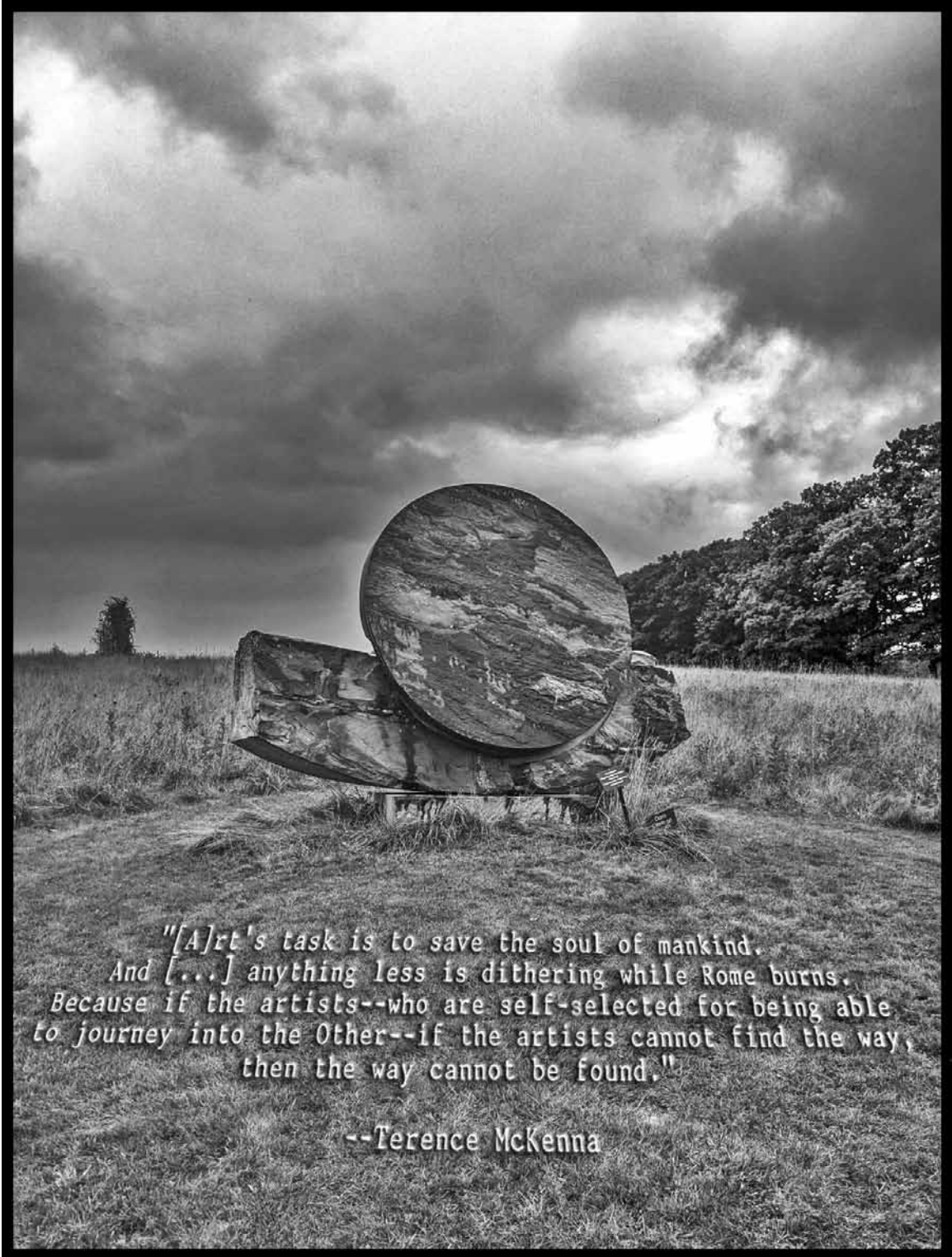




The
Cenacle

NUMBER 126
WINTER 2025



*"[A]rt's task is to save the soul of mankind.
And [...] anything less is dithering while Rome burns.
Because if the artists--who are self-selected for being able
to journey into the Other--if the artists cannot find the way,
then the way cannot be found."*

--Terence McKenna

Vow
OF
OPPOSITION



The Beachmere Inn
on the ocean

12/21/2024

December 21, 2024
Beachmere Inn
Ogunquit, Maine

Against cruelty in all times
& all places, ago, NOW, hence

What I am afraid for, tonight, as I write from this beautiful coastal place, is how there are many powerful men soon intent upon harming countless many, vulnerable to them, for getting hatred's purse, & profit's fee.

There are men in this world who've reckoned themselves better than others, & by this letherness they declare upon themselves the power to harm, to punish those of their choosing. Their lessers.

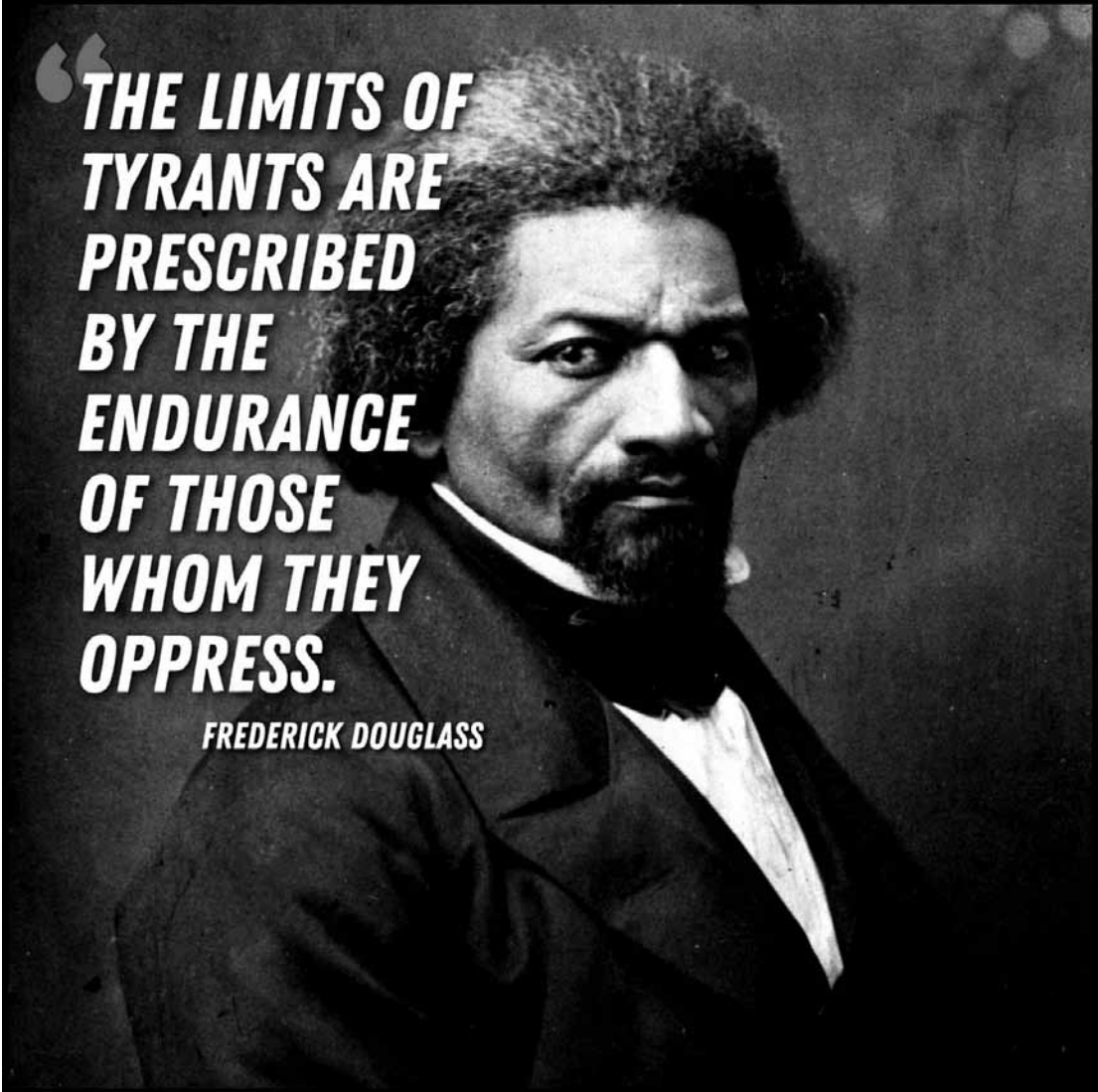
No election victory in a constitutional democracy bequeaths the powers of cruelty to anyone. For the thrill of racism's show. For profit's gain.

What I pledge tonight is a Vow of Opposition. Wherever these cruelties are inflicted on those governed.

Cruelty knows no borders.

Compassion knows none either.

Men who live by harm to others are sinners, nothing anyone's god needs to confirm.

A black and white portrait of Frederick Douglass, an African American man with a full beard and curly hair, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a dark bow tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark and textured.

**“THE LIMITS OF
TYRANTS ARE
PRESCRIBED
BY THE
ENDURANCE
OF THOSE
WHOM THEY
OPPRESS.**

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

—14—

No human needs to act cruelly toward another,
nor should cruelty ever be sanctioned
into law. Period.

Come January 20, 2005, a cruel man &
his chosen herd of cruel men will gain
assumed elected leadership of this country.
If is by cowardice & failure to act that
this criminal is not in jail that day.

More than any other time in this country's
sometimes dubious commitment to its own democratic
principles, to its Constitution which enshrined
that this be a nation governed by laws,
not the will of strong men, there needs to
be a strong & unyielding opposition from that day.

My Vow of Opposition is my statement of intent.
My Press's statement of intent. SpiritPlants
Kedro's statement of intent.

Don't passively stand by, thinking his herd
of profiteers & glory hounds won't come
for you. Stand in opposition now, so someone
will hear you, & come to help, when they do.

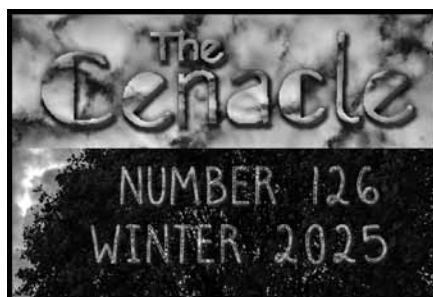
Raymond S. S. @

“Can I tell you a secret? I don’t care if there are undocumented immigrants in this country. I think it’s a non issue. Without social security numbers they’re not getting the welfare people claim they’re getting, the vast majority of them are normal people trying to live a better life.

This whole wall deport-the-illegals bullshit is just the one percent convincing the working poor to blame a subset of the working poor for the fact that they’re all poor, instead of realizing they’re all poor due to vast income inequality and resource price inflation in combination with wage stagnation.

The existence of another poor person is not why you’re poor. It’s because the people who control everything refuse to increase your wages.”

Jessie Memer



Edited by Raymond Souldard Jr.

