between man & man, man & nature. Little, less & less.

“Again, little, less & less. Faced with an event unexpected, name it, compare it, move it into its lingual & conceptual corral. Go on, feels good to suck the scare from the world.

“Explain life by the world miracle & death by the word mystery. Heave up on your grandest platform the mostly mythical heroes of your kind, best when dead, when tortured to death, when men of peace torn wildly, bloodily apart by bullet, by crucifix, by conspiracy. By common human need. By the least advocacy of either hard virtue or luring novelty.”

He looks at me again. I shake my head. “More later.” He packs up his sack of books, skewers spacetime to leave a star-shaped hole & departs with a wave & a laughing growl.

Warp in things. Could I do this better with a burning stick of oak & a cave wall? Why such modern thing as black ink pen? Or why not more modern, a blinking box & quickly tapping fingers, saving words with no inherent stain, nor understanding in the least what they are? Why not write in blood, fewer words, better ones because harder spent?

Tell me. & Tell me again.

Dancing still, she smirks at me. “You haven’t an idea how to do this anymore.”

“No. Maybe not.”

She whispers wetly in my ear, “Good, now you can get along somewhere.”

Warp in things, I saw to this idea in a psychedelic vision, how it is the accident, the sudden

anomaly, the odd blurt of words, the face with its very long nose, the lanky swing of bat, the guitarist who bends the flow somewhere else, & follows, & bids others follow, presuming nothing but there, look! & there! Over there!

cxxxi.

Slave to nothing, how sweet the words & empty to mull, slave to everything more tells it oh I'm hardly begun on this matter, I beg the night for these words when begging's hardly the way to it—

Yes, begging. Night, comfort me, I am alone & remorseful & far from anywhere home save these yawping pages.

Begging yes, & slave to everything & I admit tis so. Slave to the coin, slave to the music, slave to the way hands slide lips to thigh to cunt & demand she moan, & fucking beg for it, not trusting want in itself, need want's dirty dramas, beg me, beg hard, this universe has cut & I'm angry, beg for it, now! I want to give more, I want to do more, be more, believe more, love more, dance more, dream more, more & more, *beg for it*, that's how want is, needs the pretty bells & deep manacles, want is cage & key both, figure that one, *beg for it*, because I have, because I did, because I do, because I do less, because I only believe in Art I only believe in Art I only believe in Art I only believe in Art

I only believe in Art. *Beg for it.*

Good, slowly, close, yes, bite, lick, whisper, slave to everything. I watch & want & wish otherwise but nothing comes. Void waits but seeming impotent til its fine day come. Where the great strange creatures of the Universe? Talk to me, I'll listen. Come near, I heed.

Slave to everything. Slave to nothing. Slave to what? I ask again & again.

Beg a little more. You like it like that. Beg me.

Idea little beguile me.

Yes, be kind. Yes, life is mysterious.

Yes, all is connected. Yes, many

is one is all. Yes & yes.

Beg more. Beg harder.

They still kneel. Even tonight. Fall to knees in chanted unison & hold to the old teachings. Others plan every demise according to the old teachings. Pups smacked twice & fed steady the old teachings. Kings pound chests & smack preacherly of the old teachings.

Any new ones? Only guised up whores, old promises girdled to like young eagers. Hark! There is no sin! Hark! Be a lusty godful beast! Hark! We know now so much more than we did then & here look here & sign this & here & here, farthest star, yes, & tiniest speck, yes & physicists & mystics both yes & people from all walks of life—

Slave to nothing, say again.

Maya nude & riding John's hard cock, moaning wet, wanting more than this, has to be more

than this, even this spasm, very nice, I like it when he pushes me around a little, makes me want it, is this it? Takes me, claims me, it hurts, later it's nice. I like it slower, I like knowing what's happening, first time it went too fast. Now it's better.

Noisy Children ends its penultimate concert by exploding on stage. Char, shouts. Gone. Where they?

Now to the Ampitheatre with who's left. Enough of this laziness. Time to play with the naked drummers & the fullmoon bonfire.

I sit in some freak empty joint on very early Xmas morning 2005. Another man sips his coffee & stares drooling into the rain. I marry next weekend. Again. Married to Rebecca Americus in September 1999 or thereabouts.

"This adds."

"I know."

"You trust me?"

"Always."

"I am true."

"As am I."

"I only believe in Art."

"What else?"

"I don't know. People?"

"No. Believing in people isn't good. People change. Come & go. Die. Worse, just go. Change. Gone. You know."

"Yah."

"It's OK, Raymond."

"Slave to everything."

"Or nothing. No difference."

"Degree. Perspective."

"Then choose nothing. Decide & go."

"Like that?"

"Like that."

"OK."

"Go."

cxxxii.

Nothing between any of them truly. Seems. Maya remained vaguely housed deep heat in her loose pink. John had to turn his attention back to the shrooms, chasing their sorry fleeing asses.

We don't have asses.

Listen.

No, John. Goodbye for now.

No.

Just for now.
 Give me something more. *This is why I fucking drank!* No fucking answers. Too much fine ass. Too easy to put the one & other together.
 It's not for us to for you.
 I know. I'm not asking that. You little bastards know that.
 And you know we're not really little. Or even, really, a plural.
 Give me something. I love one I can't go near. I want to fuck the daylights out of the other. She knows it. I say nothing & she knows it.
 Being is knowing.
 Fuck you. Really. Are there little mushroom hippy chicks? Are there?
 What would Maya give to you? What does she have?
 She has *it*. The thing you have & lose. It doesn't come back. I've tried.
 So you'll take *it* from her? Will you keep *it*? Will *it* be gone? Will you then be quelled, satisfied?
 For a moment, yah. I know the look I'll put on her face. It will be fear, then wonder, then curiosity, then lust.
 Like that?
 Usually it's like that.
 Is Maya usual?
 No. None of this is.
 Then why are you trying so hard to make it so? Maybe there's something else here.
 I'm tired of something else. Too much, man! I want to get my rocks off with a fresh fine she-beast & go back to my cabin & sleep. Damn the rest.
 And Dylan? Damn him too?
 He's green. Not enough. A woman like that needs the long hard ride—
 You sound like a preening fool.
 Let me finish. The hard ride a man who's been through it a few times has to give.
It? Again.
 Yah.
 Same kind as Maya's *it*?
 No. The opposite.
 Ahh. So Dylan lacks her *it* & your *it* both? Does he have any *it*?
 Yah. A boy's. Not even an *it* yet. More an egg.
 An egg with an *it* inside?
Just let me fuck her. Take him somewhere. It will take awhile but not forever.
 Do you think you're her first?
 I don't know. I mean, I suppose.
 Are you sure?
 No. Has she?
 Has she what?
 Been with other guys?
 If you mean willing & entirely, it's doubtful.
 What then?
 That's for her to tell you or no.
 You're not going to help, are you?

Did you think we would?
 I don't know. Yah. I hoped. Some kind of loophole.
 Loophole?
 Yah. A loophole in the goddamned loneliness almost everyone feels almost all the time.
 We didn't conceive loneliness.
 Who did?
 The first time a man woke up, stood, moved along, reached a fork in his path, & it occurred to him he could choose either path, loneliness was conceived.
 Pretty. You little bastards.
 We'll meet soon again, John.
 Yah. Don't let the door in my mind hit you in the ass.
 We don't have asses, John.

lxxxiii.

It's been days & I want to tell you why: I now have two wives, married in both my worlds, maybe others too I don't know.
 A silver-colored ring & its blue infinity symbol, & I think about it to conclude whatever infinity it is packaged in this ever-passing moment—the bar at Luna T's raises a smashing toast—
 "Thanks."
 "What now? An orgy honeymoon?"
 "Some matrimonial lezzie loving?"
 "A harem! Whoohoo!"
 I stare within. "I'm grateful about it all."
 "Hear that? He's grateful."
 "I would be too"
 "What's your secret, Valentino?"
 "Keep your mind's teeth sharp & your heart's hands soft."
 "Keep yer—"
 "Mind's feet?"
 "Soft heart?"
 "Wha—?"
 I nod. The drinking roars on merrily celebrating . . . drinking. I disappear without explain.
 "I told him he shoulda run!"
 "He had his shot"
 "They never know til it's too late"
 "Ahh toast 'em. He deserves it."
 "Cheers to the beginning of the end!"

cxxiv.

Terror pursued by a lunatic named Grant, a shifting being of evil, this upon my return

home, stolen coat on one bus, stolen bike on another, & he's carved & awled & written long mad messages in my door, hurtles down the stairs to consume me & I wake yelling—

"Ahh, Grant."

"Who is he?"

"Your enemy"

"Why?"

"He was due"

"So now he's arrived, tis all?"

"His name is Odin Grant."

"I don't remember the Odin part"

"He will hunt you until one of you dies. Worse, capitulates."

"Does this story need an archenemy?"

"He does not reason. He consumes with ceaselessness & fury."

"Who are you?"

A magick psychedelic Viking sword waves about the air.

"Grant?"

"Odin Grant."

He nods. I do too.

"Do I chase him in dreams or waking fixtion?"

"He is in all places & reality."

"Do I engage him or avoid him?"

"Neither avoid nor seek him."

"Will this take over this book?"

"If you allow or deny him too far."

A Viking sword swings around him & he's gone—

CXXXV.

I dance with her because this is wedding & she is muse & whatever else this truth tough enough to stand solid or great floating in the aether, I do not question it, I question the world, I dance with her

"What have you learned?"

Desire never stops blowing until everything else gone, I don't know if even then.

"What is desire?"

An arcing that for a passage seems unending, no fall, no down, little, & less. But there is rise & fall, both—

"What is desire?"

A scratching at the babbling universe until it speaks one's secret tongue. A suck on the strange for that heaviest sugar.

"What is desire?"

Disappointment. Over & over.

"What is desire?"

The night's repeating game, its deep promise & slow release.

"What is desire?"

Nothing. Everything.

“What is desire?”

Dylan looks at Maya as she salts her omlette. Follows her fingers as they lift & fall. John watches her in the restaurant window’s reflection & also two spatting alley cats outside. Heat, desire, never ends, every fucking where.

“What is desire?”

I don’t know.

“What is desire?”

Memories. I remember Boston mostly of my years. Who & how I was & changed over time. I think of Portland too, my ragged several months there. I don’t think of Connecticut very often.

“What is desire?”

I look at Merry Muse, blue eyes beneath her pink bonnet. Something trembles, in or about me, I’m not sure.

cxxxvi.

A voice quiet raises by slow steps. “I ponder my deepest & conclude that a black iced pond in shadowed woods is best answer to any soul’s query on truth, God, the hereafter, the anywhere.

“I ponder, I wish to know. Or perhaps I do not. Perhaps I simply wish my heart’s fears denied & its hopes proven my truth is all truth.

“I ponder & I do not know. Studying this pond I notice its frozen ripples, water shaking with cries for freedom til frozen, til that moment when the air stilled its shuddering yearn.

“I ponder & nothing occurs. All happens & no answers. The trees are frozen too. What few creatures exposed & hurried.

“No enemy am I to anything here, no threat. Little, & less.

“I have nothing in this image but my heart’s long years of unanswered want displayed. No empathy, not even an enemy left.

“Something moves among the trunks, & I go. I go.”

cxxxvii.

Tonight return to see an old friend & find us both different, how, maybe just me, how?

I was here years ago, some, & loved it, thought: new, along, go, I was greedy for this new place’s every exotic juice—

I looked up & around & saw power & wanted my part in it—

I’m not who I was there, that here now less & less resembles—

Ended up in a smoky diner & no answer to anything—

What beyond my senses? Others. The world. I’ve been there, then, nowhere, non-then—

What missing? What present?

“Hey look! It’s that show!”

“Which one? There’s about a million boxes on the screen. It’s like a hive!”

Global Wall descends into pink, a cry, a weep, his two or three words, then a growl, a moan. Breathe for me. Good. Deeper. Good. You'll like it. I promise. You always have. I know.

Maya looks at John & Dylan, she decides it's time for her to do this, they are too webbed inside her want, what does she want, something quiet & soft right now, awhile, later more, later her teeth will grow long again, she knows, she's always known—

"Where does this go, David?"

"Where do you want it to go?"

"Simple. Clean. Acoustic."

"This story?" Laughs.

"Why not?"

"Your soul crawls for mazes & self-flight & arching backs. Acoustic is to clean your mind for the next. You know that."

cxxxviii.

I ask Dylan's old man, because I believe noone anymore, tell me desire is virtue.

Desire is by-product, as you understand it.

Of?

You do not know desire. You know deprivation. A hole you try to stop, yet you do not, you enter the hole, become the hole, forget there was anything else.

Am I alone?

You hardly constitute individual enough to adjudge. A few light scratches on the wall.

And you?

I don't exist at all. You know that.

You're one of my scratches?

In a way.

What do I do? How do I scratch deeper?

He looks at me, all hard eyes, so much the stranger I don't know anything.

What do I do?

Further out, deeper in? Is that your speculation?

Is that wrong?

I don't have your answer.

The night is long. I have no answers for it. Nothing comforts. There's music, perhaps that.

What then.

The night is long. Shadows, glares, light crawling. I sit another desolate joint. ZombieTown, a new guise. heh.

Grant appears in the facing armchair.

"I'm not your friend. I oppose you."

Shadow?

"Worse."

Global Wall grows restless & orders one plucked. Taps the camera. "That one."

"She's not prepared."

"That one. Now."

His man assembles a team. His whims used to come more often.

From the restaurant she follows with her friends to the near university. Dorm snatches can but clean but tricky. Lots of eyes around.

He prepares the bedroom himself. The wardrobe is black & red he does not bother with subtlety. He watched her on the hidden camera & decided.

He's ordered her delivered by dawn. Then decides they have three hours. Awake. Aware. No drugs. Few.

He chooses carefully, more so than years, each scent. Shampoo, perfume for neck & tummy, vaginal oil.

A fire drill. Fake. Fire trucks. Cruisers. Tricky. He watches closely. Wants her fresh & whole. All involved are warned: no sampling. Not a stroke, not a lick, not a word.

His man says nothing. Gives the orders.

The night before he'd spoke to a group of progressive businessmen. Told them they fought on the wrong fronts. There is no morality in consumer society. What sells, rules. Beatles, Britney. LSD, cocaine.

"Reactionary politics relies upon a mass brainwashing. A willingness to forget & remember & reshape moment by moment, hour by hour, & do it knowingly & unknowingly. Nothing solid but survival.

"The day your morning paper does not arrive on time, the toilet does not flush, an elected leader says war is for profit, blood bleeds coin, revolution will be here.

"Don't hold your breath for it"

Asked what to do, "There's no answer but to solidify your hold in the mud & don't think about it, too much, like everyone else."

Asked again, "Set fire to all your own, & set your neighbor's fire, & kill him if you must, if he won't set fire his neighbor's."

Asked again, "Good night."

She lies in the van, scared, half-awake, terrified, fully awake, yelling, quiet.

They had handled her firmly but there was no want. Nobody had touched her, not as much as a typical hour in a bar. No looks, no words.

The fire alarm had been strange. When was the last? They had to go out the rear doors. She was with her floormates, the ones she'd been out with earlier, then they were gone, she wasn't standing with them, then she wasn't standing with anyone, then she was in this van.

In between? Hands, pressing but no grope. Creepy.

A trick? A frat prank?

He presses several buttons & mirrors all over the room. Angled, warped, clouded, clear, colored, shifting.

Tell me desire has good ends. Breeding? Perpetuation? Nothing. Desire contains its beauty within. Its effects are unpredictable, often bad. Call it culture, call it law, call it religion. Call it Art? I don't know.

Later there is little residue. A light bite mark on her upper thigh. A sore ankle from how much she danced for him. A tiny hole in the pink thong she'd had on. He'd explained a little between each go.

She knew what it was like, she'd been gotten drunk & fucked. A couple of times. The risk of parties. The risk of wanting to say yes sober & not being able to. You take that drink, you ignore the extra druggy tang.

But he watched her, watched deep into her eyes, watched them open wide, dim, flutter with his thrusts. Nobody had ever watched her face like then. By the third time she was watching him back. Wishing she hadn't wasted time running. Why run? Who taught her that?

Besides, if he had the power to snatch her from her dorm bed, what couldn't he do? And why her? Punishment? Compliment?

"Your thighs." That's what he said. All those hours & two words. She remembered this.

Is this desire?
No.
Love? Coupling?
Little of either.
What do you believe in?
The power to affect.
Is that your angle?
This time.
Is there more?
There isn't any.
Nothing for all that?
No.

The mirror above them undulated like liquid, she couldn't focus, he wouldn't let her lay still & take it. She'd learned how to do that sometimes. Sometimes it went faster. After he'd cornered her, he'd dressed her in red & black & applied all sorts of creams & ointments to her body. Carefully.

This is owned. This is possessed. Not frat boys & locked cars. Not boys in class & three remembered clever ideas. This is *I am his*.

She watched her legs wrap around him, watched her mouth open & cry, howl, beg, learned

that her voice could speed or slow him, her fingernails could direct him, her hips were stronger than she knew, her cunt a powerful entity, her drove, she drove harder, he breathed, she ate his breath, he moaned, she made it ugly song, then turned it into burning wings, then exploding seeds of starlight—she learned better what she was—*what we are*—

cxxxix.

Where the elusive free realm, the shift past cage & open plain, in & through dream, or down into molecules, down deep & hard & true I ask & again, what path unwalked still? What belongs to this animate flesh, come & gone with it, simply the activities of passing beat & breath, memories without a chance of lasting bite, what then?

Solace in any plan revealed, in the raised gesture of any calm eyes, come on, what explains? What cures? What sweetens past some odd hour?

I don't know. Perhaps the godmongers right, one some or many stripes of them. Or the sufferers to break the wheel. Or the lovers of sin for how it simplifies the human tasks into obey, transgress, repent, breed, age, die.

Pick your own steps.

I notice a staircase at Luna T's & a mezzanine led to, & it's all fairly hidden in a place above the barroom & bandroom—don't know how really—

She wonders if she's his woman now but he has become quiet not tender. So she wonders when the van will dump her somewhere, home or near it if lucky.

"I won't tell if you talk to me."

Silence.

"I . . . I liked it. You told them not to touch me. You dressed me special."

Silence.

"Let me stay. Please."

"No."

"Why not? You brought me, Am I supposed to fall down dead because you fucked me rough?"

"That's why."

"Should I be crying? You don't know girls very well. We take what we can get with what we have."

"That too."

"So you'd keep me if I was ready to shoot myself? If I was scared & huddled over in sadness & shame? You *fucked* me. You were good. But it's only so much."

"You won't remember much. The milk"

"You drugged my milk. But I didn't drink much. Would you like me to drink the rest? It's warm & probably sour but I will."

He hurts her then. Not badly, but enough. Doesn't drug her for the return she's done.

"Feel it against your thigh, so hard. How many thighs it's pressed & taken. You another. The next one asleep right now in her Rock Star pink Teddy & black thong. Feel it want to hurt you. Feel it take you & depart. Feel it forget you. You'll feel it when it's gone, when I cloud your memory to rubble, when you wake in your bed & hardly know. Where were you tonight? You wandered off, half-asleep, got lost. I will stay in your dreams though where real power is

native.”

Says no more. Cuffs her to the bed, it hurts, she cries, he won't stop awhile. The drugs begin to work eventually. The pain drowns, & deep want.

cxl.

Nearing dawn, Maya had led Dylan & John back to CoffeeTime. She knows about the old man, more than Dylan. He's not to be feared for one thing, at least how Dylan does. He described the old man to her & she knew who he was. They were friends of a sort. He helped her out. Maybe again, it's been a couple of years.

I look at Grant. “Are you worth any lines or thoughts?”

“No. I don't care for your Art. So-called Art. Whatever it is. Not much.”

I nod. “Not all do.”

“Not like me. I'm worse. I don't like it from within.”

I nod. “I probably need you.”

“No, you don't.” She steps between us. Her hair more than red. Her hair fire.

She won't leave. She screams & kicks.

She isn't done. This is getting messy.

She fights to groggy consciousness.

He tells his man to bring her to the Old residence. A particular girl.

Merry Muse sets a ring of pink & red around Luna T's mezzanine. “He can't come there.”

“Why don't you like him?”

“Your stories will be about your war with him, not your dance with me.”

“You're jealous?”

“You're not up to this shift.”

“Why not?”

She says nothing.

“Is he a muse too?”

“No.”

“What?”

“A demon of sorts. He chases you, you don't chase him.”

“Trust you?”

“Yes. But I don't know you will. You will hook onto anything that sucks your ink to paper.”

“My only morality. What fills pages is good.”

“And who. Your why, your how.”

“Will he?”

“You will with or without him.”

He calls from below, “have a drink with the boys, Ray!” Voices cheering follow.

cxli.

Another voice speaks up & the rest quiet some. "Some call this moment our greatest peak of development, how our hands shape with higher power than ever known, how our hearts shift tangled among one another deeper. How close we are to . . . something.

"Others hark back, turn long locks & a raw sack of memories to an earlier hour's subtleties."

"Jesus H. Christ, this again."

"A few look further back, call this puzzling life a shard from some bigger entity. No progress to arrive here when once men like us had been so much farther!"

Someone tosses a gin-soaked wedge of lime at the television.

"I don't say there are answers true & false, full & partial. I too am seeking among the hard, untelling shadows & the bleak, shimmering hues. I too am feeling the ever more gaunt repetitions of life while not knowing if something else explains this, reveals bloody hand as dearest flight.

"So what to do, how to abide this bedeviling consciousness, this daily raise & nightly fall?"

"Punt, Mac."

"Some would say give it up a little, just a gesture, a wave close & away, nobody will notice, a ruffle of surrender, just a flicker."

The restlessness in the bar gets loud. Mr. Bob the barman leans up to cut the broadcast.

"Stay that hand! Think ye this a passive broadcast, another in a series of anothers?"

A bottle hits the TV's on/off knob & it goes off. It doesn't break when it hits the rubber matt behind the bar. The cheer is muted; Mr. Bob's been known to clear the bar for lesser transgressions. He simply nods, grim-faced. OK. Barely

xccli.

Take a breath, & continue, deeper in, it's a trail, it's a dream, life a fancy, are gloom & rut strong enough to deny?

A breath, it's a labyrinth, always was, so what then? Toward what any, this book, this life?

I wonder. A few days pass, & where the way in here, a forward, a back?

Begin smaller. The glaring lamp, the green bedspread, the beloved tending my small ailments as I tend hers—

OK, a breath, & go—

"What a *sorryass, lying, sack of shit* with *sugar on top!*"

"Hey, that's our President! Watch your mouth!"

"Your president, not mine! I don't hail court-appointed oil scum bastards!"

"Yah? Who else is there to defend our flag? You gonna sit down & chat with Osama in the train car?"

"I don't know there if *is* an Osama, or ever *was* an Osama or if he is who he says he is? How do we know?"

"You're a lunatic! Hey, barkeep, this man's had too much! Shut him off."

"I've had less than you. Seeing that talking chimp on TV took the thirst right out of my belly."

"Are you calling him a liar?"

"They're *all* liars! Wake up! They don't care about you or me or our families or our health or *jack* about us!"

Pause.

"Yah. They're reaming my ma of her pills."

"You're agreeing now?"

"He ain't perfect."

"He's barely upright."

cxliii.

"Some talk of the über-culture whence sprang all the great ancient civilizations. Greece. Egypt. Others talk of the silver spaceships arriving among our furred, hoot ancestors, & a touch, perhaps a coupling accelerates humanity millennia, all from one or a few good fucks."

Pause.

"Still others point to our stranger plant friends, the rootless mushrooms, & contend that when enough proto-humans had eaten them, found union with them, their blown-out, remade neurons altered our race's meager course.

"Ahh. Mmm. The scriptures of Jews & Christians themselves are blazing with magick, with mystical event. The Garden of Eden & its Tree of Knowledge. The young virgin Jewess who births Godd in flesh, who is, unbroken, seeded, & mothers."

Pause. A deep, hard, hurting cough.

"Some would in modern times attribute to splitting atoms or mapping the human genome a sense of cracking the final code. A following through on breaking Eden's rules about forbidden knowledge. Others would say good Dr. Hofmann found Eden's secrets in a peculiar molecule, a brain implosion, a true, lasting mindfuck. Ah."

What pleases most is how one color contrasts or highlights another, crossing lines, cotton across skin, what is tight, what is smooth, what breathes narrowly & waits, what struggles by its fate, give it a set of wings & a piercing buzz—

So, explain. Again, come on. This hour, the next. Some hour. Any? Can you?

By slant. Not even then.

"We live unknowing most of what there is to know. Living a stretch of years hardly a particle, limited to one planet, often one language, one continent, a few cities? Led, instructed, told, judged, habited, the experience of one race, one gender, five senses at best, for most, what hour would any of us be able to explain?"

She adapts to the habit of these days, it's not hard. He likes to take pictures of her, she likes the attention. When he buys her costumes she wears the ones she likes, no pressure. She notices they get skimpier, & accepts this. These hours belong to her, she chooses how they play. *It feels good.*

Go on, imagine it, which do you think? The mushrooms, the space aliens? Atlantis? Mu? Some nutty mix of them? What to believe of ancient origins?

I hardly believe in this reality at all. I can't say wherefrom or whereto. I've seen elsewhere & then returned. I deny dreams mean less than waking, yet it seems each of us dreams alone & wake together, though that does not mount to great much.

His fingers insist, softly, not a shaky boy's trying not to laugh or run. His fingers are smooth, they know, their knowledge is bewitching, she lets them move freely. She could say no, but doesn't. Say what, say anything? He wants this, & she thrills to the heat in the room, to something real.

Does it matter, aliens or shrooms or what? Is it important when none can say for sure & a lifetime chasing chimeras?

What then? I can't tell you. I simply don't know. I sit here in a mannish structure full of similar creatures I can't ever really—& I don't know.

cxliv.

Noisy Children returned, within Luna T's Cafe, but deep within, deeper within than ever, more than Ampitheatre, Rebecca had said there was more, farther, whatever word for egg within the yoke within the egg—

nonetheless, returned, & all glad, they'd done a lot of staining the world, strumming & beating out the virus from here & now around, is how it works, truth accretes if one can call it truth, or maybe truth among truths, or truths among truth, or a complex fugue of both & neither—

eh—

Noisy Children are back & tis known well though they are full at their work now & not a minute for sitting at the bar roaring with the rest—

But those at the bar are glad—Professor Tom & his boys raise mug after mug of brew in their honor—

“Jimmy Reality!”

“Say, guys”

“Over here! Join us! Barkeep, where is this man's well-crafted martini!”

“I'm looking for Rich. I hear he's back around.”

“Yah, back there. Way back there.” The Professor winks merry & bleary, high on the book of Greek myths he'd read them all earlier. Sisyphus. That boulder up & down the hill, over & over. What arguments it had caused!

“I woulda stopped!”

“He can't! It's his fate. The gods are punishing his arrogance.”

"Balls! Death ain't like that!"

Jimmy looks at Mr. Bob the barman, a bottle of Beefeater gin in his hand, ready to mix at a nod. "The Ampitheatre?" He says, reluctantly. Mr. Bob says, "No. Keep going."

"Where?"

"That's all I know. Rebecca told me that. Sorry I don't know more."

"OK. One drink. Then I go." A cheer.

cxlv.

May knowing what to come will be hard & wishing for a soothe to help her

I have to go back there

I know, child

They don't. John . . . and Dylan.

Nor should they. Your decision. Your chosen path from this place. You can't leave with them.

She looks at John, he is distracted by the music so some relief from the hot lorn need of his look, wonders if he could have been her friend & doubts it. This man doesn't mix sex with friendship.

She looks at Dylan, he seems distracted by something invisible in the air, a novelty only to him.

Her heart twists. Her thighs tighten. He possesses the hand she will need, the desire she will wish to sate. Like a boy he thinks in strange, contradictory terms. Woo her. Flowers. Candy. He hears pop songs as instructions.

Really? Dylan? Hm. Other boys surely. What then with him? Why does he delay? They held hands before, now here at his favorite place, he sits in an armchair nowhere near hers.

She catches herself. What's all this? She doesn't know. She's never had a boyfriend, of her own choosing, & it confuses her some.

Patience. When you have to go, you will.

But why me? I don't understand.

Nothing makes sense, child. Nothing. High bureaucratic technocracy from sludge in a few millennia?

I don't know.

He will have a choice too. Both of them will. They may come after you & prove unlucky.

No. No! I have to do this on my own. You can't let them come after me. You can't.

Their choosing. Each his own.

You *can't*.

Each loves you after his own heart. Together they are a potent & unwieldy foe.

He will hurt them. If I go back, it's my doing. Me.

"Maya? Are you OK? Look at me. Open your eyes. It's John & Dylan, see? Your friends?"

John is smiling at her, warmth high, want lower. Dylan is smiling too, odd for him & his strange street puppy soul.

"John told me you were OK but we need to stick with some of you, see how it went,"

Dylan's words become nonsense & he falls away with the rest of Coffee Time—

Where now? She looks around & sees nothing for her to grab onto. She thinks she's still sitting.

I am sitting. I choose that I am sitting right now.

Slowly, child.

Where did I go?

You got too upset & fell back. You're trying much here.

Can I be back with them?

You never left.

She opens her eyes. John & Dylan are still nearby but both are distracted as before.

OK. I get it now.

Nothing ill will befall them here & now. The rest is beyond the purview of easy estimation.

Tell me more. You helped me once.

I hid you from those with no claim to you.

You saved me.

No, child. Their mission was saving you, likely by marking you third child bride to the left & corralling you accordingly. I let you avoid the chute to all that. Yet you have found other tangles since.

I'm trying.

Indeed. You would be far worse off if you weren't.

Why can't they be my family?

Learning what that is, family, one of your extended lessons.

What does he want with me? There were others. Lots of them.

He doesn't want with you. He had you removed. Tis his assistant who made you the offer you trouble about.

So what do I do?

You've decided. You'll go.

But Dylan & John?

The old man snorts at her, or something, & says no more.

cxlvii.

Trip Town sites show up on the Internet. Not for everyone, of course, there are tricks & keys to it. One page along the path might open every other time for awhile, then one in twenty times, then freeze & crash your computer, especially if it's not Mac or Linux. But regardless of brand, some made it through, some didn't, few most times, almost none every time. You could bookmark every link, even write down the path, & it would change. There was no logic to it. Some found eating several tabs of liquid Lucy helped; others tried sobriety.