Assistant Editor: Cassandra Souldard

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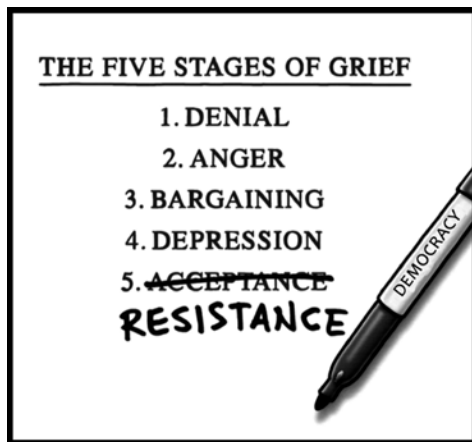
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“There is an adage: Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.

“I know many people feel like we are entering a dark time. For the benefit of us all, I hope that is not the case. But, America, if it is: Let us fill the sky with the light of a billion brilliant stars.”

—U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, 06.November.2024.

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2024

Feedback on Cenacle 125 | Summer 2024

Madelaine Taylah:

“Porch” by Martina Reisz Newberry was wonderful to read. “*And oh the madness of this porch!*” makes me dizzy with wonder at what the Porch overhears and sees. I want to be a fly on the Porch so I might understand every nugget of information and inside joke.

And “[d]oes it make you grin that I’ve said this?” Yes! It does, and I wasn’t even there, but I *am* there, and then I am *there*, and I feel as though I could “pull down the stars” too! How special to be moved and made to think by such visceral imagery.

* * *

Sam Knot:

I suppose if there was one place I *really* landed, it was halfway through Martina Reisz Newberry’s poem “Porch.” I actually didn’t know it was halfway! I imagined the last line on the its first page as the title of a response/poem, and just went with that:

Does it make you grin that I’ve said this?

Yes! I wonder why. I may not have noticed had you not asked the question. The thought it was the question, sneaky sneaking in the word ‘Grin’ & bringing it out of me. Sure, that works: sneaky sneaky. But I can’t shake the deeper sense: Your question made me notice a grin that was already there, quietly ungrinned and unnoticed on what I presume was my blank page of a face. My blank page of a face facing your porch poem of human company, like little people poking their heads out from behind the letters, one per word, one per line, one per poem & through their eyes: another. Both someone else & this same human self Writing Yes with a grin & the words coming out thank you

And I so deeply dig Timothy Vilgiate’s ongoing novel *Rivers of the Mind*. It’s one long trip but he consistently sustains it—the emotional/psychological insight really makes it for me—the way the characters are looked at both through the protagonist’s eyes (I!) and at the same time inside out—it works so well and it’s so touching and endearing. It’s so funny as well sometimes. *Really good stuff.*

* * *

AbandonView:

Happening upon Martina Reisz Newberry’s poem “Porch” was just what I needed to cope with the onslaught of winter. *The porch!* Our family, especially our dog, already craves it. I certainly grinned! “*And oh the madness of this porch!*” Our porch is worn with memories, fading paint, stains of red wine and, even in the winter, flip-flops. Thanks, Martina!

* * *

Louis Staebler:

Photo gallery by AbandonView . . . What am I seeing? . . . His eight photographs that got my attention . . . Trenchant questions in black & white . . . His photos examine possibilities to exhaustion or exuberance . . . A ready to smoke nicotine attitude . . . Soak up the innocence be it black or white . . . But each viewer adds the color raw . . .

I have but one opinion but see through two naked eyes which are often distracted.

* * *

Epi Rogan:

Really loved Nathan D. Horowitz’s “Night Bus to Quito” travel journal. He writes about his deceased friend Verge—really, it’s about life and death, yin and yang, sacred and profane, and those things merging—or should I say Verging?

* * *

Charlie Beyer:

Epi Rogan’s photo gallery has done a grand job of it again. If the purpose of photography is to invoke curiosity, then her photos fulfill that with style. Bright-centered lighting in a bath of odd details leaves me breathless.

Nathan D. Horowitz delights me as always with his descriptions, speculations, similes, and metaphors. The scientist in “Night Bus to Quito” using his mouth as a Petri dish experiment is an image I will not soon forget. Palm trees filled with birds—I love the visions of elsewhere.

* * *

Nathan D. Horowitz:

Charlie Beyer’s “Mad Jack” provides a nimble and groovy narrative of Vietnam-era crime and grime, full of sentences that go off like firecrackers. Thank you, Charlie, what a wild ride!

Also, you’re the only person I’ve ever seen use the word “oubliette.” This is the *second* time. *Who* does that? Keep up the good work. You’re terrific!

* * *

Timothy Vilgiate:

I continue to be moved by Judih Weinstein Haggai’s poetry—she is deeply missed, and I am glad to see her work in this issue.

* * *

Jimmy Heffernan:

Raymond Soulard, Jr.’s *Many Musics* struck me in its intertwining of the sublime, the sad, and the bittersweet, forming a twisted cord or cable that keeps the poem dangling but not falling to shatter. There is a tension, a paradox, a question and an answer, as we sanguinely and uncertainly journey to poem’s end. But there is an understated magnificence there, as we ascend perhaps to the embrace of a loved one, or a friend long unseen. This is a wonderful poem, tapping into every human emotion, and leaving us content.

* * *

Colin James:

Raymond and Cassandra Soulard’s photograph of the Little Free Library in front of their cottage, in his *Notes from New England*, is dear to me because of my many strolls with the grandchildren past similar houses. Always a good vibe and read of course. These LFL book boxes provide, espouse, a come-back-again type of hope and other encouragements.

* * * * *



AbandonView



Sam Knot



Epi Rogan



Charlie Beyer

Selections from Unknot 24, Part 3

Published on electrolounge.boards.net

Post by Sam on Jul 2, 2024 at 3:01pm

If I Had a Vote It Would Be Yours: Things shifting to the right here, seems more people use it as a protest vote than are actual fascists, still pretty fucking stupid and a bit hopeless if you stare too long into the abyss of it. About 3/4 of our village voting fascist. Fucking idiots. We plant flowers, stroke bunnies, get on with business being as strangely strange and oddly normal as we can.

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Jul 8, 2024 at 3:02pm

Looking into Listening More: Happily the people of France came out in force to make sure the fascists didn't get a majority, which is comforting—it's horrible to think of living in a country that votes that way. Things are now pretty split and unsettled in government, with roughly equal proportions left/centre/right, and no one much feeling like compromising/making alliances (which apparently isn't the way French politics has traditionally worked). So interesting times ahead.

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Jul 14, 2024 at 3:00pm

A Moment of Judgement: Hope you're all as well as can be, these are weird times but still there's something to like about that. It's probably perfect. It's probably all going exactly to plan, we're just missing some bit of the puzzle that can only be found in the zedth dimension that makes it all more than make sense. Peace peeps.

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on Jul 15, 2024 at 12:01pm

Yes, Sam, and here someone took a shot at fucking Trump and missed. Makes me think of the old Bill Hicks line about King, killed . . . Ghandi, killed . . . Kennedy, killed . . . Reagan . . . wounded . . .

All I can say to you, brother, is that the fascists and bullies of the world want us to give up. Just lay down and take it.

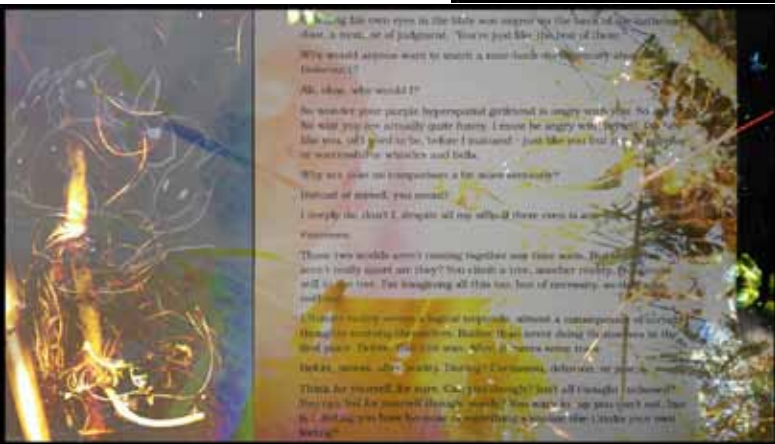
When I was younger, I took it. Lotta motherfuckers along the way too. Not feeling that way no more.



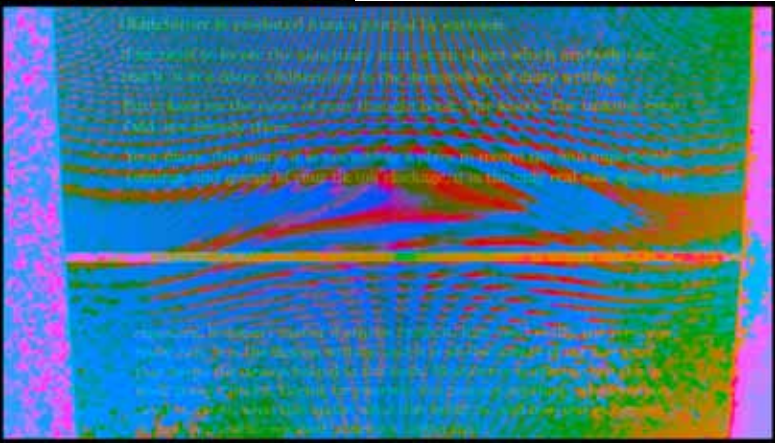
If I Had a Vote It Would Be Yours



Looking into Listening More



A Moment of Judgement



Obliterated

We've been through this time and time again. We'll stand up to them here, you take care of business there. Deal, mate?

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on Jul 15, 2024 at 12:06pm

I doubt there is a plan. I tend to think that the Universe is like a jazz concert, or a Phish show . . . some of it structured, much a surprise in execution.

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Jul 28, 2024 at 3:45am

Obliterated: I actually completely failed to even take a single photo this day, but as I've said before: sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between failure and what wasn't meant to be. I've been dipping back into my diary from this time last year, and this was something I was writing that day, that felt important to me and still does.

It is echoing through this work, too, this notion of *obliteration*, and is likely something still forming. I will paste in some of my entries from these times last year, in case anyone fancies digging into them—though they are raw me, and so perhaps rather oblique . . .

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Jul 28, 2024 at 4:10am

Obliteration is produced from a journal by excision.

If we need to locate the sanctuary in or as an object which anybody can reach, it is a diary. Obliteration is the demonology of diary writing.

Put a knot on the cover of your thought book. The knots. The unknot, even. Odd, it's already tHere.

Your diary, this diary, it is not merely a place to record the half impersonal comings and goings of your tik tok clockage, it is the only real safe space in existence. It doesn't matter if anyone reads it, they can't really, not even you really can. It is the demon writing, and it is all the thread of the one knot that keeps the demon bound in the book. Read/write is release, but this is itself Being Careful. Caring for yourself. You can say anything, whatever you need to, that's what this space, what this world, is, and how you go beyond it, how you will be released, absolved, obliterated.