Often you got through & dumped in a chat room, often that was that. You & another or six or 20 or a hundred others. Sometimes you could type comments, sometimes not. Sometimes the chat was in Norwegian or Swahili or Esperanto or Bump. Sometimes it was full of horny girls who wanted cybersex badly, giggled, wouldn't tell you their ages as they fed you a fractured stream of nude images—sometimes it seemed like the room was full of narcs & they were telling you how quickly their spy equipment could find your exact location, name

address—

Sometimes the chat could be broken open with the right typed word, it would squeak loudly & fall apart in two pieces or a hundred, & there you were somewhere else, perhaps now watching a new episode, or an old one with a new ending, or the one with you in it, or the one with the first girl you ever loved, or boy, maybe it was hardcore porn, maybe you fucking him or her or them, or them fucking you, maybe you made her beg & crawl, maybe you watched as a green creature tied her up & flayed her wildly while assfucking her with both his cocks or a rusty flashlight or a candy cane thin & impossibly long—

Maybe the chat cracked open & you were in a text forum, a series of them, a hundred, every topic more interesting than the next

	Posts	Views
TripTown & LSD	111	5000
TripTown & Schoolgirl Secrets	3000	40,0006
TripTown & the Planet Overlords	12	6,66,71
TripTown & God's Imminence	A	ZZ☹
TripTown & the Numina	☹	6969696969
TripTown & the Eschcaton	π	?
☹ TripTown & 2012	40189	
TripTown & AmeriKKKan Empire	!!	
TripTown & the Vatican's 10,000		
Year Reign of Glory	†	†
TripTown 25,000 AD	∞	

Which to click? Someone had said if you clicked the wrong one the site crashed badly like you wouldn't be allowed back for a month. What the fuck?

So you don't know what to do & watch as the site degrades into random dots & reassembles after several slow hours into your name, even working in the nickname you had as a very young child & this is too fucking much, your mom called you that & SHE'S FUCKING DEAD!

Too much til music comes on & maybe it soothes, the guitars are sweet & they make your eyes go pretty in the dark of your room, did you eat tabs this time, or no? Hard to remember. Is it the same night? What is it? Why?

The music seeps out in colors & fur & moves you to your bed with obscure urgings & you have no fucking clue but a vow, a slow vow, to be back—

cxlvii.

The one thing Ali Doyle & his son Menace have in common is *TripTown*. They used to be close but lately Menace isn't around much. Ali doesn't ask him where, Menace doesn't say.

But *TripTown* unites them as ever. They watch it together, Ali with his quart of Schaeffer, glass mug emblazoned Boston Red Sox 1975 American League Champions, & his shake of salt shaped & colored to look like smiling white-bearded old Papa Smurf; Menace & his pipe,

sometimes hash, sometimes flavored tobacco. Sit together & watch in warm silence.

Sometimes Menace comes out of his more rarely slept-in bedroom later in the night & guides his Papa to his room & they read the website Red Dog Conspiracy together. Ali ran a newsstand for many years, counted out change by hand, his receipts paper, his mail delivered by Jack Shite the postman. Jack's stepdaughter Moonlight when her father was unwell. Perhaps a tippler, perhaps not. So computers to Ali are for *Star Trek* & *2001*.

Still, he watches, he sucks at these rare hours with Menace. He is growing thinner, shrunken, while his boy is hulking out.

Menace takes no chances. He bookmarks every path, every clue, keeps records on his puter & on CD backup copies. Sometimes he panics & starts emailing his many scattered accounts information in various file formats. He knows some will disappear, some will change. Not all.

Menace is obsessed. He knows Maya on the show, or thinks he does. He's not sure but more often lately clues persuade him.

He doesn't think he loves her but he can see where it's headed & he feels he is more than an anonymous viewer. He has to get there, the White Woods. He had to help her.

Menace has a girlfriend & a boyfriend. He never sees them together nor tells each of the other. Each adores him, each imagines his long silences somehow sum to a return of feeling. Each loves the feel of Menace's large angled cock in his/her ass. Menace will occasionally reward each with giving him a blow job, sometimes in the course of one night. In this way he connects them. She goes down on his damp cock & imagines he was jacking off earlier thinking of her. Menace inspires in neither jealousy nor insecurity.

Ali sits at the bar with Tom & the boys, usually quiet, thinking. He favors Mr. Bob the barman who pours his drink & lets him be but for the kind, inquiring word.

"I wish he opened up to me like he used to."

"I remember he would come to pick you up here. Nice boy. Has he got a night job now?"

"No. He doesn't talk much. He has a lover, or two. A dozen, for all I know."

"You still watch the show."

Ali smiles, a wondrous flicker of gladness.

"Never miss it. Then he gets me to show me more on his computer. He's amazing with that thing."

"He sounds OK then. They grow up, Ali. He still loves you."

Ali nods. A long talk for him.

cxlviii.

Maya on the couch, Dylan in one armchair, John in the other. An old man sitting next to Maya, wavers like a weak radio signal.

Tell me something I can use.

The advice is always the same. Beware & be aware. Sing true. Avoid authorities. Nearer nature.

What else, child?

Why all this? Where is it from? Why want? Why do they want me?

What do you want?

I was happy at the ocean, it was big, it's always there in me, always close, I hear it now, I feel it now when I let myself, when I slow, stop.

The want is life. This life. This way, this level, this manifestation, this time, do you understand me?

You've told me all this before. Over & over. It doesn't help me with my decisions.

You've decided already. You're going to him.

Menace is recording this exchange when suddenly it ceases. Quickly he tries to replay it. Nothing.

"Fuck!" he yells.

Ali peaks in. "Now, Menace, with that tongue of yours."

"I had something."

"It's a show, son. A strange, strange show. But it's on the TV, we watch it & it comes & goes."

"No. I thought so too. Then I didn't. Then I really didn't."

"I know you're sweet on the girl. But she's an actress portraying a role."

"Then where are the credits? I've never found a single credit for anything in this show"

"It don't matter. Just creating more mystery, is all. Acting, son, really good acting. Know the difference."

"Pops, she's real. I know it. They're all real. It's not a show. What's happening with them, is really happening. The White Woods. Global Wall. Luna T's Cafe"

"Hey, that's my bar!"

"It's all the same. All the same fabric. Real as us. Real as us, Pops."

Ali sits with Mr. Bob again. "Is he right? Tell me honestly."

Mr. Bob wipes the counter absently.

"I could say but I think you know. Menace isn't a fool. Or a liar."

"So . . . that show . . . it's real?"

"I don't know really. But I've met Dylan. His story has passed through here. He's a nice young man. Lost, like you see him on TV."

I want to help you, Maya.

You want to fuck her, Menace.

I want to help you & fuck you, Maya.

Get in line, Menace.

cxlix.

Maya retreats & I follow, only me, I follow her where nobody else can, I follow her back pink note by pink note, slow upon each one

You'll expect all from me.

I always do. It's how my muses work.

I'm your muse now?

You're Dylan's. Mine in a sense.

How to be yours fully?
 That's no longer possible. Some paths close with the years.
 I don't believe that. Do you really?
 I don't believe in anything anymore & if I did it would not be in people. If I believed
 in anything it would be something people hardly know runs them, runs their sorry world.
 Want? Desire?
 Get on your knees.
 No. Stop.
 Then leave. There's no mystery. Nothing. Nothing to know but DOB & DOE.
 Date of birth & date of expiration. Are you kidding me?
 I look at Maya & truly wish I could hurt her. But I can't. I don't. I wouldn't if I could.
 That's for gone years.
 And for this one? The next?
 I don't know. I wish I did. I really do.
 I would fuck you if I could.
 I know.
 But you're going to whore me into this story again. To one & the next?
 You'll like it. I'll make sure.
 Gee thanks. Why don't you want me?
 I don't want anything.
 You're *all want!*
 Yes! But I do not wish to be.
 It's a long way still.
 I know.
 What then?
 Walk the path, sing true. There isn't anything else. Now go back there.
 No.
 Yes. I said so.

cl.

Has this book summed to anything in its thickening bloom? Moments, like everything else. Moments. Most amounts to little & less, & I know it & try to care despite.

A moment, a slow moment. Shadows of moving creatures, the smell of blood & flesh & movement, bones, I have it to raise it higher, not enough, not enough, ever, not high enough, not high enough, leap & not high enough, move slowly & close, not high enough, slip one between two & three sighs around, not high enough, I slink, I cry, not high enough ever,

Slow, & then slower. A hand floats & gestures, the chords hit harder, the elixir is strong as the world

Slow & even slower, the feel of leather on denim, the near of the strange & how to breach it, how to cut two & three, the Viking's magick Psychedelic sword for daily use, any of it?

Little changes, if any. Still the hustle for coin & tit. Still the godmongers & the fat kings & preachers ringed round with diamonds, blood, & bones

Nothing changes I'm wondering if ever. Ever the hustle for coin & tit? Tell me other, tell me true.

What to breach but a fresh dollar & an uncut cunt?

Tell me something. I will write about it years if you tell me something new.

I look at the old man. Know something I don't? He shakes his head. It doesn't matter, you'll fight longer at rest than most in their fury. Fine, & fuck you.

I come to sit in this armchair, Coffee Time Coffeehouse, Portland, Oregon, whatever shit piece of truth I have runs straight through here & know it—find it, sometimes I'm not fond of it, hurts too much—*sing true, fucker*—

cli.

Noisy Children deeper than the Ampitheatre what might it be here's one go: I'd eaten 30 hits of acid, maybe more, & writhed in my tent in the Everglades & without 100,000 saw in the new century crying happy to the groove but I did not cry happy I was not I how it fell away that night

& forward to a night I watched a bearded scarecrow at his blinking box, its cascades of numbers & lights & his fingers tapping numbers & symbols I imagined man-machine symbiosis til there is no between the flow runs both ways ahh

& skip back to a pond of water & a pretty girl & all those lost hours still tremble in me, her ragged pretty voice, my perpetual dirty carcass,
I raged for beauty for freedom the same—

clii.

The resistance is everywhere, always. The revolution is now.
Not tomorrow. Now.
Revolution now.

Another one: it was only 9 or 10 months but it stretched oh far, & I called the setting ZombieTown, the test now to extract what remains that is mine, what is not a fool vast of fragments, & I know at least one. It was nights when I roamed the town. My steps took me to a lowdown joint, & there some or most of the night, with my books & walkman, my notebooks where I've lived most of the best of my years—

Stop. What of this. The psychedelic dream is in part a praise for each & all, what is common the truest matter at hand, only, chase this—

Breach time & space, cross skin to skin, feel it like it's happening now, tis, to me, you, every, the differences less & less, the differences words the differences none—

What then? A bus rolls down Pine Street as I sit watching now but toss a rope to that hour I sat watching from another table, & then to what else? To the future? What unrarried place? I fear illness & poverty & loneliness, the sink by hours from here to hereon, if hereon there even be—

& the world after me? a lined hook tossed arcing over my life to the world before me? Caught & tossed back to tonight a swamp, nameless, I don't know where, & tossed where? Through a dreaming tribesman who sees & knows me, can we speak?

“Hello.”

“ello.”

“I am Raymond.”

“Ngai.”

“I'm in your dream. I've been weaving out, one place & year to the next.”

“What can you tell me about the secrets of the world?”

“Secrets?”

“You are a god in disguise. I am not fooled.”

“No.”

“How may I become rich?”

“I don't know. I'm not rich.”

“The gods don't need money!”

Hooked line tossed up & catches a cloud, holds, holds. Nighttime. I can't see the ground very well. Wind pushes along. No lights below. What year, which century? Letting go, easier to it, whatever kind of here this is. OK. I let more go, become a small cluster of skinless bones & eyes—a paper seagull of staring brightly into the hard, steady breeze—

Revolution, everywhere, always. No hour chaff by nature, no soul fallen & gone without import—

Menace brings his friend Fruity Toot Toot home to hack the Red Dog Conspiracy site—Fruity is gay but knows Menace is all about that skinny white chick Maya now so he's cool, & besides Menace listens to his lengthy stories about his greenhouse, his marijuana plants, his ayahuasca, his cacti, his shrooms, & so on, FTT grows a large glass building full of psychotropic plants—hacking is a sideline, something to smoke his DMT & do—or some *Salvia Divinorum*—whatever—hack-n-puff—he hasn't even had a boy in months—

“What are you looking for?”

“I want to find her”

“Maya?”

“Yah. I have to stop her.”

“Listen, kid, how many are doing that? Come on. Even I can see she's hot with that pink blonde candy cane hair & hippy raver chick vibe. That is one horndog show.”

"It's not a show. It's real."

"I know. It's one of those shows where real people play out some kind of game."

"No. It's more. It's our world. I don't know how to explain it."

"Your old man asked me if you're OK. It was the first time he talked to me. Just now. When I came out of the toilet. You worry him. He's OK."

"Yah, I've shown him all this. He doesn't believe it."

"Look, there, see that? The letter j. It's a clue. A font clue. I bet if we triple-click on it, we'll find out it's a secret link."

The forums on the monitor's screen disappear. The screen is black.

"What did you do?"

"Relax, Homes."

The screen begins to bubble, liquefy, distort more & more.

"Tripilicious!"

"What do we do?"

"We take a hit each of this Sally 10x & go in."

"Into *Trip Town*?"

"Right down its black throat like a couple of great big ding dongs!"

An object from behind hit hard, very hard, & death. Wake, still here. But no more dreams. Dead in dreams. What to do. A hundred books about dreaming do not help, warn & speculate but do not advise.

Then dreams again but not like of old. These are the dreams of a dead man.

So, a mystery. He's not dead in waking life, but in dreams a kind of ghost. He can't deduce what.

"You will fail," says Grant.

"Was anything else ever possible?"

FTT motions Menace into the black throbbing mass that has enveloped his computer monitor & reaches near floor to near ceiling—Menace is between worlds anyway from the hard hit on Sally—he holds his breath, just in case, & dives in—

"Can you help me? I can't figure out what I'm supposed to do."

"You don't belong here. Why are you here?"

The noise & shouts at Luna T's bar raises up & up, more crowd in than usual, Mr. Bob the barman taps an already rather drunken Jimmy Reality to help him pour drinks. Jimmy pours one-for-you, one-for-me-style, & presses heavy the hard stuff, lighter & lighter the tonic, juice, rocks & so on—

A hookah appears at the bar & fills the air with a pillowy violet smoke—the music up & up, the noise & faces multiply, ahh, close, warm, how it raises—

The mass gathers around Menace & pulls him in with a thousand gelatinous fingers, & then recedes within computer monitor, & FTT can only watch. He taps the screen with a long burnt umber lacquered fingernail. Glass. "Figures," he pouts, & watches.

A day ten thousand years from now lands the hooked line, the plant a great undifferentiated living mass, & the hook is swallowed as though never there—

cliii.

What the new language will bear the next song? Will the song drip electrical strums & sprout a thousand feet toward the clouds? What will explode lovely every minute between pages, is there anything tonight not confession of old & new & next & multiple & conflicted want?

I ask, wonder, do not know, am nothing, noone yet here, this, pen blowing out wet ink on white quick drinking sheets, what then, who, why?

When the tape, rolls, nobody is ready, & the music begins, because it is always going somewhere, down deep, out there, who somewhere, where you, how time's a ruse, why?

Fingers one & multiple & countless make & make in a world of atoms nearing & releasing constantly—do you understand you are vital & nobody at all?

Why? Ask again. Why? Ask again.

cliv.

"Whatever it meant"

The Viking nods.

"Unconvinced?"

"It still means everything, if you let it. You know that."

"Live hours seem more laden with age, with presumption, with regret, with fear."

"If the worst to be feared is death then yet it does come."

"I don't know if death is the worst. I think decline is. Diminishing hope."

He nods.

"I think having less to say to anyone. Brute, wordless want. Loss of faith not in the universe, but in humanity. Nothing much changes. What to tell anyone about anything that matters?"

"Each decides. Each hour. Each day. Adds to a life's statement."

"And then what? Tell me the point in any of it!"

"A point?"

"A point."

"A point to a whole life?"

"A point."

"Would a life complex enough to seek a point end simply enough to have a point?"

Grant looks like a homeless tramp now as he endears to Luna T's bar by sweeping up the floor, collecting the pitchers off the table. I don't tell anyone who he is, not sure myself. Rebecca, like Merry Muse, dislikes him .

"Let him be, Beckah."

"I don't have to."

"Let him be. I mean it."

Grant smells. His large black garbage bag smells. He moves awkwardly & bumps things. Has the shakes of an old alkie but refuses drink, tells Mr. Bob to refuse him should he ever ask.

Franny talks to him. She knows small-town oddballs from her youth. Convinces him to shower once a week, on the vague, actually non-promise that she might one day scrub his shoulders.

He leaves me my distance mostly. I seem to interest him less.

"It's not you. It's whatever claim you ever had to authenticity."

"No more?"

"It's tricky because it's in your mind finally."

"I'm as indie as I feel myself to be?"

"In a way."

"I don't believe in a lot of things anymore. Maybe just the idea of progress. Maybe simple as hope."

"What ever was hope?"

"Hope is arrival onto new lands. A faith like clean water."

"Hope is also action. Good work. Hours at the task & accomplishment."

"Hope is fucking music like anything else worth shit."

"OK. Where's yours?"

"I don't know. Can hope be a love for defiance? Can hope be not for an event but rhythm? Can hope be moments of chocolate, of trying to take a photograph of the full moon—"

"Yah, Jack. All that."

"No?"

clv.

Soul's best weapon twined awfully of faith & doubt. Night bids follow & learn new. To Art upon a different pitch, tough as a bone, the bite of sugar & pink cheeks, old faiths.

What were they about, what toward when they existed full? I wrote, full of song, to absence. I've never understood anyone or anything, ever. No amount of years has told me anything overarching, save kindness connects, competition corrodes, violence does not fill as quickly as it empties, the best hours many are hidden or in hiding, memories live by their own will, love is an amoral force, desire many times more so.

Maya steps out again & looks at me.

"No."

"You can't control me. You ceded that power."

"No."

"Why should I scare you?"

"You're Dylan's."

"I'm *my own*."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did you hurt me?"

"Who?"

"All of you. Each & every fucking last one of you. Why? That's all I've ever wanted to know. Why didn't any of you love me?"

"Do you want an answer?"

"I know the answer. Because life isn't fair, isn't pure, isn't anything in particular. It doesn't sum to any kind of explanation, does not devolve to a clear point, does not deduce, does not compute."

"Would you like me to return now?"

"Answer my question."

"Which?"

"Why did you hurt me?"

She sighs. "Because nobody is ever fully satisfied. What else?"

"It's only by stubbornness I am still writing this."

"You still have to say something. Lots of pages."

"You're sweeter to Dylan."

"It's what he likes. You want something else."

"I want truth."

"You want truth with a nice ass. You don't want molecular truth or superconductor truth. You don't want fungal or arachnoid truth. You want muse truth."

"Muse truth."

"Tell the truth but with a nice blush"

"That's it?"

She turns on me. "What else?"

"You're leaving?"

clvi.

Now Menace is within for real, he knows that, it's about time & his only thought is: save Maya.

Not fuck Maya?

No. Not really.

Not really.

I have to save her.

"She's over there."

Menace blinks. Coffee Time Coffee House. The room with the armchairs. There's Dylan, taller & skinnier than he looks on TV but still, that's Dylan.

John is a muscular dude. Not one you'd like to push for less than a life's endangering moment.

Maya is hard to see. She's . . . glowing. Glowing?

"Are you going to talk to her? Are you going to save her?"

"She's glowing!"

"Go nearer & see."

Dylan & John daunt him as real people. He didn't know this was possible. And what is this exactly? He knows his psychedelic film canon. *The Matrix*. *Waking Life*. *Mulholland Drive*. *Pi*. *Vanilla Sky*. What this then?

He approaches her slowly, hoping she will solidify, hoping he will become less scared.

Is he on the TV now? Is someone watching this? This is no set, there is no camera filming him. He feels a little disoriented but not unreal. Not filmed.

She glows more as he nears. It seems to take him forever to cross a few yards at most. How does he know it's her? Her pink & blonde hair. Soft cheeks, narrow chin. Very light blue eyes. But she won't clarify more than some & he does not near her no matter his countless paces.

John & Dylan are watching him not terribly friendly.

"What am I doing wrong?"

"She's not your friend."

"I have to save her."

"Does she look like she's in danger?"

He wants to tell them but how? You're on a TV show that's not a TV show which I've come to by hacking my computer to create a path from my bedroom to this place? Maya I think is going to sacrifice herself to allow a bad man's remorseful assistant to crush him, free his mostly willing captives, & I think that this all goes much further than any of those details imply?

"I need to tell her. Will you help me?"

Dylan & John consider him wordlessly. For all the complexities between them, especially involving Maya, they are a guarding wall between her & what amount of the encroaching world they can keep far—

Menace can wait, he realizes it's them whether they know it or not, jerks hard at each without thinking & falls backwards in her direction.

It works enough as he cracks their field around her & wedges partway in.

She looks up from what she's reading.

Menace can't breathe she's so pretty.

"Hi" she says softly.

He nods, terrified.

"Are you OK?" she can't tell his dilemma.

"Don't do it" he croaks in a whisper.

"Do what?" she half rises from her beat brown armchair. She knows what he means, panicked he knows too.

"I came to stop you. I love you."

John's powerful hands lift Menace up & through the air away from her, becoming black & gelatinous as he falls away hitting not the wall John intends him to strike but a mass receiving & swallowing him up again, pulling him toward his journey's start, the sniff of her pink heat choking his nose with desire & melancholy & fate.

clvii.

Arriving nearer the within's within, Noisy Children play younger & older both, nearer the place where the music does not cease nor resume, nearer, nearer, time neither is nor is not, place is no here no there these conceptions are not & thus control nothing affect nothing, the music swirls multiply all songs at once one song ever no differentiation turn on tune in drop out enough of an instruction? get on the bus is another yet there is no wavelength there is no bus, to put another way this is no spoon is that enough I don't know full the earth if you know

you are deep within it that you raise & there's still more that you fall & still there's more how to tell ink left to right what any of this is art while the ink not yet spread on paper, some thing like that perhaps are you listening? Noisy Children is playing for you & always have Noisy Children is playing me & always have what nearest to this how dreams seep & erupt & layers of them concurrently & consecutively & yet flick them like ripples & they become another & several & many & they open out to something near nearer the same but not a burst two countless none tell it go on or it will tell you or sing by your own creation or not within's within within's within within's—

What's left? What isn't?

clviii.

Why? Question of blood, heart, thighs, dream. Question hard & fair, run through trunk & seed, flight, bone. God to all questions, companion every hour, ripples & glare, undulation, powerfully unknown—

Dead is dead yet here I sit in this bar & I don't know what to do, they watch the TV up in the corner awhile, quietly, I've never seen a tavern slow & stop for television, but they listen, lean forward, I forget for a moment my situation—the girl is so pretty—I remember something far off—

then remember all this & it whelms all else.

The bartender offers me a drink. I look at him helpless & wordless. He nods & smiles. Looks over now & again as though protecting me.

I am dead. I don't know what that means. My dreams know but I wake up & here I am in a body.

A breath. A beat. Another. They keep coming.

clix.

“Tell me it means anything”

“Which?”

“Any of it. Tell me why I care”

“Do you not care?”

“I doubt. I doubt any importance in anything. Habit is not faith. Good will is not faith.

Loyalty is not faith. *Love is not faith.*”

“Do you love?”

“I do. Love is want. Love is absence of completeness.

“I don't believe in progress. Time explains nothing, predicts nothing. Inventorying property & successions of dead is not explanation

“I really question it all. Faith is an explanation believed, or unneeded.”

The old man leans back & closes his eyes.

clx.

Beloved,

to continue this letter nearer conclusion of this book, no closer the answer, or even the question save bluntly spoke: Why?

I don't know. I started asking this question a long time ago. I think it involved others, why they didn't like me. I had no awareness that was no local, or TV-generated, human concerns. I hardly knew the world. I was barely anyone.

When I began to write I began to wake up. It took years. It's still going on. Does it ever end?

What I feel often is helpless. I don't know if anything I've ever done has mattered, or how that could even be measured.

I met a guru in last night's dreaming. We argued whether the question or the answer matters more.

I say the question. Whatever it is.



To be continued in Cenacle | 69 | June 2009

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Why ? [a new fixtion]

(concluded)

clxii.

A mystery, a riddle, a chase, a maze, a journey, this, a pursuit, a psychotropic fairy tale, metaphysical travelogue, raw symphony, chocolate high arc of event & misdeed, breathe, shh, near, ahh, tis, what tis, tis what, tis, tis what tis, what this world but the cosmos confessing all, every throb toward kindness & cruel, what this universe but a torment & salve of continue, breathe, relax, say it again, I watch figures lean in & know more, summing heat, a service, a show, a try at reinventing the world by flicker & powder, recall me this night held back from memory, recall it now, for its story too could be this book, its story a mystery, a riddle, & so on, nothing forever & nothing gone

Kiss me because you could
teach me of your want's hard chase
let me know it matters

every day the try, the hard high great gobbled leap try to see new & see now & an hour of some passing scrap says yes *this* is how, *this* is true, the rest lesser, a tired stumble, wait the shine, it will near again, wait the shine

to remember wider & longer
maybe to see new
always the spasming beg
to see now

I can see particles, a building, a spark of that day's weather or emotional complex—but not much more—sentiment, perhaps a bite harder than sentiment—what then? Clue? I'm ugly with such pockings

What wish to craft & handed where? The universe is little & grandly knowable but not by a familiar light—men mistake a shocking taste of its potent meat with knowledge of the beast when whole, of its creation and cease, how to steer, where the map, who the maker, will this & so, or will that & so

Why? Never far from why? Never answered but a flash, or some smiling guru's sturdy lie—why? & why? & why? & why?

I want to push harder & know how to know
the long arc rises—————

rises—& I think how I cannot do this alone—not simply me not all of this—not as possibility keeps revealing a larger stage, greater canvas, no, cannot do it, all of it, alone—never have but no, cannot—

so I wonder—that's what I'm doing right now—this later night's hour—& push at this book with my rough pen's want—

long arc—rises—rises steeper—there is so much to be about—

clxiii.

The sense of coming apart, of change, of departure, Maya feels it nearer, it tugs at her from within, she can't tell Dylan, she wants to, she wishes, she wants, she knows where bound, it was determined before she met Dylan on that bus & only delayed by all passing since—

It's been stipulated. She must appear freely & pure. She knows what's meant by each yet wonders over her own sense of purity.

Yet he'll shut it all down at her word, the great experiment, all will be released, the efforts ended

What could it have meant, any of it? He believed he could bridge the chasm—

Wasn't it just a lot of fucking?

No. Not quite.

Each was explained. Listening or not. The words were spoken. The lesson or indoctrination or whatever began immediately with—

Why hadn't it worked with her? What had gone wrong? What would her return do?

Her heart & thighs didn't belong to Global Wall. Yet he sought to break & harness as a way of life—so why just her & all the others let go—

She knew his demands. Knew what she would have to join in. She'd been a part of it for a short time, & listened. It was a process. She didn't witness each step but the results.

Why hadn't it worked with her? She'd not been touched. She'd been prepared as all of the others, in pink, in scent, lace, a razor, the understanding of restraints for reward or punishment, but not by her own pleasure—

She noticed how they came back, dazed, & the next time, accepting, & the next time, something like resolved—

How the returned ones were assigned elsewhere after a short time—

She waited her turn—waiting, someone else's will had always been her life—

“Stand straight. He won't abide a slouching girl.”

A brush to her hair.

“Straighter! Spine. You've got the kind of round ass & breasts he likes, just pay attention. Learn his will, know his pleasures. Details will serve you here.”

She stood straight, let herself be primped & studied, these things were familiar—

& so close when it had happened she was ready, had decided to listen, to let it happen, there was no escape, no friends, & what of that life back there? Just other hands, fouler places than this one—she'd decided—

She'd asked to see his face—others had—but he hadn't believed them—stalling, manipulative—her question was curiosity, nothing else—

the one prior to her had been difficult. So bitchy that the pleasure, the purpose turned dark, & away. It became punishing rebellious flesh, breaking it, & again—he made sure she saw the cameras, made her buck & cry for them, took off her gag long enough to let her scream & moan, & a two finger signal created a feedback loop for when he fucked her again she listened to her moans & curses over & over, & new moments were fed in & he signaled the walls & ceiling feed live this fuck for her to watch, it had been difficult because she was so sure she'd seen it all, could handle it fine—could talk her way out of it—she'd had close calls before but a persuasive, & wet tongue, a good knowing hand had saved her—

She'd been in a bed or two like this & found her way out too. It was a game. She liked it. It gave her something to think about in the day. Someone else was writing their scripts. These occasional nights were hers—

the tease was so easy—a bit of flat tummy, a flash of tight ass, her tits were decent, she'd seen better, but nobody used them better—

So he was rich, had paid some fucking goons to take her. She'd seen worse. The rest of the girls were for show. *Big bad bull.*

The air in the room was soft, but pressing. He was arrived before she was ready.

He was too quiet. Get them talking, play them, words & touch, more of the first but emphasize the second—

he wouldn't talk—he didn't want her to talk either—his touch was direct—knowing—she was repelled but responded—

She knew when she felt his two fingers snap her black thong & flip it aside—not for a later souvenir—he didn't care—didn't think like that—she was his, she was *next*, she was *now*, there was no option—

Before her first scream the silk gag in her mouth, her hands in manacles to the headboard—

She was undressed in moments & struggled with his movements. They weren't hurtful but allowed little resistance.

He spoke once, that first time. Quietly, just for her. "Perform, or it will go worse."

He knew her body well which shocked her. Knew her breasts responded to the soft touch & rough one in alteration—touched her down below where she'd often touched herself—places no man had found or been allowed to find—

It was his cock against her thigh that blew her mind. He let it rub her idly down there, loosed her gag, then he started to unlock her manacles & she wrenched insanely—

In an instant it seemed she was bound tightly by arms & mouth, & her thighs wide, & he made his intent plain when in one long clean thrust his cock drove inside her, drove to an inside even her secret fingers had not probed, drove hard past fleshly resistance, & she'd bucked instinctively, & he drove again &, how? harder, deeper. For a moment she passed out. When she came to, she was on her stomach, that flat teasing thing of other days, & she felt his stern hands on her ass & that cock again this time breaking her ass, her will following—again she'd fought, against the million echoes of her cries, against every wall & surface showing her bound & fucked inevitably—"Perform. Or it will go worse." So it went worse. She'd fought. he'd fucked her again. She'd fought. He brought in a bigger man to fuck her, much rougher than he had, less subtlety, none, & made sure she watched him watching her get this other man's cock. Watched, wordless.

Eventually she relented. It was in a less clenched hand, a softer breath. They all do at some point. Whatever why will come later. This is the how.

As she relented his attention changed, he was trying to give her a fucking orgasm!

She knew it, & that he had come close after—it finally happened the night she noticed the window ajar, & made her try. She expected him to really hurt her but instead he spread her thighs in his owning way & set to the most maddening lick of her pussy. She resisted, knew the ajar window had been a trick. He reached up & grasped each of her hands. He squeezed rhythmically & tongued her clit & around her shaven lips, long & longer, slave to this hour, this movement, this pleasure, this final gift she had to give not have wrested from her—

her eyes fluttered open & the ceiling showed him fucking another girl, violently, her face young & terrified as he did—what he did

three hard sharp licks & she exploded—the gag was out & she didn't scream, she yelled, what came out hadn't been there, wasn't her, what the fuck? Just licking her? Just showing her a fuck tape? What? What was it?