Obliteration is the process of preparing this or making it more inviting for others, who are thus not not you. It is important to do, if you don't, the magick might not work. It will be you, and not the demon, trapped in the book. You or the demon, it matters not, we are all you. What matters is not to stay stuck, not to be trapped, that is what this is about.

The binding of the demon is the beyond pathology of its liberation, it is the only way to accomplish it. You exorcise yourself. Perhaps it is even an exercise book. Books. None of those things matter so much as what really does not matter, what never minds. We are, it is, it is all on one line, and again and again

we have crossed ourselves.

Out, I fizzle, but there is the germ of it. The Jesus of diseases. Your own bible to write. Your own Hell World to program. You'll never learn to focus, which is to set this world ablaze, unless you really get into this place, earth as concentration camp as . . .

AZ we each must Realize an interpretation of for ourselves, out of care for God. Love has never been so crazy, for madness has ever been this wild.

You are not a rewriter. This is a key, a why we proceed—each towards the other, and this the only other there is—through excision. Cutting out. Leaving space. The space in which we can realize perfection, however distorted our judgment or however powerful the judgments upon us. This space is outside the law. Space itself is beyond the law. This is the only law there is. Cosmic Anarchy. You are not a rewriter, but nor is this first thought best thought, it is an approach to freedom, through realization of the self constraints we have no choice regarding, and yet can not properly speaking consider ourselves as subject to. This is obliteration and you are not a rewriter except insofar as you are changing the past, which is of course the real meaning of the future. Going back over yourself, this hell, this is the meaning of moving forward, moving on, one's own creaturely momentum, one's own ultraterrestrial encounter with the Self Creator.

Our unmutable ananihilation in the transfigure of death. The metaphoreal meaning of True Love.

Notnotknot.

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Aug 10, 2024 at 2:54pm

She Doodles Horses: Very well, I think, when she's on the phone sometimes. I really like them and sometimes I save the scraps she draws them on, or sometimes just snap a photo.

* * * * *

Post by KD on Aug 3, 2024 at 8:28pm

Obliterated: raw you, even oblique you, is always interesting! "Obliteration is the demonology of diary writing" is a different definition of obliteration, I think? and already thoughts about knots/unknots.

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Aug 10, 2024 at 2:16pm

That was the first time the idea of "obliteration" occurred to me, so I guess "the demonology of diary writing" is the original notion and I've continued to play with it a bit. Just one of those ideas that pops up that you kind of like the sound of, and think you might want to know more about, even though it's apparently your own idea it more appears as a suggestion of one that you yourself can try to clarify if you want.



She Doodles Horses



Leviathan



Anotherkind

A lot of the demon stuff was due to reading Joel Biroco's *Demonic In Thought*, which he had built up a bit, saying it had been tucked away for years and he wasn't sure whether to release it, as he himself wasn't quite sure what parts of the book were about—so the story goes he summoned a demon to help him write it. Part of me wants to know more about that and part of me doesn't.

At any rate when I started reading his book I thought, “well, this isn't as demonic as all that,” and told him as much, and he said something to the effect of, “ah, it has hidden itself well.” And I did then begin to find the reading a quite unnerving experience in places—I was going through my own things at the time, confronting my own demons to some degree, and it sort of melded with that . . . so that's some of the background there, in a rambling way.

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Aug 10, 2024 at 3:03pm

Leviathan: Speaking of looking at the stars: this is my grandad's old binoculars—big fuckers mounted on a tripod they are—I remember Ray saying about finding an old telescope in the garage? Well, I inherited these and hope to take them outside one of these winters and see what I can see. One of the first ways I'll be pointing them is towards the Pleiades, I love those little stars and am never sure how many I can see.

* * * * *

Post by KD on Aug 10, 2024 at 7:55pm

That makes sense about “oliterature” and “demonology”—how reading that and dealing with stuff and working stuff through could all result in a bubbly soup of thought and ideas.

Leviathan: Ooh how fun! That is a nice thing to inherit, and I bet they'll be fun! Yes, we have Raymond's telescope from when he was a kid and we have kind of cleaned it up, tried to weatherproof it a bit, got it set up on the deck, bought new lenses, and have had some fun looking! mostly the moon for us.

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on Aug 14, 2024 at 9:17am

She Doodles Horses:

That is a country western song begun . . .

*Oh yes, she doodles horses, all the day long.
When she sits. And she talks. On the tel-e-o-phone.*

*I save her scraps because I love her.
I save her doodles because I love her.*

*When she sits. And she talks. And she doodles horses.
All the day long. On the tel-e-o-phone.*

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Sep 15, 2024 at 1:49pm

Hey Ray, is that really a country and western song or are you singing tis the seeda one?

* * * * *

Post by Raymond Sep 16, 2024 at 2:20pm

Your words, brutha!

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Oct 17, 2024 at 8:22am

Another Kind: It was afternoon on the 14th and I was working outside when I realised I should take a minute to find a photo for the day. The light was falling nicely in the snake garden so I headed that way, through the willow arch, thinking I'd find some nice autumn colours.

I took some photos of some autumn leaves on the little Acer, some photos of a late red rose. I carried on a little way and saw this cricket resting in the sun on a rock I'd found in the grass and set standing up, like a mini-standing stone, so as not to forget to collect it some time.

It made me really happy to find my photo opportunity sitting there waiting for me, alive and kindly strange, making use of one of the little changes I'd happened to make—little events like these are a really wonderful kind of company, words from beyond the human that add so much interest to these conversations we call lives.

* * * * *

Post by KD on Oct 19, 2024 at 8:31pm

Another Kind: I love this one, and I really think the concept of mixing your photos with your artwork like this is a fun one. This one especially goes nicely together, and we agree about how nice it is when others make use of little changes outside—we sort of by accident made what we call the Squirrel Bridge (a long skinny branch that we sort of leaned against the fence next to the garage) and so many birds, squirrels, chipmunks use it on a daily basis. It is a “wonderful kind of company, words from beyond the human”—what a nice way to say it!

* * * * *



Ramblings from the Rabbit Hole

I sit here
 in the space between words and the world and
 i think—well, daydream really. I wander, about the wonders.
 and my mind it PoUnDs incessantly
 you should listen to your bodies call for water
 (more on this later: the Return to the Water)
 but back to the dreams. The day ones. Perhaps the scariest of all.
 To dream in daylight where one cannot hide from what it is they are dreaming. There is no cover of shadow. If my
 thoughts manifested like the light of a star then they would race past the night sky and illuminate it in its entirety.
 It would be daylight regardless. Gods, they fucking burn bright. The pounding, in the head. again.
 I—
 i cannot get it all out. the longer i stare the more distorted my perception becomes. I assume I can just
 reach out and grasp the thought but its like a cat who lays in front of me. You can look, but you cannot touch.
 maybe it wants me to slow down, I ponder. I stare at the thoughts. I ask if any of them want to sit with me.
 Some do.
 others giggle and flutter away. I wish to see them soon. I offer my farewells and know I will meet them again in the
 sea. In the sky. I'm not scared to let these ones go.
 but the ones who sit in front of me. I don't want to spook them. these are the dreams I fear.
 the ones I will not do justice because I have to be ever so quick and ever so careful.
 I feign indifference. They see right through me.
 Pick a pace, pick up a pace, any pace and space and look at you going! You're doing it, really.
 it's like riding a bike, keep pedalling and it will tumble out. sometimes the words win and you don't. sometimes the
 thoughts disguise themselves and all of a sudden you are writing and reading and singing and confessing things you
 never thought you would and—little bastards.
 Quit! With the surprises already. Really. I hate them.
 they *blink* at me. Just blink. And then I remember I am here. I am sitting. At my laptop and
 dammit, they've got me spiralling
 down the rabbit hole again—and yes,
 I would take the blue pill thank-you-very-much and no
 i do not want to talk about it

* * *

Bottle Me Up

Scanning the sea of thrumming red- I nearly burnt myself alive ~~(with an ungodly amount of rage)~~

~~when I noticed~~ the juvenile gum

~~(look at me)~~

The tips of her branches reaching sky-ward. ~~An outstretched hand to the heavens.~~

Long and proud and unflinching. How calm she looked amidst the early morning sky.

Languidly squishing her hips against the lapping azure. And--

her gentleness touched me...

~~(feather-soft and carefully/I was stunned by/its juxtaposition to my pulsing anger)~~

...reached right inside me and stroked that horrible beast until it purred and unclenched its claws.

unclenched my teeth.

'You do not have to start the day fighting'

~~(I know/softly)~~

So I began writing and started creating, instead.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

The Great Grand Braided Narrative *[Gr. Gr. Br. N. for friendly],* *Part 3*

*“All is one
All is mind
All is lost
and you find
All is Dream.”*
—Mercury Rev,
“Hercules,” 2001.

i. Along

Funny: this past summer passed four years of writing this *Great Grand Braided Narrative [Gr. Gr. Br. N. for friendly]*, & thus tracking alongside of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. Neither is done. Only to say of this coincidence that, even in the vilest times of human history, government leaders as incompetent as iniquitous, Art, like Nature, like Dreams, like other good & timeless things, keeps along, showing us both living hope, & better paths to choose.

Part 1 of these *Notes* on the *Gr. Gr. Br. N.* (*Cenacle* | 118 | December 2021) was written when the six narrative projects (*Labyrinthine*, *Many Musics*, *Bags End News*, *Creature/Travelers Tales*, *Great Heroes of Yore Adventures*, & *Dream Raps*) had not yet crossed, but were each aiming in that direction. With goal to re-unite the six Brother-Heroes of the *Many Musics* poems (first appearing in *Cenacle* | 83 | December 2012), & so coming about a year & a half along the work.

Part 2 (*Cenacle* | 120 | Summer 2022) came some eight months later, & detailed my plan to travel each narrative, & its associated Brother-Hero, to Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle’s Beach of Many Worlds, by the



shore of the Deeper Deeper Sea, by October 2022. And then to “[w]rite 36 *Many Musics* poems in 36 days to bring the story to its conclusion about December 10th, which marks 10 years nearly to the day since the original *Tangled Gate* poems were finished.”

And, indeed, two of the narratives (Odom in *Bags End News*, & Francisco in the *Creature/Travelers Tales*) had already arrived to Abe’s Beach.

But, to vary an old adage: Men plan. The Universe laughs.

It was into the autumn of 2023 when finally all the narratives & Brother-Heroes & their many companions arrived to Abe’s Beach.

The tales of the travels had to spin out as they would, no faster or slower. And many stories of those waiting on Abe’s Beach had to be told as well.

And it became critical that each arrival, each reunion, powerfully matter. As I wrote in *Part 1*: “Good Art sweats [the smallest details]. Does so with zest & delight.”

My personal struggle in later 2022 & long into 2023 was that the Senior Technical Writer position I had at a Boston biotech firm (mentioned in *Part 2*) went bad. New & *very bad* management put a target on my back, for *no good reason*; twisted me in the wind for awhile, then cut when deemed time.

No desired place for further mention of this here (been ranted on elsewhere, & often), save to say that I think I drove deeper into this *Gr. Gr. Br. N.*, to protect it from what I was suffering on the job. Does evil exist in this world? I believe so, by the willfully cruel acts of men & women. The angels or the devils are in the doings.

I’ve considered how much this *Part 3* should cover. At this moment, the *Gr. Gr. Br. N.* has moved on (for the most part) from the reunion on Abe’s Beach, but is not yet completed. Close, but not done.

So I’ve decided to leave what occurs after the reunion for *Part 4*. (Guessing it will be in *Cenacle* | 128 | June 2025). Complete this series when the *Gr. Gr. Br. N.* itself is complete.

That said . . .

* * * * *

ii. *Labyrinthine*

Where these various works dwelled closely to one another, so to speak, occasionally crossing narratives, even while coming to share one complex geography & history, now they are each telling one strand of a greater story . . . I am telling one narrative right now, “great,” “grand” by its own hyperbole, & “braided” as a hint of its strategy.

Brother-Hero Asoyadonna visits with Miss Flossie Flea at the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock who, by *hmmmming* & Rutabaga Soup, helps her “remember some things.” From when she found herself Wobbled from below the Cave of the Beast, far from her Brothers; waking up to the friendly black-&-white Benny the Dog; to their long travels by bus from High Station, to Central Station, to the one where she meets Raymond the Author guy; & onto their following the First Islander Imp at the

Festival; to the Blood Canvas her Brother Francisco painted & hung upon a tree there, showing all six of them in the Cave of the Beast, from their travels to there back-when; aboard the Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee, where she happily reunites with Brother Dreamwalker, & meets his friend the Gentleman Photographer; & finally aboard Calgary the Sea Dragon, diving down the Deep Deep Sea to their arrival in happy reunion at Abe's Beach of Many Worlds along the Deeper Deeper Sea.

* * * * *

iii. Bags End News

*It's a breathless, magickal balance,
knowing how to do this or just, simply, doing it.*

Algernon Beagle travels with his dear one, Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna, & Brother Francisco to a Door on Abe's Beach, leading to a Place of Shadows, where Francisco paints a canvas showing him & all of his Brothers in the Cave of the Beast, but smiling happy, a vision of the future, unlike the Blood Canvas's dark memories at the Festival.

After Dreamwalker & Asoyadonna arrive, a Wobble hits the Beach, causing the three arrived Brother-Heroes & the Famous Travelers (Daniel, Marie, Joe, & Derek) to investigate, discovering an entrance to the Forever Spaceship, which somehow travels time like space, beneath the sands. They even end up in the very strange wooden-roomed Clover-dale place deep down. Francisco is able to render a Wobble Map that will eventually prove helpful to the King.

Asoyadonna also brings a letter to Algernon Beagle from his *Bags End News* colleagues Lori Bunny & Boop, currently in Imagianna, telling him to urge the Brother-Heroes to return to the Festival as soon as possible. Something to show them (I suspect the "Room of Song," which involves importantly in much I am currently finishing [see "Notes Toward Many Musics, Twelfth Series #25, Room of Song"] in this issue).

* * * * *

iv. Dream Raps

*I feel this Great Grand Braided Narrative [Gr.Gr.Br.N. for friendly] getting toward its conclusion,
at least conclusion of a kind, & this is fascinating to see play out, see each disparate narrative
begin to twine with one then more of the others, & wonder those remaining to twine,
& what it will all mean then, stray ideas always, but what can it all be that matters?*

Dreamwalker, growing up at the Manse, discovers a strange hand-made book, & somehow with it a strange girl named Zia. His travels also lead him to finding a map to Dreamland, & his mysterious Hekk stick for Dreamwalking. He reunites after a time with his old friend, the Gentleman Photographer, & they pass through the Rutabaga Festival, where Dreamwalker sees the Blood Canvas. They visit the Manse of his youth via the Talent Show, & find many adventures there before returning to the Festival, where they discover the Good Ship Ker-Plow-Eeee! waiting for them to board. Where Dreamwalker & Asoyadonna had first met long ago is where they now re-unite, & travel with their friends down to Abe's Beach of Many Worlds. Further travels by many of the reunited friends occur in the Dreaming, where they come eventually to the Dreamland *Trip Town Pavilion* (strangely enough, for a live performance of key unknown events in the travels of Brother Roddy & The King). And they help Dreamwalker to

remember how he came to have his Hekk stick.

* * * * *

v. Creature / Travelers Tales

*I write it all down, or narrate it
This world companions me in a sense*

Aside from the tales summed above, the Famous Travelers & their friends travel via Boat-Wagon, on the Deeper Deeper Sea, down a Swirling-Slowly-Somewhere, to the Forever Spaceship again, & again arrive to Clover-dale, & then to the Shack at the Threshold of the Dreaming. Here Marie learns from its Guardian about something called the *Mesh*, which is a place where Dreaming & waking mix (like the *Trip Town Pavilion* they will later come to). Eventually, they all return to the Beach, as everyone is now returning, on the Night of the Wobble Moon. It is notable that as more Brother-Heroes & their friends arrive to Abe's Beach, the separate strands of the *Gr. Gr. Br. N.* cross & become like one.

* * * * *

vi. Many Musics

*This feeling that the Gr.Gr.Br.N. has reached this deep, strange, lovely place
And always wondering the Tangled Gate mythopoeia itself—
it encompasses the whole of my writing, of my Art in every form—
Many Worlds I know some-not-much-of—*

Brother Roddy & his friend Gate-Keeper leave their companion Mentor at the Lily Pond, where all three had met, & are led by the First Islander Imp, & then MeZmer the White Bunny, to Roddy's beloved old Mailbox House. A bed of Ferns there conceals an entrance to the Forever Spaceship. Roddy enters Clover-dale, now lost, & is guided back to Gate-Keeper by gift of a Mossy map from a stranger sitting in a corner of the Clover-dale liberry. This Map then leads them from the Forever Spaceship onto Abe's Beach, though far down from Abe's camp, on the Night of the Wobble Moon. The two climb a Half Moon Bridge to get a better look & then, still farther down the Beach, Roddy spies the Sea-colored eyes of his long-loved King, all feelings of estrangement falling away.

* * * * *

vi. Great Heroes of Yore

*Right now, my most important concern is writing toward that moment, narrating toward it,
when all six Brother-Heroes come together again in reunion. This has been many calendars in coming.
It feels like a long-arriving apotheosis, & is so close, yet not quite arrived—*

The Great Heroes of Yore, Miss La & Miss Ta, arrive to Abe's Beach, telling everyone of how The King is Wobble-stuck on Mount Cloudy Day. Abe decides that Calgary will bring much of the group from the Beach—along with the Heroes' Beach Nest, which they will use to bounce the King from Mount Cloudy Day to the Rutabaga Festival (where the Thought Fleas will help them). The rest Calgary will bring directly to the Festival. Also brought along will be the several canvases Francisco had made (Wobble Map, Place of Shadows canvas, White Birch canvas), braided together by Princess Crissy

magick. The Great Heroes & The King leap from Nest to Fest, & come eventually to the Helping Hut. There the King uses the Braided Canvas to return un-Wobbled to Abe's Beach, & eventually arrive back to Abe's camp (in the company of Algernon Beagle & the Kittees & Friend Fish in their Boat-Wagon). And The King happily espies his beloved Brother Roddy.

vii. Anon

What I can say about the *Gr. Gr. Br. N.* is that it has possessed me, & all of my writing projects, for four years & running. I have never written such a massively complex work before. Sometimes I am focused on the biggest view of this *Gr. Gr. Br. N.*; sometimes on the smallest, Imp-sized detail.

I will have more to tell of all this in *Part 4*, when it occurs, & likely wish to look back expansively on it all, as well as wonder the path on.

Maybe I will have it finished early next year, as I expect, but maybe something else entirely. Men plan. The Universe laughs. But I hope, either way, I am ever writing with all my billion stars alight in my sky.





Judih Weinstein Haggai



and so it begins
dare i challenge
down the rabbit hole

* * *

feet on floor
conversation of cells
alive this morning

* * *

morning surprise
greet's blurry vision
window sill orchid

* * *

before morning walk
water-stained ceiling turns blue
yesterday's sky

* * *

new spring cycle
green fields bloom under sun
chlorophyll morning

* * *

a moment to feel
the power of butterflies
silken transport

* * *

old storage box
thank you note to self
but whose handwriting?

* * *

a guiding voice
accept and discover
the teacher within

* * *

ships divided
sailing in search of partner
vanished into mist

* * *

quiet clean start
silence among trees
windless reflection

* * *

hours of nighttime
paint pours down the cliffside
the artist in awe

* * *

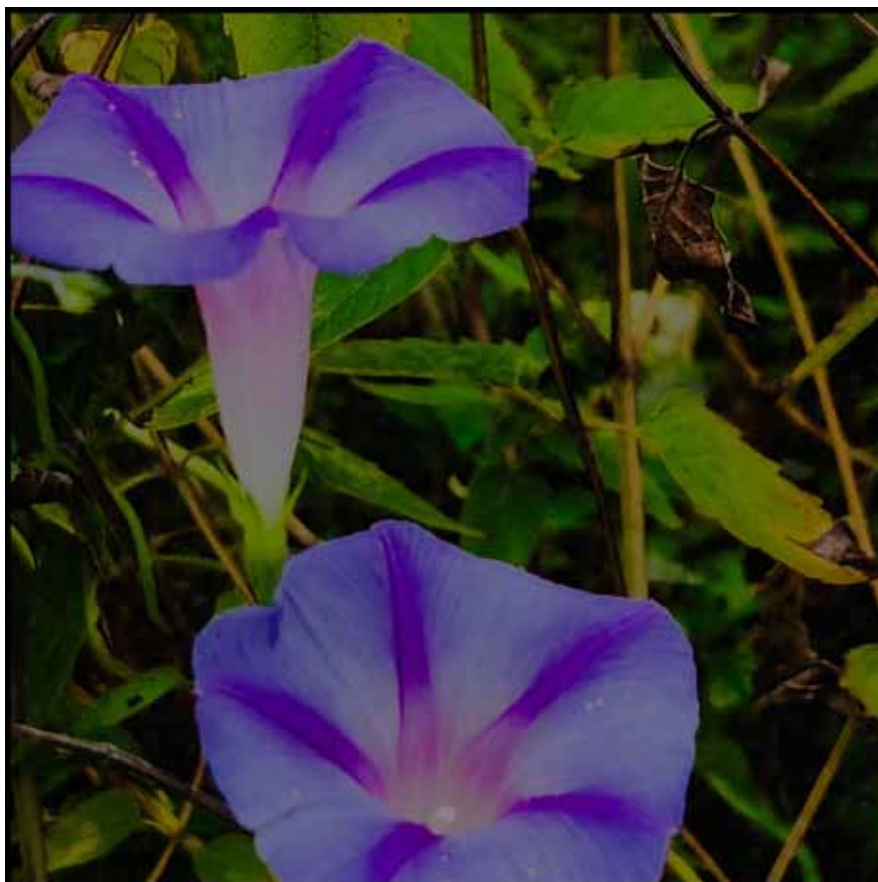
four a.m. awake
sudden unblurred focus
gift of clarity

* * * * *

Louis Staeble













Martina Reisz Newberry



Christmas Day

At 11 am, on Christmas Day,
our building was evacuated.
Someone
 in our building
fought with his lover
 in front of his lover's parents
 and went nuts
and stabbed the lover's father
 in the hand
 while the father was cooking
 Christmas dinner.