She must have passed out awhile because she woke alone. The door unlocked, the way back to the others, but none of them familiar. Nothing to say now. She wanted to go back. She had mattered *much*.

clxiv.

Any wild lands left, find many but fearless do so otherwise they shift to resemble old walls & cries—

I bear softly, sloppily in me much sentiment for old years & remembering is much of what we do, it seems—

Fuck it—praise the old faces & hours & let them be—they're carried along without my company—whatever I comprised in memory or influence—fuck it—

the only music that matters is the one being played, that's all—old music fades, becomes ink & paper, shivers something in someone at best—I look at it, listen, & there's hardly much there—

Remember it all with love & burn it away—what will tuck around, tonight's higher throttling roar let be, what crosses, what slows, fuck it, hard, twice, & off—

I look around Luna T's Cafe's bar & see what's needed of it. The long, dark, L-shaped bar, the TV in the corner, the Jimi Hendrix poster on the wall, the several backs of drinking men, the jukebox in the corner, the heavy swinging door leading to the bandroom—

& what of this place, its floors wooden & sawdust, its several small tables deep-awled with old hours' comments—what of this place, how I've carried it along for something it deeply bears—once I was a tavern-happy drinking man—I raised my glass & bottle & can a thousand times on a thousand nights, roared & believed—& then eventually I did so with less belief—& then I did so with little belief—& then I stopped—but this bar remains—I keep it—whatever I chase in these pages now—however fuck high nutty it cuts through this bar—affects, affected—it happens countless—I continue to live here—

But rouse the old faces for an evening's wet slob through old thirsty glories—no, none. No patience.

I am writing for my life on these pages, the old thirsty mates would not make much of this, fight their own matches with mortality—lose each at his own pace—

Now for a soft moment. Seat beneath me, Rebecca near, she smiles, ever. Love. Muse. Her pad in shadow, hand a slow blur. Love you. Ever young. Love you. Muse. Love you. Love you how the years diminish to other thoughts on time's passages & its meaning. Whatever meaning. You are nearly 26 years old. How did that happen.

Look at Knickerbocker, he hasn't drunk his whiskey in years. Always keeps pace with me, scowls hard & continues.

This the best of it, what resembles a soft moment. Guitars crash hard. Next song.

clxv.

In his dream late he finally has what he wants, his shadows & want loosed, his hands know better than what tie-dye & denim will tell—

most intense near break through, near crack the binds, the glare & crackle bear a map, a direction then another, a way out that does not include return

her breath is shallow, her words are few, enough to tell her fear, her inexperience, her trembling wish to please him, this is his, this hour she bears for him

more, push a little, other full moons, other patches & wide blows of stars, there's music, always music, & often people, smiling strangers, hard, high

she wants to say be gentle, go slow, but she can't talk, can't disturb him with her doubt, her secret retreat, & return, in a heartbeat, less, wee

He takes what he wishes to know

There were moments of sugar, there were kisses in complete cosmos, there were views down mountains & across deserts, there were years of hours lost to watching

When he's rough she flinches but he does not notice & she is sad, my secret isn't there or there—my tremble, my flinch, my watching your face best I can while you strip me, while you try to surround my body, look there—

his lips are cold on her nipples, his mouth hurries, sloppily conquering, she responds leastly & he tries again, his mouth warms, she responds more, this is what he wants, she gives, when her hand slightly touches his back, he bucks, he spasms—

this the single universe? this material illusion, this tightly agreed upon crust of earth & water, slight sentience, teeth reach toward meat, mind toward any novel flicker, heart, etc?

The gentlest moment when he was lifting the cups of her bra, he did it like there would be twin explosions, his breath blew out in several directions, he waited for her to spasm, to fight, but she just watched him silently & the long beast within engaged, how far back the roar for tit & cunt & ass, to make her moan, cry, release, submit? How far back the deviling drive to own for an hour in this single way? How long back did this cruel only want become confused with vague, sacred beings, how deep within are fuck & God twined? Are they bound to music too? They are not deeper, what relation?

Her touch on his back implodes his focus, splatters his brute, he has to beat deeper to recover, has to bruise, to hurt, to make her beg, make her know & make her forget—

Tell me it means anything, tell me history has a traveling arc, tell me polity is not lingual cage,

tell me the hardest longest drives are civil, well-costumed, tradition's stern quiet soldiers—

Tell me. I do not believe you. Tell me you know, tell me it's in this book or that, tell me any man has breached the world beyond men & returned, I say a different man returns,

once you're gone, you're gone

his hand stroked her still covered breast, t-shirt, bra, his fingers pressed & stroked, she knew it wouldn't stop there, knew he would go on, knew she could not stop him—his hand between her thighs, angry when she seemed to resist—resistance did not exist here—a tree may as much fight to keep its fruit from a plucking hand—

clxvi.

The TV's glass screen explodes limply, crackles, sighs. *Trip Town* seems over for the night.

"For porn that was kind of strange."

"It was hard to see anything."

"Hey! You saw her tits! They were fine, weren't they? What else?"

"I just don't like that fruity arthouse crap."

"I think that show is gone. They can't get away with that."

"They just did! You saw it too!"

"I think it's gone. You can't show stuff like that except on, what do ya call, pay TV."

"You're old. They show nearly everything now."

"What happened to the story? Who was that guy?"

"Who cares? First you want more blue, then you want a story line that makes sense! He fucks she, we watch, remember, wank later at bedtime. End of story! Drop the curtain!"

"You're a real asshole, ya know that?"

clxvii.

The songs become extended notes & reach for the dotted swathe, break up into leaves & float off, flame around faster & faster until not possible, not likely, not at all, feel it, feel it harder, something contains you, closer on these hours stretched wide feel it, feel, feel—

Slower, slower, slow, let, let some more, how one off to there, others elsewhere, watch you go til there is no you anymore, call this a dream, call this illusion til daylight & the venal assemblage of things?

Explain a dead man's memory, go on. Explain! I have none. Can you explain any of it?

I remember a street, far from here, miles, years, walking it to reach a restaurant, entering, the hour mine own but I suffered it, feel me returning there now, to that town, that street, that hour, the dusk, the many dusks, now grapple up one of your own, go on, like this, there was no band on my finger, no paycheck in my pocket, I walked that hour blind to this one as I walk this one blind to the next—

the re-building market, the headshop, the hair stylist, the strangers in every direction, the crimson floor, the framed trout, the many misshapen lamps, the deep brown pot of green leaves, faces stare at blinking boxes, others knot together meat & bread—the streets filled with metal engines galloped by electric torches—

Almost a crack enough to escape, close, close. A distant window floors up, loud with light, the old wonder about who & what—the old yen to know—

Almost. Close, close. The rush of old wonder, when it mattered, when I cared. Humming trucks in early morning. Windy desert camps. Somebody love me. Somebody know me. Here's a new day, what possible? What isn't?

clxviii.

She lies before him, perfect, rent, watching, nude, obscure streetlight patches on her thigh, shoulder, he tries to remember, looks, down, did it already happen? He can't remember. Is her face wet, is there fear, is he beginning or continuing, he is strongly motionless for a full minute, when he does next will tell him, how she reacts, does she flinch, crouch, wish to cover that beautiful torso, does she open out for her first, her next, is he? Was another, he wishes to extend this moment, would he make her, does he even want to do this, the moment can't last, who is she? What is this? What happened a minute ago, five, is that blood or shadow between her thigh?

"Please" she says softly, fear, want, what? He tries to think, feeling himself hard below, impatient below, remembering one late night, now so long past, Cordelia was sick & couldn't sleep, wouldn't explain, just radio for hours, that pink radio, the only program she liked that wasn't music, a man talking about alien ghosts, sentient ectoplasm, he flinches remembering Cordelia leaning into him, & now this girl, what is anything?

"Again, it will be better"

"Don't do this please"

"Come closer"

Which words allied with her soft-spoken "please"? In multiple universes multiple truths?

Or none.

clxix.

To ask another what it means any of it, why? I don't do that anymore, don't believe the answers, none have the whole contained & thus & thus—

No. Look down the dim yellow corridor & wish something there, more than alarms & cold winter air, beyond an other, an arrival, a cosmic welcome, a new basket of memories, a stranger tread through unknown air, what would be necessary to make it new again? Make anything new again? Or a push & arrival in a profound next, the untried & seducing by terrifying liquid cries?

What will fill the hours so they haven't an escape? What hard live ether would light up the cracks among creatures as, hark, they fill in tightly?

No answers yet, none smiling engulf—the moment trembles & gives way—

clxx.

Art is guide but does not lead, rouses bone & blood & flesh to eager hours of make but what & how? What of money's poison lure & sex's red distract? What of how others watch, mock with eager compliments & coarse questions? The suck of others, do that work but not right now, have a beer, let's go to this party, blah blah distraction blah blah join the fucking human race you're a fucking freak blah blah

I'm remembering high school hours, study hall hours when I sat alone with my notebooks, lunchtimes when I hid with my books & notebooks, months of days when I didn't go there, I took a dirty bus to a dirty city & revelled in a swatch of freedom—& little has changed in that I still seek to hide with my work, still lure to solitude, why?

I keep asking why. Why? Realizing my books are long past youth's slender dreams of renown. What dream then now? What prize sought here? Is it just fucking habit? What belief throttles this engine?

clxxi.

We share the dark brown craggy pipe again. The hash is even stronger.

"Cheer up! Have a good smoke."

I look at her. "What did you mean to me?"

Her smile does not lessen. "One bad fall, or trick of ill luck, & you will know. Does it have to come to that?"

"I don't know. You're right."

"Do something about it. Squeeze the hours soft & hard. Nobody knows how many or how much left."

I nod.

"Do you believe me or are you bluffing?"

"You're right. I've been pushing myself mirthlessly & hopelessly."

"What then?"

"There's no way back. What remains is memory. I don't even know where to, nothing tells in advance."

"What then?"

"Better breathing. Patience. Awareness. I don't know how to handle daylight's crippling mereness."

"What—"

"I don't need it again. Despair is a mindstate, wide & shallow. It is a muddied puddle, a weak connection, worse things. Loneliness in any setting, any company."

"?"

"I don't know. Acknowledgment."

"Then what?"

"More words. Some of them with the old burn."

"Art is risk. Art is life's best risk."

I nod.

Maya keeps dreaming him, she is different each time, & once he might be Dylan but the dreams keep coming to her & she wonders what, how, so close she can't escape even in sleep? Will he do it? Will he stop Global Wall? It's why she's wanted back, isn't it? She's expected to put him off his guard, the one who got away, the one who befuddled him, has she got this straight? Thinking about it, dreaming about it now, it seems crazy, worse, it seems dangerous & she is scared, she's been scared since—she doesn't know—but somewhere Dylan—if he—would he? Would they? It would be nice, it would be warm & close—she'd left one then another who wanted it, wanted her, wanted something—& she learned to keep moving—& sleep lightly—yet here she was—sleeping hard—she knew it—this happened—a book she'd looked at a long time ago in the library called it lucid dreaming—school library—that had been long ago—they didn't like her going—they had the answers—school was the brainwashing—where am i? I need to do what I do when I'm sleeping like this—here goes—

She concentrates on seeing a wall in front of her, a blue wall, no pictures, & no furniture in front of it—a solid wall she is looking at—now a mirror—square with a thin black frame—sometimes it won't stay black & she lets it become white—but a mirror—there—good—hold, hold—

She is not in the mirror—but she lets herself slowly appear in it—slowly, slowly, breathe, & breathe—remember breathing—her face, head, pink-striped blonde hair—she wavers—become a bit masculine—she pulls back, throbs & spasms—something is trying to stop her—hold

Now her body, it doesn't need to be detailed—why is she naked? She hurries some clothes on but they are thin, short—again, something is blocking her—she pushes, yanks—*there*

Good. Now the trickiest move—she pulls, slowly, tightly, steadily, pulls this image toward her, it has to come out of the mirror unbroken, she has to go slowly, let it emerge, & as she does she quietly breathes from all over this body into her, breathes this form to assume her, still the resistance but it loosens a bit more, a bit more, her thighs last, always last, & her stomach the cap, as it draws into her she is able to snap closed, a twist, a lock, a kiss even—

Good. She starts to look around as hands reach around her from behind and slide beneath her breasts & a large torso presses at her—

She weakens, some pulse to let this happen, let these hands through her gauzy covering, it does not resist him, his fingers play right through she feels more covered in chunks of cotton that can be fingered aside

his mouth on her neck, kissing hard, demands the movement she resists, wants moan, wants writhe, his hands cover her breasts, squeeze, squeeze hard, fingers locked around her nipples making them hurt, demanding, is she still standing? is she nude? is there light? he is all around her as her thighs are nudged open & she is falling through herself as he presses her open wider & wider but somewhere words call to her, somewhere they do as she feels his hips adjust & his hard cock ready for its master's take, words, several of them, & she sends out arcs of hook for them, they are several, they are strange, which are they? How to gather them, what could they do, his hands under her pushing her thighs wider adjusting for his wish, words, you, now, he stiffens harder, words, now, you, he growls, he groans, he squeezes, he hurts a little, you, now, you, now, you, now, you, now, not, you not now, you, not now, he feels for her wet places, not you, not now, not you not now not you! not now! Not You Not Now Not You Not

Now “Not You.” Not now. “Not you. Not now.” & a single wrench of her torso & she is free, she is rising & falling, she is returned, she is awake, here is Dylan. She loves him. Whatever happens, she loves him.

clxxii.

Story nearing something, a crossing something, where there is crumpling & unfolding, a movement in the beams between shadows, what tis, what tis, call it where life leans in & where pulls away, tis, tis,

try again, Maya wakes & feels in her jeans’ inner front-pocket for that scrap, & it’s there, she wishes it wasn’t, & yet, & yet

They have to get going, this place says open most but not all night—

Where to now? She feels like this night should have been over days ago, Dylan is quiet & won’t look at her, John is focused on their being out in the street—

“It’s OK, John, we should go to Dylan’s place.”

He nods but unhappy. “There’s got to be more to this. It can’t just fall back into place & the sun’s up & that’s that.”

Dylan now speaks. “The overpass is near here. I have friends. They make a fire all night. Some don’t sleep very much. There’s lots of blankets to go around.”

“Homeless guys? With her?”

“They know me. They’re nice. They’d help if I ever asked.”

Maya takes Dylan’s arm, not scared but establishing something in her mind. She’d never belonged to anything or anyone before. This was a step for her.

I won’t do it if Dylan says no. If I tell him, & he says no, I won’t.

Dylan quickens their pace & streets fall away. They arrive before she is ready to.

For a moment, fear. Lots of men, shadows. Then Dylan is recognized & these are friends, they see her face first or at least seem too.

“What happened to your place?”

“Yah, we kicked you out!”

“We didn’t get your stuff. You took it right? Not that you had much, but still. Your stuff.”

“This is John. This is Maya. We needed a place to rest for awhile.”

There’s no danger here for her. She had more at her old home. No, here there’s soup, a fire, blankets. She stays near Dylan but, still, she’s OK. He has some standing here. They like him.

She begins to drift.

clxxiii.

What way back to the White Woods, to my cabin? Does he know I’m gone? How do I get back? Can I bring Marie with me somehow? That’s what I want. This one’s made her choice, a good one for her. I’m not convinced I agree but I just want Marie back, is that possible?

Maybe I’m just done with all of it. Marie, if you’ll come with me, we can go wherever. Boss Dogg was paying me nicely. I saw the bank receipts, they looked real enough. Maybe he’ll take back a piece for me leaving no word, but he seemed fair. We’ll have some to go with,

Marie. I'm done with the booze. I'm dry. I'm clean. I want to taste every inch of you with my un-numb tongue.