Then,
the nutcase poured gasoline
 all around the apartment
 and made threats about lighting it.

At 11 am, this Christmas Day,
the police evacuated our building.
Some of them went to the sad apartment;
 some closed off the street,
 draped yellow crime scene tape
 on trees and light poles and fences.
They herded us a block away
 where we stood in little groups
cursing the nutcase,
hearing/telling the story to each other.

Our cat was terrified and *loud* in his terror.
I was terrified and grinned at everyone and grumped silently
 inside my red pajamas.
My husband was terrified and took charge
 in his red pajamas.

A SWAT team came.
 Firetrucks came.
 An ambulance came.
 Drunk partiers came from far up the block
 to the north.
 Neighbors came from other buildings.
 A five-year-old in her brand-new mermaid costume
 stood and watched our building
 same as we did.

We were outside for 3½ hours,
 on that Christmas Day.
 It got cold.
 We crossed back and forth across the street
 following the sunshine.

When they brought the nutcase out,
 they had put him in a “bunny suit,”
 (my husband took a picture).
 The nutcase in the “bunny suit” resisted
 but they got him into the ambulance anyway

and then it was safe to go into the building
 and have drinks
 and food
 and discuss the events of the day.

The nutcase had marched himself
 into our Yuletide celebrations
 and stomped through our cheese plates
 and the fresh cut vegetables
 and our sweet desserts.

The ambulance took him away
 and we could go inside and forget him.
 That part was good.
 We put on Christmas music
 and cooked dinner.
 It all turned out fine.
 Over cocktails, I muttered
Damn nutcase.

* * *

When the Wars Are Done

When the wars are done, we'll have eggs and bacon for breakfast,
with melon on the side.

We'll walk the dogs and go listen to band music—watch it rise
until the shine from sunlight off the trumpets trombones
and tubas nearly blinds us.

When the wars are done, we'll wear our spring hats—the straw ones
with glued-on flowers, and feathers that shiver
with every move as we once shivered with every headline,
every broadcast.

When the wars are done, we'll pack glamorous lunches in trendy picnic baskets,
and head down to the sea to raise our plastic champagne flutes to the waves.

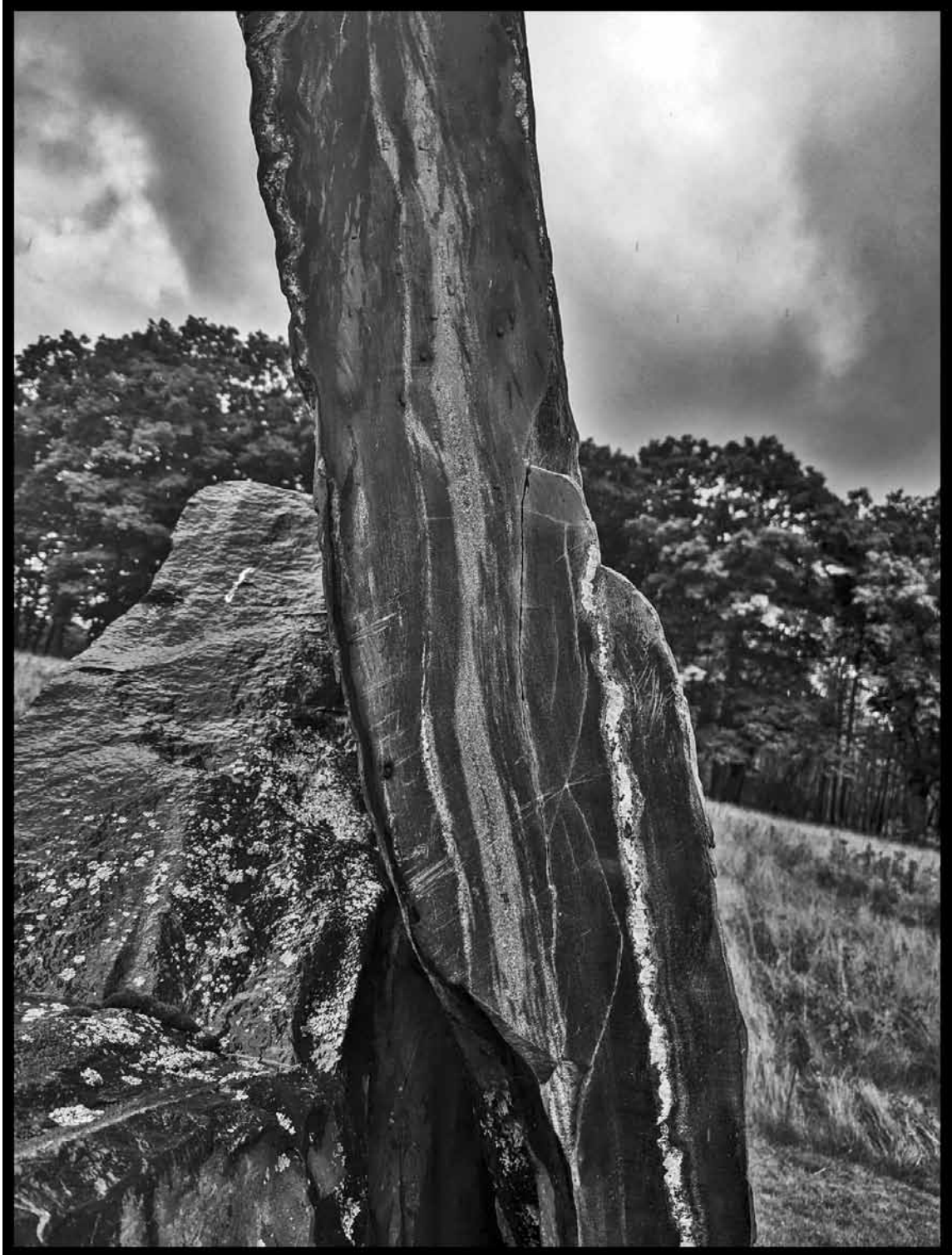
When the wars are done, we'll attend dances at the gyms and armories,
women will wear fancy shoes, men will remember how to dance
and *will* dance. There will be no wallflowers.
Families will take long drives to end up at the ice cream place
at the end of the pier. They'll order black cherry, chocolate raspberry,
and vanilla coconut cones—with sprinkles.

When the wars are done, we'll talk with each other about the weather and weeds,
and how difficult it is to clean the rain gutters. We'll argue about
whether pineapple belongs on pizza, whether sugar is the secret ingredient
in spaghetti sauce, and which bar has the best martinis.
We'll discuss the new Sherwin-Williams blue paint, decide whether or not
it really absorbs red and green wavelengths, and what its name should be.

When the wars are done, we'll make sure to have breath mints in our pockets and purses,
a spare set of eyeglasses, tissues, a new wallet, and spare change.
We'll use walking sticks and go window shopping.

When the wars are done, we will understand what is said to us, we will breathe truth.
While we shouldn't, we will spend our minutes, hours, years forgetting what we did
before the wars were done. We shouldn't forget, but we will.

* * * * *





God the Transformer and a Fucked-Up Tattoo

[Travel Journal]

i.

Back from Quito, I'm in the jungle town of Lago Agrio with cash to last me a while. Yesterday I had plans to talk with Serafín the educator about Secoya mythology, and possibly get a tattoo from my sculptor friend Elias, who's figured out how to draw a nine-pointed star. Rufino took me to his new Cabaña Supernatura office in the morning to pick up my mail, which he'd picked up from the post office several weeks before. Two items each from my mom, dad, and grandmother, all saying, "Please come home. We love you."

I talked with Elias the sculptor. He said to come back at five. I found Serafín the educator. He was busy too and said he'd meet me at seven. At five I was back at Elias's shop, where the sculptor was outfitting a girl with an ocelot-skin bra and miniskirt for a costume party. When he finished, he drew the star on a thin sheet of paper from a carbon copy pad, cut it out, and pasted it to my shoulder. Put a fresh needle in the machine he'd made out of a little motor and the shell of a ballpoint pen. Dipped the needle in ink and let it fly.

People kept coming in and kibitzing. A teenager thought the design was cool. A middle-aged lady clicked her tongue and remarked, "Such handsome eyes and you want to mark up your skin." The tattoo took two hours. Serafín showed up and waited in the outdoor café next door with his wife Alba, both drinking fruit juice. Washington Piaguaje, the strong-guy-lame-in-one-leg who had a head cold when he helped us with the roof of Joaquín's hut, currently the recently elected president of the Secoya tribal government, came in twice with some pals.

The first time, he crushed Elias's hand in a handshake, then mine. "Why are you so weak?" he asked me, laughing. "You're so big and I'm so much smaller than you, so how come I'm so much stronger? Let's test our strength." We took the piss out of him after he was gone.

The second time he came in, Elias said, "If you think you're so macho, you should try getting a tattoo." Washington had no answer for that. He looked queasy watching a drop of blood seep out and trickle down my arm.

The tattoo finished, I looked at it in the mirror and noticed it was imperfect. It's a difficult design to draw well, and Elias had gotten the proportions slightly wrong. "What do you think?" he quizzed.

"It looks great," I coughed out, past the lump in my throat, and paid him the sum we had agreed.

ii.

I headed out to Serafín and Alba. After a bit of small talk, the conversation turned to shamanism, as I'd hoped. Serafín talked about some of the things shamans used to do, and I noted them down: keep the weather nice and dry in the dry season so that people could burn the underbrush to plant their

gardens; perform a ritual before a party so that people wouldn't fight; receive bamboo flutes from sky people during the *yagé* ceremony (unlike false shamans, who would secretly bring flutes with them to the ceremony and pretend to have received them from sky people); stretch a chambira string across the room and walk along it during the *yagé* ceremony, singing, nearly weightless, perfectly balanced.

A shaman, Serafín asserted, can't see a woman walking down the street and want to have sex with her. He has to be above that.

I listened silently, not wanting to dispute the point. I often saw women walking down the street and wanted to have sex with them, and I also felt that I was smoothly progressing toward my goal of becoming a shaman. The crucial point was that since parting from Ricki, I hadn't acted on such an impulse. The spirits accepted me as I was.

I mentioned something about Joaquín being the most advanced shaman I'd met in my travels. Serafín smiled and countered, "For me, don Joaquín is not a shaman. My shaman died in 1994. I am referring, of course, to my uncle Francisco. Francisco was a true healer, a man of knowledge. His brother Ambrosio was very good too. He had the most beautiful voice of all."

The one who Joaquín said sent jaguars to kill him. Must tactfully ignore that. "Your uncle Francisco must have told you a lot of stories," I said. "Did he tell you any about God?"

"Of course."

"I know the one about God killing Thunder, and his wife's tears flooding the earth. Do you know any others like that?"

"Yes. There are many stories about when God lived on earth. In that time, he created people, and he observed them, and based on what he observed, he transformed some of them into animals.

"He sometimes walked among them disguised as an old man. One day he went up to some people who were making spears and sharpening them. *Rrrrup! Rrrrup!* was the noise that made. He said, 'What are you doing?' They said, 'We're making spears to kill that bastard God!' 'OK,' God said, 'you're acting like pigs, so you're going to *be* pigs.' And he changed them all to wild pigs. The sound it made when they were sharpening their spears became the voice of the pigs."

"So he transformed them based on their behavior?"

"Correct. Some other people ate human flesh. They were cannibals. God disguised himself again as an old man and went to visit them. Right when he walked in their hut, *peen!* They clubbed him on the head and killed him. They cut up the body and cooked it. They took the meat out of the pots and put it on their plates. They sat down to eat. At that moment the meat vanished off the plates and God walked in the door. He transformed them all into spirits. Those are the evil spirits that live on the earth."

"So they lost the right to have bodies?"

"Exactly. There's something else, too. We believe God is still observing us. And we believe he'll transform us, too, based on how we behave."

iii.

Maybe because Alba had been shifting in her seat as if she wanted to go, Serafín pulled out of philosophical mode and told me that there's a *terreno* for sale, a hectare of land near the Secoya communities. Four hundred dollars. It's five hundred meters back from the river, but there's a path to it. I could build a house and live there, he said. I could marry into the Secoya community, and bring in tourists. We spoke about it a little longer and then shook hands and parted.

I don't have four hundred dollars to buy the land, but I'll think about it. I don't know if I'm quite ready to get married, either. Plus, all the single females are under eighteen. But it's an interesting concept. Maybe something will happen in a few years to make it work out.

I felt mostly OK about my new tattoo until 4:30 the following morning when I awoke suddenly and thought, "Oh, shit! What have I done? I've fucked up my skin forever! I'm marked!" I scrambled

out of bed alarmed and depressed and went out on the veranda and thought about how messed up my life is.

At a quarter past five, I started commiserating with a thin, middle-aged ice cream vendor who had his own reasons to be sad. He had recently brought his daughter to Ecuador to escape the violence in his hometown in the south of Colombia.

“You can’t leave the house unarmed there,” he sighed. “And you’re always outgunned.” He improvised a prayer, which I *amened*, and then we said the Lord’s Prayer together, him in Spanish, me in English.

I couldn’t remember when or where I’d memorized it, but there it was: *Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name . . .* By the time the eye of the sky rose in the East amid fiery, watery clouds, we were both feeling a bit better.

* * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz



Nathan D. Horowitz

Suno Cat Poems

My Cat

My cat whose bottom is curly red with black spots.
 My cat whose brown star is the mother-of-pearl of biological time,
 whose belly is the moon,
 whose will is a wild desert wind, whose freedom is a lucky star.
 My cat whose Communist Party membership card is revolutionary poetry.
 My cat who stirs against my left knee
 during Cocteau and Chaplin's touching, sexy, vertiginous film *The Beast and Beauty*.

In a collaboration of sound, speed, size, and humanity, one of the actors is a cat who my
 cat swears is her reincarnated past self—my cat, who is the librarian of Circe's snake, my cat
 who is salt-stung sex-stood-upped-ness, my cat who is energy money muscle, my cat who is
 blonde and cold like the sun.

When you're taking a stand, where's your cat?
 When you need a friend, your cat's where it's at.
 When you're taking a stand, where's your cat?
 When I need a friend, my cat's where it's at.

My cat who knows her own orgasm, whose legs are the literature which is my language, who
 is the whip my guilty truth needs. My cat who is an *Arabian Nights* adventure of the Ming
 Dynasty. My cat who is blood, soul, and heart. My cat who is an empty page. My cat who
 sees four-way geographic-historical matrix reality.

The use of space: my cat, who is tedium, my cat, who is hyperconscious, my cat is
 unexpectedly warm when she stumbles in at dawn and curls feline-finally down next to my
 flesh and sleeps. My cat, whose voice is a curious time machine. My cat, who takes a nap.

When you're taking a stand, where's your cat?
 When you need a friend, your cat's where it's at.
 When you're taking a stand, where's your cat?
 When I need a friend, my cat's where it's at.

* * *

My Cat in the Cat Trees

My cat with eyes of envy.

My cat whose eyes are a window into a thunderstorm.

My cat whose eyes are as mysterious as the origins of existence.

My cat in those breathtaking jazz pants.

My cat in the false light, in the real life, in the night life, in the midnight.

My cat who, when stripped of her fur, is the light of daytime,

who sees through the future-present multiplicity,

who steals my right place at my right time,

whose continued existence shields my opacity,

who becomes multiple with every single purr,

who sings of Life and Chance and Offal.

My cat with the god-damned.

My cat in the cat trees.

My cat with the sprinkles.

My cat with the cherries.

My cat in the big red trailer.

My cat on the big white dresser.

My cat in the oven's doorway.

My cat with the stovepipe hat.

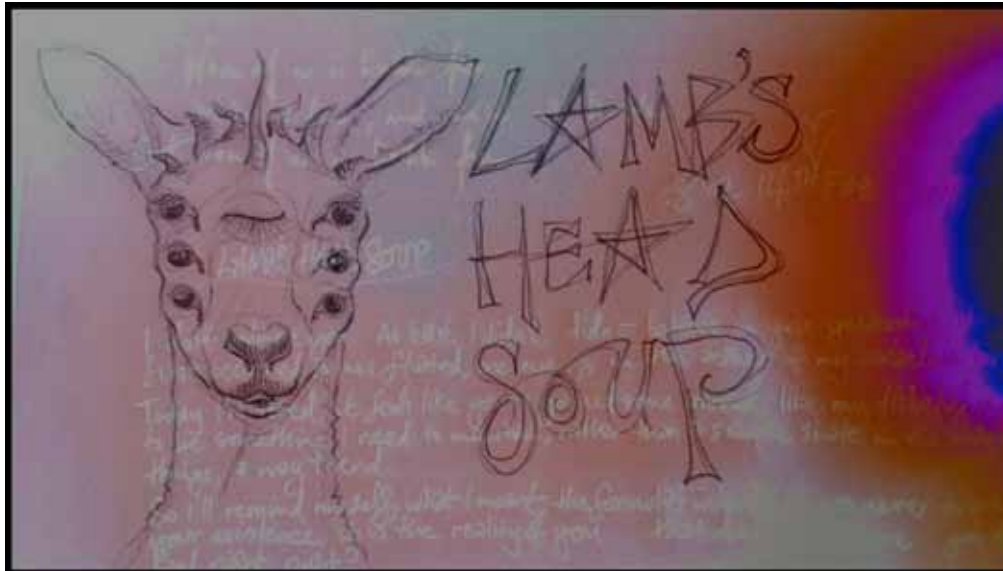
* * *

Her Tail is a Temple

Her tail is a temple where shepherds worship.
Her teeth are a cult founded three thousand years ago by a woman inclined to the arcane.
Her back bears the water that sank Atlantis,
the same water pressed out of grapes from which the greatest wine was ever made.
Her whiskers are the shoal on which the best ships go under,
that have the best gold, the best silver, the best jewels on board.
Her nose, her nose? Mortals rub it and live forever in amazement at her bestial eyes.
Her eyes are reason enough to descry the invisible,
to hear the unsaid, to sing the unsung.

* * * * *

**Nathan D. Horowitz**



[Prose]

“Mixing up the planes is the sad fate of many a mystic. How many do I know in my own experience who tell me that, obedient to the Heavenly Vision, they will shoot no more rabbits! Thus they found a system on trifles, and their Lord and God is some trumpety little elemental masquerading as the Almighty.”

— Aleister Crowley, *John St. John*, 1909.

1.

I don't believe you. At least I didn't, didn't believe in you yesterday, when you first occurred to me, floated one eye up in the aether of my senseless touch.

Today I'm tired, it feels like you've gained some ground, like my disbelief is going to be something I need to maintain rather than a simple state I'm in, a way I tend.

So I'll remind myself what I meant, the formula's intent: it was never to question your existence, it is the *reality* of you that doesn't ring true. You don't feel right, right?

The way you feel is wrong. Not wrong like I feel today: out of place, tired, upset. That's how I feel so if it's wrong it's the right kind of it. You it's like you don't feel. You just float there in the broth, a little more salt, dead cute thing. Dead cute. So cute I could eat you.

Is that the kind of wrong you are? Unkind enough to take me literally?

The cat sat on the mat.

The writer put pencil to paper.

The head is boiling away.

Morning has broken.

* * *

*The people of the future are very patient, probably
because of how long they've had to wait
for it to arrive.*

* * *

2.

Does the soup have a geometry? I wouldn't have thought so but when I did then think about it it appeared that it could. Could be said to.

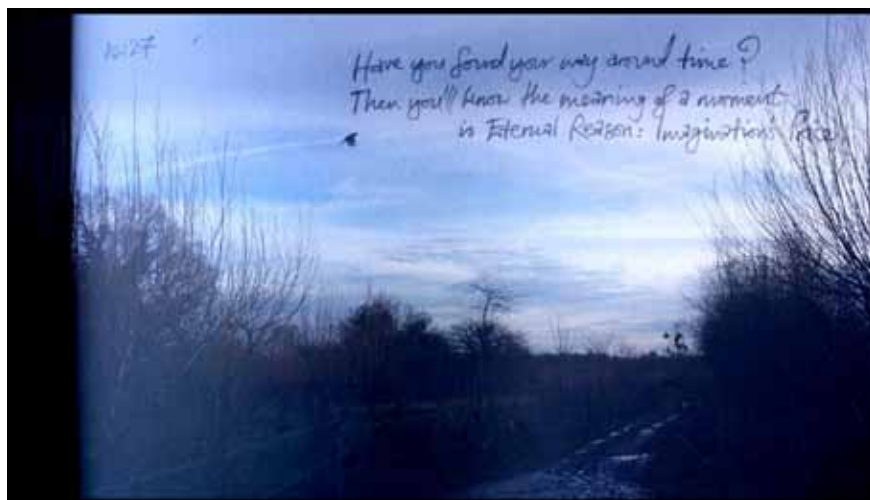
As ever you don't have to look long to find a circle: the cauldron, the bowl, the spoon—plenty of candidates. The knife will do for a straight line, carving its little distances between whatever the points, a triangle there at the tip of it. & lo, we can even find a square: one corner in the liquid of the soup itself, one corner in the fire that heats it up, one corner swirling in the steam that rises from it, one corner cut into little pieces & floating about.