Tell me how to get to you. Before all this is over.
Mushrooms you cheap fuckers tell me about it! Where? Where is she? How do I get to her?

"Take some of these"
"What are they?"
"They taste nasty but you need a boost right now"
"How did you know?"
"They taste nasty. Here's some water. You don't have to chew them. Just keep them down."

"What?"
"Do you want to find her? Do you want your chance?"
"How do you know?"
"Your boss wants you to do this. He knows it's what's necessary. He'll find a new caretaker. You did a good job though."
"He knows? Are you his assistant?"
"Drink. Swallow. Good. They'll help. Don't worry, you'll see the kids later. They're safer here than most anywhere. Go, John. People are rooting for you. You'll be back here after. Go!"

clxxiv.

Closer, now, truly closer, the edge, the border, closer & I can't say what on comes, can't say why, this many pages in & no answers to why. Few, none.

This night, another night, countless nights but yes, this night, reck its shag & rag of beauties, a bench where tall bare trees beheld a great yowl of stars, a city street where punks & hungers & pets crossed & let cross, briefest in a strange den music too cruelly lit, more streets, more folded figures & laughing others, walking long, walking forever, there's a hand I know well & call my own, walking long, walking forever, nights so many nights, & no, this one, among countless, near it, near it,

A moment, before a yard of white daffodils, no purpose but to bloom, no why, bloom, I watch, how, why, oh, I see, no why, oh—

Night curls & creeps in, deeper in all the time, pushing by what it doesn't care & fluttering wider what it does—

clxxv.

Almost arrived feel it, I'm pushing for it now, that's what I'm about, have to be, there's not much else, the years suck off some & some more—

Just push it, & again, little left so crawl, & some more, nothing impedes but will or its cowardice, push, a little more—

A dream, maybe, but not enough to say that & let be, not enough to let the walls fall by & stars on all sides, no floor or ceiling but what sky explains, not enough, nothing left here in that limited human way, nothing at all, but not enough, none enough, never enough—

speak it. sing it. cowardice to call it dreams & leave it be—no there's much more, eh,
Benny?

 "Always."

 "What say you further?"

 "You're handling it."

 "No counsel?"

 "You don't listen to people, you just write shit down. That's not listening."

 "Yah. Thanks."

 "Listen. You want to raise up ancient psychedelic castles & chase stories through them?
Go on. I invite you to. Twice."

 "But what?"

 "But nothing. Do it! They're there to be written about, dreamed, whatever."

 "That's not much."

 "It's enough. You can do it. Most can't. Most don't get my nod, funny boy. You're
getting it."

clxxvi.

 Why indeed. Why any of it. Sitting some punked out joint with the brick walls & their
gapes through spacetime casually passed by breathers & drinkers—

 Benny's right. I'm clearer. The older dreams are dust left to whatever vibrations I raise
at them. The new ones involve ancient psychedelic temples & how they connect to electrified
hard spaces here & hereon, this much & more

 Closer, very. Soon. Now. Almost.

clxxvii.

 What temple, what such talk, how these pages near such matters, why? Is there belief
still in this book? Is there fragile, is there flutter? What is there left?

 Near, a page or two.

 All that remains from the vicious arc of years is a few songs, a lead guitar bloodied hour, two
words, maybe one—

clxxviii.

 No answer is enough, what would contra this cry, where one is bleeding & waterless,
where another shifts lonely in silk, where another consumes another, where many consume
many, one feeding a chase & capture & kill, another a plastic box unpacked, slaughter here, a
small voice & bright trinkets in a clean shaft of sunshine there, go on, conjure that answer, garb
it in lingua this and that, a red cover, gold burnished type, weekly service Sunday mornings
among the bare trees & colored glass, mid-week spiritual healing gatherings, go on, is it answer
hard & tight, pocked & prickled with nays, a wormy yawp of nots to push the immediate
moment to a watchful distance, or tis it sweet the bright-eyed kind, a human steam of yeas, go
on, touch it, that trembling within, yes to this & this & this too, never enough, no fence, blah,

wisecrack, blah! wisecrack! Stall. Stop. Breathe. Again. OK.

Here is arrival, now, the crumpling, the unfolding, here tis. A day blue & bare & sunshine, a clean chill, here tis, the glint & color no answer, the shadows & brick, no answers, moving flesh rising & sinking, this one, that one, those two, that group with its goslings rushing toward toys designed by coked-up ad execs 3000 miles & more away, no answer, it clicks, it crawls, it squeaks & makes me laugh—

clxxix.

A book several inches thick now & its question & rags & shags in reply, fire it in yet other directions, look blinder if necessary, tell the rest & more, remember, squeeze tight,

arriving in a far city years gone at dawn, a new city, foreign, I was eager & fearful & hungry, I had been here before, & that was years before that, any difference between cities, years—

chop. chop.

it was a girl to see, maybe kiss, I didn't know.

chop. chop. chop-chop. chop!

she was pretty, punkish, I didn't really know her, this didn't change with the press of our flesh—

John looks up & around. He's outside the cabin. Alone, morning.

Stands still, very still. Cold, clear, hard blue sky.

What?

We didn't fit, you see. She wanted sex with some mind stimulation, I wanted Art, I wanted her to fucking pose while I drew her first then fucked her after—

He looks every which way. No Dylan. No Maya. No Portland.

A noise in his cabin. He brings his axe.

A corridor, not a room. No possible end down there, he sets down his axe. Finds an older instrument on the ground, jittering. OK.

I thought I loved her, I'm good at that, & chased her past when it mattered, good at that too.

We all shake with terror sometimes, the Viking said. These words are set up high right now, on a darkly-designed patch of cloth, looking hard for what has no below or above, no rising or fading hour—

a moment in a museum & I was briefly happy, it didn't matter so much I was losing again, the beg in that restaurant later matters less, the neurotic blowjob at midnight, the anemic hug at parting, & nothing else came of any of it save some drinking hours of pain in my lonely company, a few songs til it all moved along—

call the world an illusion I say that's wishful wanting—too real, too contra, too incomplete—but call it an illusion & die & find out then something more or something else—

Another hour, a later year I was in another city's night streets trying not to lose what was left yet I didn't—lost some, not all, another woman—now a mother, now dead or otherwise—now I don't care much—now simply does not stay—

I was poor. I shook with terror sometimes. I used to sit before blinking boxes & conjure

erotic joinings from afar—

John begins running—running hard—is Marie down there? Finally? Hasn't this all been fuck fucking enough?

"What's in the shot, Benny?"

"Nothing. Junk. Whatever."

"Tell me."

"You. Him. Her over there. Everyone. Everything. It's my work. I can't explain it better."

Learn to steer, tell me that one again, learn to steer, I learned that from a bent book of hippies & several hits of LSD—learn to steer, I wrote it on my chalkboard when I came home high, alone, crazy that night—used to do that a lot—come home with acid aphorisms to remember in chalk—

Cecile & I sit with the Artist & pass her craggy pipe back & forth. Two leopard spotted divans while she sways far end of the room to candlelight & rolling late night melodies—

John hears this music too from his somewhere else, cannot figure how to near it, thinks he sniffs Marie in it & growls & moans—

the music comes from deep within Luna T's Cafe, so deep within there are presences not aware there is a Luna T's somewhere out there—

but there is—

another one I only talked to on the phone—another I kissed but only slightly—another I took to a strange film & she shook my hand after—another arrived at the theatre with her boyfriend & his parents—another broke my heart dozen of times, got bored & fucked someone else on her birthday—another made sure I had written evidence of her loathing—another lusted over my long red hair—another kept a block between us as she click-clopped along—another surrounded me by her mocking friends & made sure too—another would have let me fuck her if I hadn't stopped, stricken by my filthy mortal hour—

but, see, I realize now, it's OK, filth is the nature of this universe & I write,

Dear Beloved,

I was wee & I dreamed a woman not knowing of you or what was possible like this. I grew some & learned little for nobody taught much not dead in books or widely-born habit. I grew more but had to break first, break many times, before I knew you.

John reaches the end of the corridor & a blank wall. He leans against it, spits on his olden instrument to spark it, & writes—

RETURN TO ME MARIE RETURN TO ME MARIE RETURN TO ME MARIE RETURN
TO MARIE ME RETURN ME TO MARIE RETURN ME MARIE TO MARIE RETURN
ME MARIE TO ME

—and stops suddenly.

What will it sum to when over? That's all. What? Not even why if an answered what—but there won't be will there?

Will there? Will there? Will there?

clxxx.

Revelation is everywhere, always, what of this? What is truly hidden to be revealed? I'm asking hard here.

Start with death, what of it? Told a countless man-foes, none true, just that some stick like sunlight or nightmare, but no, not revealed—

What of love? In its sweet young want, secret notebooks & shy sideglances, in its first raw smack, in the one after counting stops, the kiss after betrayal or capitulation, the best fuck, the worst, which, what of it, now you tell, the wet kiss at dawn & its broken tell of feeling still throbbing in mystery, how about the trashed fuck at 4 am between the weed & the cops & the raw blind of parting—what of it? Revelation?

What of Art? Now you're on *Trip Town: The Musical*, half all-night movie, half dozen leopards feeding on a small doe called God—frenzied high, feel it, when the guitars set their players on fire, feel it, when she lies nude asleep between two gorgeous wet canvases, her mouth gagged, her hands cuffed, her feet tied with hand-made rope—she does not struggle, hurts too much—tries to sleep—she did this to him or her or them, pushed it too hard—

Godd the little half-eaten doe? What of Godd, what of it, them tall buildings of fist-driven faith, the angry push to bring more in—to make sure every babe born doused in the tome & its blankly told instructions—a how to being born, a way to snap open young cunt, a manner for moving the shiny jing among the elders & here's death & how & why—& nothing—just take off your fucking tag & fucking die now—

What of psychedelia? Really what of it? The last frontier & yet—what of it—the small vial of pure LSD-25 come on, dose her because she's cute, now the great night come on, & hark those trees their wise waving tongue, & reckon that fat tit full moon, go on, watch it traipse the treetops, them stars a million hung by strings, go on, & when lure into the quiet woods, when a hand in her blouse & a flinch, shhh this is how the world is, hours of revelation, they said so, shhh, that's why you're tight & round, what would the longest preacher say would he behold this upheld shirt those heavy floating breasts & scoff & when after a few dramatic moments the denim is unpeeled is this revelation too, could be, the lacey pink thongs, the shaven pink lips, the deeply spiraling racial expectation of a cock's demand & take, call you gatherings of humans civilization I call it slavery to order, to fear, go on preacher touch it, she's too bound to move, & she wants it, go on, she believes angels are blue, & all the world is angels, from angels born & to angels bound, she told me so the night I talked to her, the night she came with me, the night ownership of her body & life became mine—

but I've saved her until now oh maybe had a little taste here & there, look at that pink cunt as I push aside the lace—look at those tight lips, now look up there, those nipples beg for the interested touch of finger & tongue & when a treat she deserves hard cock—

I feed her mushrooms & make sure she sleeps in pigtails & a short white nightgown—she doesn't know what was before me—just that she is mine & I am to be pleased—she accepts this—having no choice—

See those tight pussy lips moisten slightly as I stroke them, see her smile as she pleases me, grows wetter, knowing what to do—

When her rose shaped lips have sucked my cock long & slow, & my cum glistens on

her lips I turn on her radio & let her fall to sleep listening to music, cat-shaped radio, white face, pink body, I make sure she is wrapped warmly & her clothes straightened, go on preacher say a word—

say a fucking word—

go on, preacher—

clxxxi.

Deeper still in the Ampitheatre, far in beyond far & hours, Noisy Children such as they remain such a thing are leading their audience in, are urging their audience to let go & become the music itself it's the greatest release this life lets be known, Noisy Children cajoles & each of them is in truth barely holding on, resisting letting go to the music too, being what little keeps all from being unable to come back—

I don't want to come back say many of them—no, learn—learn! let go of it while we hold on to you, gird you as you become music,

Is this safety, is this possibility, is it fixtion anymore, what tis, what of it? Is the music in this no-here & no-how revelation? Is this truly it?

How to tell it how it feels, when nothing's left & yet all is embraced—

imagine becoming water

imagine becoming night

imagine becoming hunger

imagine become love

imagine can you imagine not being you?

becoming the world its every wiggle & flash

becoming the world in its amnesia of time & space

becoming space, unmeasurable, no map, ho ideas, no coming & gone—

just fucking pose—

just fucking pose—

just fucking pose—

clxxxii.

What the path? Sniff within, bear this scent into a fumey world, bear it like map to a somewhere, a nearing, a hope, bear this scent as the goal no can give you, bear it like it bring you bright conclusion, not sink into the wormy woody below but out, out, here & gone like sunlight, what the path? Go on, pick a word, several, or a face, countless, pick a branch, pick a great flapping tome of to-do's & no-no's, pick one sleek she-body or he-body or they-body, press your root to lover's root, believe, go on, what the map? A sound, a melody, orchestra, band, DJ, a low flute when lost in the secret wood of your despair, something acoustic luring you along, into coupling, into glad meals, into the thick dance, dreams, what? No. Dreams are not goals, they smell samely but do not trust that which no other sees too, be ware, be ware, beware the conclusion if another cannot nod too? Me? No. Path? Art. Map? Art. Goal? Art.

Conclusion? Art.

Dylan walks into Luna T's Cafe with Maya by the hand & John close by & the crowd there greets them friendly.

His reply: "Mistakes are a path to God's grace."

His second reply: "A man needs a captain, a boat, & a book."

"Else?" I ask.

His third reply: "Find that best groove down low."

I nod. "No," I add.

His fifth reply: "We all shake in terror sometimes."

John sits down next to Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, as few do. They regard each other & experience clarity between them. Well.

His sixth reply: "The revolution is now, everywhere, always."

Mr. Bob the barman is making Maya a special drink, he's just that day got a blender, & her drink mixes ice & berries & bananas & atop it whipped cream & she smiles & asks for two straws.

"Enough for now" I say to Dylan. He & Maya sit at the far end of the bar where Rebecca & I usually sit.

The regulars look to me about this & I nod.

"Find wisdom among the threads & moments," I say to David who sits with me at the table below the Jim Hendrix at Woodstock poster.

He nods.

"Which way, David?"

He shrugs & looks at the table.

"One could say all paths lead to the grave. You've heard that one."

I nod.

"But it tells us nothing of the paths themselves, or your favorite question. Why?"

I nod again.

"So I don't know which way. You & I are brothers of the pen. Yet we do not deny this world as some do. We don't slight it as test or punishment, or partway from heretofore to hereon."

I laugh.

"We walk solidly in it, as we can, as we are allowed."

I nod a last time.

"Our path is Art's truth even as we could not tell another what this means. Being truth, it does not lend itself to the countless fragments of inquiry."

He nods.

The jukebox rears up.