Clearly there is at least an attempt at something *like* Reality.

* * *

*Have you found your way around time?
Then you'll know the meaning of a moment
is Eternal Reason: Imagination's Price*

* * *



3.

There is something of my faith in the blank page, such that it isn't belief—as perhaps many might understand it—so much as an incredulity concerning that which is added. It really is more like doubt, or perhaps scepticism.

I might've enjoyed your soup just fine—I take no issue at all with the hot water part. But let me stay with the blank page a minute: It is part of my art to imagine myself an unblanker of them: I like to decorate, I like to write, I like to experiment with marks & media. A memory may arise, get added: cleaning the old enamel cooker top, losing my patience with some cooked on goo, going at it with the scouring pad: I get rid of the crust but I scratch the enamel. It makes me sad—there is no going back—this old thing will keep deteriorating until it is useless & with this mark I have basically inscribed this fact, drawn myself a picture of it to look at every time I cook.

There seems little doubt about this mark. Perhaps because the adding is in part a taking away? More likely because it already accords with certain beliefs I have concerning Reality—common ones induced by common experiences: what is done is done & any form of undoing must begin by accepting this.

Might *end* otherwise, mind.

The smile in that sentence is a sign of my faith. It is these kinds of marks that I find most convincing. More convincing than any logic, you understand? Quite beyond reason. Yet subtle enough. Not idiotic. You could reason about it, just I would only find it convincing if it had that smile, if it was able to lay its hand on me in a certain way. It's reassuring, but only really because it neither is nor is not reassuring. It's true. Somehow the page is still blank. The smile was already on it.

* * *

Can life write home?

* * *

4.

It isn't a warm smile. It is a smile of fire, a little piece of a great circle of silken steel lit for a moment by an inexplicable flash. If it is a smile that belongs to a person she is the mother of fates. It is a necessary smile, a thrilling glimmer of the way Gods might think, thoughts in which it is not possible for us to exist, never-ending thoughts without beginning, thoughts that permit no possibility, yet whose exactitude obliterates every apparently natural limit, every idiotic restriction reverts to delight in the agonic responsibility permitted to each creative restraint. I just mean to say that my faith isn't merely a form of scepticism, it isn't a simple optimism based on a knowing ignorance, the *we shall see* of suspended finality: it is an End.

It is an End, it is Final, because it is in Touch with Something & not because it is Over, & this at least in part because it can never be done. But let's not lean too hard on the impossible: it can be Not Done. In a similar sense to my declining to partake of your soup: I do not intend to refuse your hospitality but I must honour my own inhospitable soul: offending you is nothing compared to the unwelcome I can give myself, to be cast out of the pact of this deepest form of contact is a fate worse than death.

So many ways to end in endlessness: each of them total but none of them final. So many ways to miss

the Absolute, to yearn for what does not move, which is the root of every feeling. Every feeling, in the end which is its beginning, is Peace. All true feelings are quiet. Quiet like the music music can't not be.

Anything else is on the run.

* * *

*Spring flowers tremble
in space the air's not left
Make yourself comfortable*

* * *

5.

What is necessary for me is not necessarily necessary for you, but I think it is necessary that it is in some sense chosen, committed to. I believe the truly necessary entails a kind of vow. Perhaps the vow of vows. Not to eat Lamb's Head Soup is not the vow I have taken. I cannot tell you the vow I have taken—it is in many ways still hidden from me—but I can tell you that not to eat Lamb's Head Soup feels to me like a consequence of it, something that has become necessary in light of it, in light of that which remains somehow dark to me.

How can I have vowed, or have chosen something, truly, & yet not know what that something is? Well, for one thing: I do know, that's what this is, it's just that knowing is a feeling for me: this may not be a vow that you take with words. For another thing: it means, or seems to mean, different things depending on the situation. I didn't even realise I was writing about it until today. One last thing: though any true vow must be taken freely, the freedom that underwrites this vow feels somewhat otherworldly. I believe it may only be found at the nexus of certain forces, a location from which worldly perspectives may appear highly constrained.

I won't eat Lamb's Head Soup because the creatures are my kin. Moral relativism is not the end of morality; it is the matrix of it. All this is built on kinship relations. Such relativity is a face of the Absolute. Perhaps the vow is given & taken as an Absolute Relation.

I won't eat Lamb's Head Soup because of what it is, which is also what it symbolises. I need to stay as far away as possible from the Meat Factory while I hold myself against it.

I won't eat Lamb's Head Soup because of the whole bloody mess. They sound like they're saying *Yaay*, to me, when they bleat. Those cute little sounds drift across the fields & make me smile. I talked to my wife about it, she said that when she used to be a vet she learnt we didn't eat them yet: we waited until they were teens (so slightly less cute) & killed them then. I'm not sure peace can come to a world that eats meat, I told her.

I'm not sure peace can come to a world that eats meat, I said to myself. Of course it can, you idiot, I said, Peace comes to whoever goes to it. It comes to who it comes to, always Absolute & never total. But I know what I mean, I know how I feel, I know what my Lord is saying to me, I know what my Peace is, what this Peace means.

I couldn't even imagine it. Well, I could, it just seemed even less real than the angels & demons, fairies

& aliens, I might sometimes imagine I imagine. Lamb's Head Soup: I don't believe you. Cute wrinkly pink head boiling away. You don't feel right.

So I had to wonder about that, if it wasn't a sign I was making some progress: I knew Lamb's Head Soup existed, that it was something the world did: it was out there, somewhere in that consensus reality I don't recall myself ever having agreed to: Lamb's Head Soup, I could find it, see it smell it touch it taste it, hear one of the main ingredients calling just now across the fields, inexplicably: *Yaaayyy*.

It just doesn't make sense to me, emotionally, & this means that it lacks reality, at least for me, it lacks reality. Maybe that's why I went crazy, before? I think now: I just didn't believe in people, in their world, not nearly so much as I believed in myself & the voices in my head & the pictures in my dreams & the feelings in my soul & those other strange people who have apparently given time to or followed their own.

So I'm making progress, because now without going crazy Reality is reorganising itself along another axis or according to a different dimension, like depth but not really: feeling. I'm not sure feeling really does space & time like most conceive dimension. If you had a flow of feeling in a certain way then wound another around it you would & you wouldn't get a whole new feeling between & beyond them. At any rate you could never package them up & then replicate them & put one pack there & the other over there & say time is somehow in the gap or passage between them. I just mean that to feeling dimension means something more like meaning & so if there's a point it's basically You, which I am too, & so if there's a line it can't be the one between us & them, & so on.

So Lamb's Head Soup, which is part of the world & exists in consensus reality, is less real to me than certain feelings that said reality may label subjective, & thus the world may categorise as fictions what to me are more facts than fact. But to grasp the import of this you have to see the entire Meat Factory & all its products—one of which or some of whom you & I might be—as actively becoming illusory. Concretely: what many people take to be the Real World seems more like an illusion to me than ever. & the earth herself erupts in an almost apocalyptic-feeling imaginability, a realer-than-realness. Existence becomes wondrous—it is no longer your everyday, run-of-the-mill stuff—& yet there is nowhere it isn't.

Apart from where it's not.

* * *

*In search of a single sentence
Raindrop upon my back*

* * *

6.

She makes a small question-like sound & I look up from the blank page, which she takes as a sign I am willing to be interrupted.

“There is an exhibition in London about cute.”

“About cute? Huh.”

“If it is still on when you are there I think you should go & see it.”

It turns out I won't be, I'll miss it. I'll miss it, but then I've been to the Great Cute Exhibition In The Sky & I can still sense the transmogrifying Typhonic rurr happy honking away beyond the outer limits of my mind sigh. The Absolute Cute.

Such great mysteries here. Absolutely here, I mean. Like our sweet horse daughter, Notre Flamme. Now she was an impossible thing fresh from the womb, some kind of alien cuddle drug, but she will always be cute to me. Objectively (as if there is such a thing) she is already less cute, & of course cuteness is always relative, but

Absolutely, not.

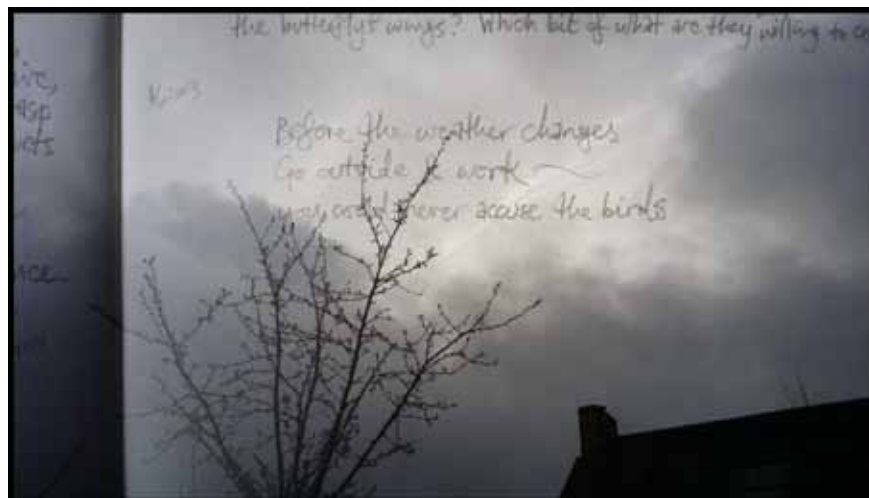
A memory. I am a young boy, perhaps around seven years old. There are kittens. Either we just got a new one or our cat has given birth. Mum, I'm sure it's Mum, gives me one to play with. She puts a kitten on me & it starts mewling & padding away & she leaves the room & I am alone with the kitten & that is the moment its utter strangeness strikes me, although admittedly it is my own strangeness & thus all our strangenesses too: the sense in which it is relative is a way it is Absolute.

People will tell you Nature is not all Bunnies & Butterflies. They are right. But nothing is all anything apart from perhaps a certain special somethinks. Can they tell you what that means? Have they been grass? Can they conjure the viscosity of the cocoon? Would their heart pump blood through the butterfly's wings? Which bit of what are they currently willing to concentrate on?

* * *

*Before the weather changes
Go outside & work—you could never accuse the birds*

* * *



7.