"Sitting on a hillside
watching all the people . . . die
I'd be much happier on the other . . . side"

acoustic twists through sad pressing strings surround a slow, smart, angry voice—

TripTown the Musical on the TV pulses silently to the jukebox, flesh smacks & crosses on the TV screen, a hand grabs a hand, another over a set of raw lips, a thigh slapped hard, a nipple pinched, a cock squeezed painfully tight—





“They’re locking them today
 They’re throwing away the key
 I wonder who it will be tomorrow
 you or me?”

the guitars steady & harsher, the music tightens & swirls both, the voices echo off each other, there is sorrow, there is warning—

several pushed together, bound, nude, then a shot of a hospital hit by a rocket, & one of two pro boxers, one pummeling the other into prone stillness, the blood audience members cry & cheer & thrown from their bit wrists—

a short skirt pushed up over a tight black thonged ass, & a finger paints in red cum on these round cheeks the word

CONSEQUENCE as a cock pushes its way in—

two men kiss in a darkened diner booth, their hands holding fierce, their hearts beating so hard the TV shakes in its silence—

the world boils in broken blood what more to convince, what great spire of cultic belief will deny, what tall mound of coins, what light new kiss between barely knowing mouths, look at trees the ones a car can drive through & here comes a beastly machine with its hard shovel

the king waves both open hands around, he weeps, he begs, he knows, he *knows*, nobody believes, *nobody believes* but *fuck you all I will serve man & god anyway I know I believe my great suffering heart is enough for all I will save us from them we will go on by my grace, my will, my soul*

Nothing more. I could stop now. Really. What else? If I go on, it’s habit, it’s indulgence, lack of alternatives, simply chase for familiar sensation. Benny shoots up the world, I shoot black ink, have most of my life.

So. I go on. But there’s nothing more. Nothing new. Nothing else.

The night. A song. Loneliness. Nameless yearn. The claws of memory. Imbalance of hope.

Why?

clxxxiii.

Falls, it falls, this book & whatever its faces & events, falling, a perilous arc lower & lower, is there a floor, an end, or an ever dream tumble? You tell me. I can’t. I just write this shit down with no clue about from or to.

Every hour shines, I heard that somewhere, some other page, falling, falling, faster? Possible? I don’t know. Every hour shines, there’s the main thought here, yet what to do, this book into deeper spaces now, less call it falling than a painful evolve, hands clutching each other within a mind’s farthest hour, where to, tell me, or from, that much at least, no—

No.

There’s not much left, you see, the rag ends of such a long trail, & whatever’s left won’t solve or resolve, or do or undo what’s come, you see there is no linearity, one event then the

next means nothing—

“What then?” I ask the Viking.
He smiles at me, & farts loudly.

The window shows bare tree, a raw sky, a landscape where figures move, several fires, what else? There are always drums too, sometimes toward dancing, but elsewhere here’s that damned war again, it never ends, you see, the tribal writhe by bonfire or the assembling of young men for slaughter, the knot explaining all isn’t undaoable, if knot there be—

Falling, call it evolving now, call it something else, the roaring twist lighting each being within, & what resolve would you wish? What end in a story that came from others & tends toward others? What of any kind would it be?

Think on it, then resume here.

clxxxiv.

A noise & Dylan opens his eyes & here is his security guard desk, his clipboard of instructions, his lunch half-eaten, his sandwich in his hand.

Nobody around. The clock on the wall & the newspaper in the corner of the office tell him it’s his first night on the job, again his first night, & about the time he remembers stopping to eat his bag of lunch.

No Maya, no John. What then, & how? Had he dreamed all of that, could such a crazy thing be possible?

He was just with her, at that place where they all seemed weird but friendly. He doesn’t remember the name but something about the moon.

He’s scared, he’s shocked, he’s crazy disappointed. No Maya. No bus trip to the ocean encouraged by his friend. No John. Just him alone.

He puts his head down on the desk to think.

Maya turns in her seat to the Dylan next to her. “What’s that? It was you.”

Dylan shakes his head. “Not me. It was him. The one on that TV show they like here.” He stops. Knowing more wouldn’t mean much. Let her deal with all this for now.

“You’re Dylan & he’s not?”

“I’m my own Dylan. He’s on a TV show.”

Maya’s face wrinkles & shifts in thought. “How can there be two?”

One of the drinkers speaks up. “That’s how the world works.”

They wait for him to say more.

Now self-conscious of several looking at him, he only manages: “That’s how I see it. Doppelgängers, polar opposites. It’s hard to get away from once you notice it.”

The Viking farts loudly several times by way of explanation & several laugh briefly.

Dylan on TripTown listens to a throbbing sound just begun. It’s not in the room with him so he leaves it to investigate. Louder as he walks the empty lit corridors of the building. Floor by floor, the throbbing increases.

Top floor & he comes through the stairway door to silence. Nothing. What now?
 “What now?” he asks nobody.

Dylan at Luna T’s turns from the TV, shaken. Maya leans to him. John looks over & watches to see if he can help. Dylan’s head shakes at a softly spoke question from Maya. He stands, & walks uncertainly toward the heavy swinging door to Luna T’s bandroom.

clxxxv.

Maya wakes, in a dimly lit room, on a bed, under several heavy blankets. She can sense she’s wearing few clothes. The room is full of furniture & shadowy objects. She doesn’t feel much familiarity with it.

The door opens & a man steps in & shuts it again.

He walks slowly over to the bed & gets in. Maya freezes as he gets under the covers, & this turns to white panic as she feels by his movements that he’s undressing. He doesn’t speak or much acknowledge her until he is done. Then he turns to face her & speaks.

“I didn’t think I’d see you again.”

She doesn’t reply.

“Your request is being handled. The whole apparatus is being undone. Everyone but you & me will be gone by morning. Then we will leave. I followed what you asked precisely.”

Now he moves closer to her, intent to hold & possess her, as she’d agreed. She is still paralyzed as she is gently held, firmly touched, there is no hesitancy in his movements or fear. He has arranged this with her & she has come of her free will to his bed, dressed in the clothes he put out for her, followed a few written instructions on preparing her hair & body, washed & bathed & primed to his specs. Now he is making his full claim as his great process is disassembled by unknown others.

His hand reaches under her very short nightie to hold & tease & cup her breasts, & she is just about to cry out when a heavy throbbing fills the room’s every inch.

clxxxvi.

The ocean approaches, they can both hear it, always that last climb to see it. He is ahead of her but stops to help her up, she takes his hand & wants the rest, you don’t know, boy, what’s in me, deeper than anything you could imagine, yet, I think I want you to know, & when he begins to loose her hand in his shy way she won’t let him, let the ocean see what we are, let this moment be the truth I’ve always wanted, not knowing what truth would be like when I found it, I’ve found it, here it is—

Dylan is quiet, she can hardly see his face, but thinks he’s watching the ocean, thinks he’s overwhelmed by it, by her hand which won’t let his go—

throbbing, a strong hard beat & a hand slowly down her thigh & the barest of voices says moan for me Maya

have you seen the ocean before asks Dylan in the dusky murk & she shakes her head even though she had, she was brought here years ago & told to regard how little she was & to look & *look*

at me Maya this is your truth now, hand moving across her thigh now

we should go closer
 there is no final truth, none, your church teaches this & nothing is greater to know it
 will guide your whole life to better places if you let it
 move your thighs apart, slowly, you understand how it must be now, now that we've
 agreed

he tries to go slower, knowing this moment is what he's waited for & life hereafter will
 be a little lesser

"You'll fall at your least moment!" he had last cried, no more speeches after this one, no
 more books, the perfection of her & none else, her essence added to the rest, the elixir finished,
 the study & preparation,

"I have none else to say after tonight, no more books, no more speeches, my voice will
 recede from you like the night's gnashing frost & you close the door & near the fireplace"

perfection here, in this, & tap more than vulnerable places in reality, breach more than
 a hidden bubble of multi-dimensional escape, flick the material universe off, yet, but fucking
 more,

"None of this matters much, in truth, nothing! Neither the flight nor the arrival, nor
 the wings it took! Nothing!"

She breathes hard & he drinks this breath in, his fingers curling around the pink thong
 he'd clothed her in, feeling it twist, resist his intent then its seams tearing upon his will & the
 other hand to her opening lips shhh this is how it is now—

the sun a rim of raw red flame on the horizon, they sit on the sand next to each other,
 she's lost his hand as he watches & gestures & smiles & is glad of her company, she heats &
 heats more

"My dreams of ice are upon me now, there's nothing else for me to do but ready myself
 for they will make for me inexorably now, I cannot trick them in the old ways—"

His hands pushing her nightie up, forcing its thin fabric apart as he moves to mount
 her, break her open & consume her there is nothing else to this yet there is nothing else yet

Dylan pulls from his pocket the bag of mushrooms he'd brought out earlier—later?
 when?—& he looks at her doubtfully & she takes the bag & smiles

"not you not now" she whispers "not you not now not you not now" his hands on her
 uncovered breasts his thighs prying open hers wide his cock blind greedy focused on foraging
 to its prize "not you not now I want him make it him"

they eat slowly, feeding each other she is calm the white panic is the night's first star she
 lets it no closer

moan for me Maya his cock grazes lightly her bare pussy lips "not you not now I want
 him not you not now I want him" moan for me Maya or I will hurt you she moans loudly &
 his cock convulses with hunger but presses just lightly inside her

they chew & they chew

"Would you take anything with you from this it's the knowing that you contributed,
 each one of you, to the crack I'm going to make, the way out, I don't know to where or what,
 but each one of you—"

She releases to the mushrooms in a moment, a flicker's flicker, letting them as she had
 not, could not before, & they take her, uplift her, raise her, her arms is tight around Dylan as
 they go, fall up, rise within, twist among each other

throbbing throbbing throbbing as Dylan arrives, slams into Global Wall's body so hard

he disappears, what is happening? What? The mushrooms explode, the moment explodes, the world explodes there is nothing & everything at once is this possible?

Global Wall pauses. "Each one of you can only thank me for all of this, all you were a part, of, & the promise of what may happen yet for you."

Still, everything. Still, nothing. Both, & this continuing chaos, an hourless hour, a worldless place, no sense, no flesh, no language

Nothing, everything.

Everything, nothing.

clxxxvii.

How do you steer a boat on God's own sea? Rudy has been asking that question a long time, so long he's forgotten it's not his own, he was given that question, some years back it's true, but nonetheless—

Was it years? He has to suppose so—seems like having the sight has never helped his memory—would he even wish it had? What would he wish if he could.

Now that's a sad thing. A man without a wish. Hopes are different things. They bite, they join in your day, pick your door among the many which number you dial on the phone—wishes, now them's other things—

You're talking like an old colored man, Rudy. Yes, I guess I am. That's my choosing today, my way of coping without the comfortable mask everyone wears, I get to pick a new one *every day*—I don't have mine—I have no illusions—I've seen *what is & what's to be*—

He hears the sounds in John's head as he runs for that bus—the anguish, the lust—the sound of fabric tearing, of flesh compelled, of taking, & taking again

there is no end to it really.

How do you steer a boat on God's own sea? You take your oar & you beat at the boards below your feet—beat at them & scream & beat at them some more until you sink—& you drown—& you give your reply—your sea, your boat—*my will, my death*—

Traps & doors. Traps & doors. The tricks of perception, & interpretation. Which hand grasps my wrist, which torso presses me down, which thighs hug my own. Which? I don't know. They told me back there that there is no final truth. What then?

For a moment, a pool, a reflection, not my face, a softer one, a prettier one, the one he wants, the one he dreams, I am his wish, that's all I want to be, his wish, his Cordelia—

The explosion is more a series of them simultaneously, meant not simply to bring down the immense mansion but to crack & crush the endless bunker beneath, the city of villages, the years, the cries, the bondage tools, the tryptomynic mind-fuckery, the pacts ceding or leasing power centuries raised, the deep throbbing engines of moonlight, the arcing skylines of blood-heavy sadness, roots below roots, what bears the earth herself, reaching back before time & then around & through & multiply, creating an echoing cacophony one can nearly call the creation itself were one to see in limited, wishful terms but there is more to this you see mistakes are one way to God's grace someone else says and her clean teeth bit the shoulder nearest & she slowly roars **FUCK ME HARDER** pushes this shoulder over & mounts him

not caring what he is only that her thighs need cock & a whole civilization mocks & interferes with this *constant fucking need* & her hips move good move dirty because they know how & fucking is called dirty but when the cock is driving up & in *UP & IN* it doesn't fucking matter *more harder more harder* the need to ride *harder & bigger & deeper* & I'll take it I don't *care who you are just fuck me harder*

“What a fucking slut!”

Ride him, you bitch!”

The boys at Luna T's bar overcome their shock & are ready for *Triptown* to go porn, hard long porn—they roar for drink—

“Who's fucking who!”

“Who the fuck cares? Look at them titties go! Look at that cocksucking mouth!”

The explosions become rhythmic now, & nearer, seeming timed to arrive here last

come as a man not a mist,
just fucking cum long & hard

nothing departs & nothing ever returns

world boils in blood, men & their cities & their monuments a moment's froth

harder, oh, harder

please stop please duct tape on the pretty mouth, pretty white blouse torn open, pretty underthings torn too, one lusts for it, one cries, the one fleeing is caught, & trained, til her pretty round ass knows a cock's pleasure, many cocks' pleasures, which drives the world, any that don't the world breeding & consumption & waste & a few tinkles of starlight as the shit mounts to a mute sky—toward lords of the planet, some say, soon come to claim their ripe prize—

clxxxviii.

Maya finds Dylan on the landing sitting hear a large floppy eared grey bunny.

“I talk to him sometimes”

“Is he friendly?”

“He said to take care of you when you let me”

Maya smiles & kisses Dylan on his soft, untried lips, kisses him for every hour she's known him & every hour she waited for him, for things still possible & those not, hopes & wishes, the difference between them, kisses him lips to lips nothing more nothing else not this moment here

Maya throbs beneath John as he pushes her pink thong aside & his fingers slide up & down her mad hot cunt lips wildly desperate for that cock it can smell nearby

Maya struggles as Global Wall binds her hands & shreds her clothing, tongue tasting her cherry cunt's reluctant juice but he knows how to release it, knows its dark trails, ravines to

draw it through

Maya holds Dylan's hand as the gut-red sun swallows the trembling waters on its descent—holds his hand & feels her heart jive within, sweetly, devilishly, secretly jive

clxxxix.

What then, call it an arc from sac of water to stretch of soil, or reach a little more & say that sweet, dirty or mundane orgasm was your begin & maybe something else not buried in the box, call your life that orgasm's arc through this world from a heretofore to a hereafter or laugh & snort at time, call the cosmos a great orgasm, a vastless cry compelling countless worlds, awhile, to be—

Any of this helping? World boils in blood? Call that not enough. World a damned tangle, bark twice & bite with all ye be, but, why, & what, be ye? Not helping? Not with the rough roaring chutes & the bright shallow eyes calling the run through a life, & what of it? Burn a carcass for its sparkling sing into the stars? A half dozen knives to the bones & everyone feeds & weeps & keeps a little?

No, none of it helps. Sac of water, stretch of soil. In between the movement from one crowded lowing van to the next. Dreams tell plainly but in a tongue for the soul who easily speaks bloom & breeze, river's fine noisy flow, & its merest kindred stream dark in its close viney solitude countless tome, if tomes at your farthest sight is all ye see—

cxc.

What then, three twists & show it to all, that truest vein in things, so close, come on, tell it! That coin blaring the great final rule of thing, that myth of a mortal god, another advising the honied beast of denial, the ones who sneer at all, the ones who find it i selected faces—

“He's running low”

“Think so?”

Not enough empathy, craft your great cry from this wood & cloud. Go on, maybe that then.

She doesn't want to leave. Nothing back there matters. There is no explanation for this . . . this expulsion. This is her home, her life. What he said made no sense to her.

Her duties, over? She prepared the new ones, dressed them, instructed them. Her own hours with him came most often in dreams, but she is taught these are not usual dreams. She wakes from them embraced, sore, *had, fucked, loved*. He loves her. He loves them all.

The last one she prepared was only two days ago. Long strawberry blonde hair. Viciously erotic little figure. Made it rough on herself.

Wouldn't dress in the ribbons & the gauze.

“This is how it is here.”

“Why? Let me go!”

“This is where you belong now. To him. Like all of us.”

“I don't want to. Please help me. I want to go home now.”

"There's only one rule here. Pleasing him, sooner or later."

"No. I don't. I can't. I haven't."

It took hours. It took tears & screams, begging, bargaining. Cordelia was kind, firm, patient, pushing her new charge along the path to acceptance. A big sister.

Finally, the preparation. Oh this one was good, Global would be pleased. When her costume came, Cordelia knew for sure he had been watching. There was a shade of pink in ribbon, nightie, panties, a pure, light, cloudly-ache of a pink. Her bath was a certain sign, too. The camera prompts & lights told Cordelia to pose Fiona, to go slowly, to make her laugh, to join her in the bath & whisper to her secrets few learned so soon if ever.

They soaped each other & Fiona laughed a so-naughty laugh & when she was embraced & her perfect pink virgin pussy stroked she listened in sudden fear but overriding curiosity.

"I'm going to tell you something secret, something I tell few."

"What?" A bare whisper.

"When he takes you" she flinches "Hold strong, remember my lessons!" she relaxes some "When he takes you, when he bursts you open, your virginal essence will contribute to something special, something perfect" breathing, listening "He picked you from many, don't let him down. Don't let me down, Fiona." Maybe tears, maybe a bit of pulling away. Maybe a warning in that.

Cordelia was not in the room when Fiona was taken. But by a rare gift she was present, in her own bed, but dressed just like Fiona, the aftertaste of the drug dissipating as she joined Fiona & was let experience everything Fiona did. Not a psychedelic, none would submit to such a narrow harnessing, more a vaguely tryptominic neurotransmitter. A gift, whatever it was.

To be taken by him again, this the closest to that first time, & to her horror Fiona forgot her entire training when the lights gave way to candles & insense, & the door opened.

It was rough, Global was quickly angered, more angry than in awhile. The cuffs on her hands were tight enough to hurt. His fingers were brutal, Cordelia nearly bailed out but want, long tearing want kept her there.

Fiona cried, loudly as her nightie was torn in pieces & stuffed so deeply in her mouth she could barely breathe. Global did not remove her panties at first. He poked at them, pulled at them, terrifying her, playing with her, cruel & precise, flipped her over & with two hands removed the ass side. Stroked her ass, her sweet untapped round ass, several times as she tried to move, moaned barely, then he leaned down & bit her left cheek. Hard. She screamed til her gag flew out. He did not replace it but leaned to the right & bit her other ass cheek.

[Please, Global.]

[I let you participate not direct! Are you not enjoying your gift?]

[She's just panicked. I taught her well. Slow down. It will be better.]

Global rolls Fiona over.

"Will you stop that if I'm gentler?"

She doesn't answer. Whimpers. Breathes hard.

"Very well" & starts to roll her over again.

"Yes! Yes! Please. Yes."

Testing this, Global peels her panties from her perfect cunt. She remains still, tears, but still.

Now was over. Why, Global?

cxcī.

“What is desire?” I ask Grant, having met him in his lair, his hid place in Luna T’s Cafe.

He holds in his hand a shifting image . . . sunflower shifts to full moonlight shifts to a heavy rhythmic thumping shifts to a forest bursting with insect & animal & leafblowing noise shifts to the ocean’s long growl . . . shifts to a woman’s widely spread young thighs & moaning pink lips shifts to . . . a black pen on white sheets . . . shifts . . . to a city raised up in flood & blown away . . . shifts . . . to . . . to . . . a child’s first ugly steps, wild & true . . . shi . . . fts . . . t . . . oo . . . eyes shutting & a great light drowning all material . . . forms shifts . . . to . . . images too fast to know . . . shifts

“stop”

“code & key, that’s what” he lights up a very fat cigar & puffs shrouds of smoke about him, I speak to his cloud

“What then? Can my mortal enemy oppose me & tell me true?”

Puff. Puff. “I think *only* your mortal enemy can tell you true. The rest have something at stake. I have nothing.”

“Not defeating me?”

“You misunderstand. I don’t wish to defeat you. When you go, I go.”

“I misunderstood then.”

“Indubitably. But I do oppose you.”

“On what grounds?”

“You fancy Art a sacred matter & your best activity on earth its performance.”

“True.”

“No!” Puff! Puff! Puff! “I oppose you on those grounds. I will to stop you.”

“How?”

Single, long puff, a great mull of a puff. “It’s a matter of path, keeping to the known & useless one, or beginning to work away from it.”

“I am not working away from it.”

“Not yet.” Puff. Puff.

cxcīi.

Maya dreams she’s riding a bus to the Oregon coast & a strange boy gets on board & she decides to take a chance, talk to him, he looks sweet.

He sits in the aisle seat across from hers & she shudders within from the one look he gave her, he started as though he knew her, then turned away.

She wants to speak, wants badly to do something other than she is doing.

She watches him obscurely, reading.

He falls asleep. Against the window. She’s frozen. Something that was supposed to happen doesn’t.

She keeps reading where, it seems, she hadn’t, tries to pick a random page though she does not believe in randomness.

She reads: "I know you will come back to me, Maya"—

Oh. Shit. He's still sleeping. Very still.

"& you will help me to finish my project. I was scared before & sent you away. I don't have other options than this, than you. I got scared. For all I've done, for all I shouldn't fear & do not, at least anymore, I only, truly fear this one thing. Its failure."

She looks up quickly. He stirs. Something is wrong here, this isn't how it's supposed to happen.

"When you call my man he will grant your wish. I already know what you want. It's what I want too, it's where & how our paths, & desires, cross. We want freedom, to love, to choose, deep into the engines of our souls, undo, re-imagine, choose other."

He's stirring, he's facing her.

"I'm going to release you, Maya, in the moment you give yourself to me, the White Woods will burn down finally, & out of history."

Dylan looks at her, waking, smiling, shocking her deeply, she feels the deep shake, the brutal sweet eruption deeper within her loins than she has known, feels it like an emotional convulse, & again, harder, she cries out, told to moan, she cries out again, told to moan louder, she gives over to her body's long cries of want & sensation, release to greater shocking convulse to greater release.

Burn down the White Woods.

Burn down the White Woods.

Burn down the White Woods.

John opens his eyes to the familiar color of a violet sweater, its long-loved shape, the voice above, the hands about. Dream, delusion? Which fucked-up game this time?

"None, John."

"Marie."

"A man, not a mist."

"I think so."

"What about your friends?"

"I don't know. Nothing happened with the girl."

"I figured that out. Would you have?"

"If there wasn't you, in my heart, impressed upon my loins, as deep in me as anyone has ever been, I don't know. But love doesn't work like that. You don't forget other paths. You just choose to stay on your own."

Silence. "You said love."

"I love you, Marie."

Dylan & Marie wake up next to each other in his rooming house bed. Beneath his Mickey Mouse comforter, clothed. Close. A shyness surrounds them.

"Are we awake?"

"I think so."

"I'm not sure what's real."

"Me neither."

The crowd at Luna T's roars at the TV when it dims. "Oh come on!" "What kind of ending is

that?” “We want more porn scenes!” “What happened?”

Tom shakes his head at me. “Is that enough? For you?”

I stare at wood. “No. There’s more.”

“More titties?” some drinker barks.

I stare.

cxciii.

What were any of those nights, those countless people met, passed by, touched, who? Here is another night, nameless, a visual phenomenon, a biological affect, here it is & I don’t know what it means, I am crawled out here on the esoteric edges of things, & do not feel what differentiates anything—

“What’s he saying?”

“Hey, buddy, you OK? It’s Tom. The Professor. We were just talking.”

“Yah.”

“Talk to us. come on.”

“There’s nothing left to this. I’ve asked why for nearly 600 pages & fifteen fucking months, and, nothing. Why? Because. Fucking Why? Fucking Because.”

“Yah. What did you expect?”

“Something.”

“Hey. Is she OK? Maya. And Dylan.”

“And John.”

“How about Rudy?”

“And Global Wall? What’s he doing all that for?”

“We want to know.”

“I don’t know. Stay tuned. None of this is worth jack.”

“Not if you only grab at the biggest question.”

“Why is the only question.”

“Look around you. The world is your answer. Dreams. Secrets. Beauty.”

“Yah. Thanks.”

I look at Rebecca. “Tell me.”

She smiles. “We answer why by our own hands.” I sigh. “Don’t, Raymond. You know this is as much as anyone gets. Every answer roots in quicksand.”

“Even Art?” She stares at me. I nod.

cxciv.

It had come down to a simple request to the Universe, a willingness to breach back, to orgasm the years in reverse, to cross over & resume his path from a ways back—

To reach over the years to the first moment when want betrayed him, when he was told he was nothing, shit-nothing—

To make a different decision, compelling this alternative action, this key moment, all had been contrived to negate how things had gone, how the years had developed their brutal interior, how success would mean revenge for the longest time—

Then he discovered, simply, how to gain a chance to try again, & everything became

slave to this goal, to the how, to the girl who would release him, give him his chance, to undo, just one different step, one clear communication from a disintegrating, already told future, just one clear instruction, a much younger self, the chance, the wild chance he would listen, he had let everything evolve in that life to bring him to the moment when he would be flung, a catastrophic arc through the ethers of reality, tearing, breaking, disappearing, each year, each hour, all that had happened, burn the White Woods? Deeper than you know. Burn out of existence, through nothingness, through possibility, through conception itself. Gone. Gone's gone. Perpetual not-being.

Unless he doesn't listen.

cxcv.

Again, half dozen touches in this book, poor folks' cafeteria & called it a report card a several hundred pages ago, so what's the grade, aye? Much, any? What the truth this hour, scratch twice & what shows?

What detritus tells it, the photos of great ball players old & new on that newspaper box out the window? Blank grey light cracks between buildings? The old professor with square black glasses & sparsely hair pate, at his reading? The greasy mediocre food heating & selling, heating & selling til the remaining hour empties down? This bright lovely blue fishtank incongruous among the cheaply passing time here? Go on, tell it.

I began this book here nearly 15 months ago, took a try or two to make it stick—but it did—Kept pushing it, months thick of pages & lean, intended to finish it last December, didn't, pushed along anyway—through its brutal & its sweet—it's as little known as anything I've written in many years, decades?

Across the street a parking garage, nothing the ancients could have imagined, or those even nearer to now.

A circular dining area. Dining? Feeding maybe? Blue swivel seats bolted into the floor. Fake brick flooring, a view of several traffic intersections. What was this moment supposed to mean?

There was a man I saw here twice, eating salad with a palsied hand. He got thrown out. Someone did. I hadn't returned before tonight, in 10 months. Maybe once to eat with the wife. Tonight I came alone, pages dwindling, goodbye & thank you.

cxcvi.

So. The long arcing shot toward fini, the arriving & leaving swish, the go, good go, again, gone & later there's again.

Someone shouts: "They all sound the same!"

Shout back: "It's all one song!"

There's no other explain, pages accumulate by the hour, by the book, by the years, by the great flopping pieces of a whole lifetime.

Why? Fucking because.

Why? I don't know.

Why? Keep asking.

"Do we get to keep that TV show next time?"

"We like it! Not like baseball, or football"

"Or hockey"

"Or basketball"

"Or the Olympics"

"Especially the girls skating!"

A roar goes up at that one.

"Does that Maya skate?"

"Nah she's a raver chick. They dance."

"Ha! Nice word for it!"

Tom settles his people down. 'His' people, heh.

"We like it. That's all. Just letting you know."

"Thanks."

How does it end? Does Global Wall get his wish? Create the paradox necessary to swallow his & all the others' pain unto negation, the White Woods gone, Red Dog gone too?

Just a word & it goes away, all of it.

And Maya? Would she have been on that bus to meet Dylan?

Would John have come through his many fucked up hours to lay simply his love at his Marie's feet?

Dearly wish to undo yet undo any undo all

Is there anything to be freed of the tangle?

Does "Why"/"Because" have any indefensible side?

I look at Grant a last time. He shrugs. "I'm sentimental. I'll let you have a try at a good ending."

What can I give in this late tired hour, where the new sweet within me, where has the rust not tried, what inviolate from the great heavens of regret & sadness?

Not much, many. But I think: here I sit, trying, art the true, best meat I've known, what's left when the cynics & bastards & collectors have each come & went

In the worst of it I simply fed my woes to Art, nights recall to me, the simple slash of human mixing, & again & again I turned to my pen & notebooks

I don't know why

Past belief in the brotherhood of the bottle—past belief in the cosmic recreative effects of new pussy—past most & all—past all essentially—

I don't believe in truth but I do believe in Art

in Music—

The best & worst of it is desire—where the explanations fail & good intentions crack—

cxcvii.

Noisy Children for a stretch back on Luna T's Cafe's stage, corporeal, five musicians, a crowd, the night in itself good enough—

fades in & out

metaphor's static
there they were—

cxcviii.

Fixtion is contingency. Nothing is truly gone which cannot be, literally, summed at a word.

Nothing I say here cannot be unsaid.
Nothing true, nothing even false. Letters on a page. Tick-tock.
I call it my music.
It endures me.

cxcix.

What, then, when nothing's impossible but what desired needs to be made from the materials at hand, what comes to be *comes* to be, made unto the world, its new moment, its next.

Did this book answer why? Or did it simply ask. Is it a question or an answer.

"Barkeep, talk to him."

"You OK, son?"

"Yah. I don't know what to do with these fundamental matters."

"Do?"

"I have this pen, when it opens up, it matters. I know this. I've spent a long time in the dark stretch of this book, angry, I don't know if sufferings within flesh are anything more than passing—

What do the years remain, what was noise & trinket—

What near, what far, what matter breaches the years & miles? What did I learn. Someone asked me & all I could say was something about music & dreams & kindness.

"It's OK, son."

"You're fixtional."

"So are you."

"True."

I think the White Woods does burn. Every last page.

I think Maya might see Dylan again but . . . not now

I think Red Dog Restaurant is so deep into the Psychedelic Revolution nobody notices. Call the seed a revolutionary for bringing something new into this endangered world?

Global Wall, what of him, I think something of him goes on, I think something like him always goes on, want springs hard toward the world like dancing fingers or a fist, hearts taught to uncurl or elude, one finds a different set of counsels listening to one year or another

What then. Why? Ask it, answer it, follow, deny it?

I've tried to figure it, the interior borders of want, & have not found them, the bloom sings ever closer, tendrils through dream, where the fine glance arcs breathless hours & which fine glance this time—which one?

cc.

I asked how to finish for I've never known how & endings seem less finales than pause, breathe, resume.

What answer enough, not a glare & incomplete, not a chorus loud enough to obscure the music, suck on the bars & believe them branches to the sun, & comes the night the cries are samely spectral, a dream cracked eyes wide, what is this, then, neither sleep nor wake, the rhythm faster, melody a great tide of fingers, regard the chaos nod & give its fruit—there. There! The sky opens first with stars then with more—

Smooth, slow, slower. Nothing goes away, nothing returns. Keep passing the pipe, sharing the bread. Keep the water clean & going around. When the king speaks soothe in words of war, stay there & no more. When the preacher comforts from tomes & hard-grooved ritual, stay there & no more. When the yearn flails, when it does not know, when it wilds in shaggy darkness & untaught twist—

We watch Dylan return to his friends under the bridge, them happy to see him, the credits rolling, someone was right, it couldn't last, plans for a movie? Plans for an online collaborative community? Plans to build a real *Trip Town*? Oh sure. The credits make no sense anyway, but we watch them & there's Dylan talking to his friends, a fire nearby, the camera panning back now, the fire distant, the movie a long strip little else, the line of comic books made from White Woods paper, the delusions, one & another, a hand reaches across & touches, a breath, another, which word now? Any?

Hours, plain & golden. Memories, little enough. The question, & its many answers. A touch. A breath. Which word now?

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