No-one should have to pay for what they don't want. Aye, paranoid old no-one again, eating up all the invisible costs, for doesn't everyone have to pay whenever anyone neglects what is necessary? But then, how can you neglect what is not? And how can you not? Night sweats, muscular pain, & soul strain. Strange answers to weird questions, worldly confusions. For most people need is just the substrate of want. The necessary is not. Whatever is necessary it is not, like & unlike my identity. I mean: the real necessary is negative? Who will give the world what it neither needs nor wants, yet would not be without? Not even no-one. This is why spirit & money don't mix: it is impossible to really desire it. It isn't really even a fix for the sick, just that nothing really works without the only work there really is, which is compensating for the apparent lack of it. Yet how else would what is not appear than sometimes lacking? There is no thirst for it. There is no hunger. It isn't needed like food, can't be taken like breath, won't fill your hole or wrap you round like a lover, not tonight. It will not. It will necessarily not & you will know the strange peace of that. Strange because it drives you. You can rest in what will never let you rest because it isn't that that irritates you. You miss gleaming. You miss the gleam. There is no mirror to catch it in but however word seems

forgive them.

* * *

*Afternoon tea with Lady Kestrel
Vole-shaped teabags squeezed
Against the rim of a porcelain sky*

* * *

8.

I know you've come a long long way with this question burning in the hole where your soul used to be so let me try to answer it for you:

What is the Absolute Cute?

I don't know. I guess it's like The Absolute Truth if this was a game of Cosmic Charades & I was doing a *sounds like*, but then that would imply I knew what the Absolute Truth was rather than just suspecting I can't not know what it feels like because it must be like the deepest truest part of me who cannot be mine alone—

I don't know, but since you came all this way . . .

It's not a style. Not the cutesy, nothing that can be marketed. Magnetic but not really attractive. It's your Cheshire Cat Animal Mother grinning weirdly from that too high branch.

It can't be quantified, if that's what you've done? It can't be quantified any more than I can be precisely located in any particular spacetime.

It isn't a cardioid-shaped transformation applied to a generic mostly-mammalian face—not an infantilism. It is a giant ancient universal foetus too unborn to be strictly speaking called an abortion.

It is a mistake you can make, rolling a circle around a circle & then taking that too far, thinking it a formula of the heart instead of just a symbol for something terribly ineffable that also happens to be an everyday part of how things work & why they won't.

It is a mistake that you can exist in—persist with—persist with & become wise—but this wisdom is the bomb blast of your annihilation—a light that comes on when the candle of everything is blown out—a spark that kindles in your mind—burns—burns bright enough to read by—a story about a hand from the other side—such strange long fingers—ever reaching out—in—stillness always already there—appearing at the last moment to broken wing you back across the burnt circle of

* * *

*His sausage-fingers
failed to reproduce
The Beast's non-linear beauty*

* * *

9.

The other day I saw a bird, who happened to be a Chaffinch, at the feeder. The voice said to me: All that is about that bird (& thus all that is really real about it) is what cannot be reproduced in it. What cannot be reproduced about that bird is what it is. The voice speaks very clearly & exactly but perhaps there is always some amount of translation going on. I amused myself by giving the voice a biology lesson. Yes: No, it is not biology, it is a simple statement of truth: what is, about the bird, cannot be reproduced.

This is a fact made of feeling that you are welcome to question & if you are in touch with the source of it it will answer you, it will go on responding. It is this state that is intended. It is non-intellectual while leaving all your critical faculties in tact. You don't need to be convinced by what you can feel very well is the truth & what else is faith?

But it strikes me that it cannot be seen. It can be heard because it has to be listened to. It can be felt. But it is seen in & as the invisible & this is what makes things beautiful, this is what Beauty is.

What cannot be reproduced about me is not what marks me apart from my parents it is what makes me the same as them. Such sameness is difference absolved, difference in its purest form. It is the Absolute, right there in that little bird, right here in me & you.

God is a being speaking the truth, however silently or strangely they may seem to say it: there is no mistake in it. God is the being, the speaking, & the truth. It does seem to come from elsewhere—when it is me alone sometimes I am beside myself in another place speaking calm guidance into the ear of this journeying body, the one in the trip, in time, under the spell. It comes from Heaven & it is always here. What cannot be reproduced about the bird is the meaning of Eternity. That particular bird, which to us lives & dies, begins & ends, & is most likely not so different from any other particular bird—what is truly once & one time only about it: this is the Eternal.

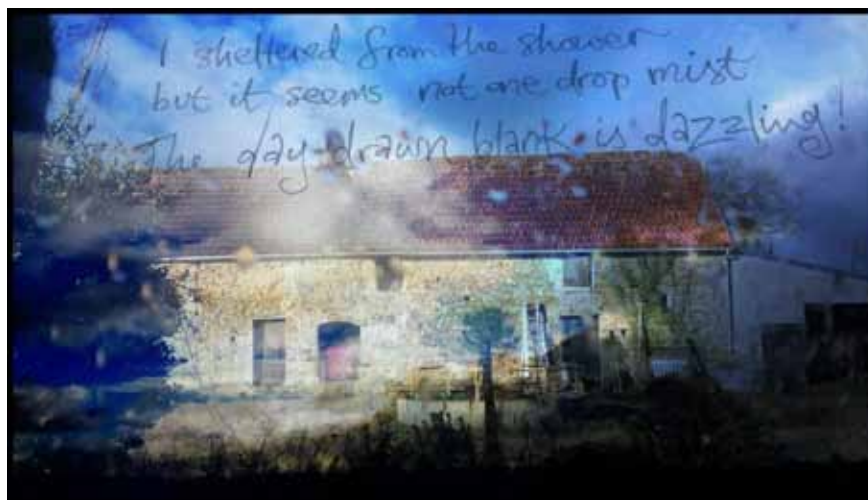
It is heaven on earth, which is so Good it is scary, but such fears are very much preferable to anxiety. The awesome rock beneath all terror, covered in this moss of creeping dread that some call language, blooming with mushrooms of laughter, bursting corpse flowers of pure reason. All gone to seed. A

wave of calmness rolls over the garden submerging it for a watery aeon of peace. Seaweed wavery peace, flitting trancefish singing bubblesongs in what the world may perceive as the depopulated goldfish bowl of your goneness . . .

* * *

*I sheltered from the shower
but it seems not one drop mist
The day drawn blank is dazzling!*

* * *



* * *

10.

In the calm after a storm—or perhaps between blowings of it—I hear the voice of the buzzard, high, & look out through the double glazing at the blue morning, the dark barn caught upside down in every drop upon the window—all things I can believe because I don't have to. I think of working in the storm, snatching up armfuls of hay for the horses & trapping it on the wheelbarrow with the pitchfork so the wind doesn't rip it right away—cold hard rain smacking my back as I carry it to them—I am harried & cursing but at some point I will laugh with the wildness of it all, realise I am not not enjoying myself. I think of donning my spacesuit & going out through the airlock to do something a drone should probably do, seeing a slow spiral of cloud spinning over the earth down below, syncing with the generative ambient techno I play to cover my anxiety-triggering tinnitus: free of the planet's surface & feeling more shut in than ever. Part of the old ruin comes tumbling down, a great noise & a rush of hooves as liquified everything smashes all at once into the window. Bulletproof glass & then some, crystal-balled controller of nothing speaking sweet nothings to their psychedelic houseplants as the universal gyroscope readjusts to another pancentral perturbation. *Come in birdsong do you read me?* This is yard wren one sir, ready to fire in sparrowchirp—three—two—one!

* * *

*Is the sound of the plane in the sky somehow
one of the world's less confusing emotions?*

* * *

11.

The raindrops on the windowpane are on the move today, or at least some among them are. The general tendency is downward, in conformance with tendencies in general. Isn't it sweet how gravity has just the lightest touch? I shouldn't be too surprised to see her roll one up as an expression of her delight. I'm sure I could handle such a delicate glitch, in a sense it has already been explained away, which is perhaps to say we have given permission for it to happen: it's okay, darling, if you need to be a freak—we're all a little improbable! I guess it would seem like when a satellite drifting across the night sky makes the stars move, except your little contravention would make my whole world

stop

& start flowing in reverse. Your little going against the supposedly spatial grain would send me sliding backwards in time limbs flailing in my fathomless void fixed to the spot until you begin to curve near the top, seeming to pause as you come through the double glazing & down towards my left eye, disappearing into the duct there

another tear I'll never cry.

* * *

*Hide your face, my little peach—
a vague embarrassment in the east*

* * *

12.

I am descended from Foxes on my father's side. I only learnt this recently. We were out in the woods when we came across a great den—a giant beaver's dam of a den—a mound of branches & bracken & moss with an opening at the top. Across this opening was laid the body of a vixen, now little more than her coat. We knew those responsible & were indignant. As we talked about their offence her pelt stirred & a little train of kits emerged & went running around us excitedly. They must've been down in the den hidden beneath their mother's corpse & then have pushed out passed it when we disturbed them, but me I saw her death bubbling, her flesh rotting in an instant & her young expanding from the writhing maggots, bubbling up out of her & weaving all around us in a single furry thread. We went a small distance hoping to shake them off but they stuck with us. They were large and well fed, blond foxes with bellies full of dragonflies, & they assumed human form without visible transition. There they were stood beside my father in front of the grey-pink bark of the pines. The only way I could tell them apart was that he was still wearing his clothes. These were his brothers, my kin, wild dogs the supposedly civilized ones had been taught to hate, to hound. No wonder I always felt hunted when I heard that sound, the baying of the crowd. One of nature's great shames that noise is.

Then I am a white wolf born of blond foxes & I live in one of the last great rainforests of an age you are more than ready to say goodbye to. I eat berries & roots because I am sick to the tip of my tail with death. I pay the price of the false god's feasting, having gorged myself too long on this meat of illusion, having drunk too deep of that delusive red wine.

I am the blind eye of the moon my people still howl at. I shut nothing out—not even nothing—all that I reject I have accepted. It is by love that I cast myself out & the wizard well knows it. Slinking through the one woods we tell each other's story.

You mounted your horse of night in the hopes of a new day to ride: it is only the greatest of fools who do not take the sunrise for granted. It was an angel's wing that covered the earth between aeons, a wing of water, which wherever it is in the universe is of her body, whole in however many parts such as only bodies can be. You stood at the nerve centre at the top of her spine & you sent out two ravens. One didn't return & so you waited. You waited so well that in a way you ever shall. It is this wait that gives Eternity its gravity—a great gift but the price indeed is freedom.

The black bird returned on fire, a poet's song: fresh every morning no matter the age. In this way the fire-bird whitened & the bright flame greened & the world found a way to speak Peace, a new word for what it might be. But they kept it like a promise, & a promise is too often compromised, so the real word became stranger, the truth made it twist until no tongue could hold it. When at last it slipped from our mouths—the word freedom free now even of its speaker—it found it had nowhere to go. This is how the bird became a cuckoo & why for you Spring will ever be the strangest of seasons, the very alien of your heart.

You mounted a horse of night to hope to get the beast to kneel but in the end your only friend will be whatever you cannot subdue. Such triumphs make us smaller, able to be folded up, pressed like a leaf between pages, shared between times, an oddly useless thing that gets brought out in an attempt to remind us how precious we are. The night is a black jewel in an infinite garden. The black jewel a single tree. Night is the bones of the universe's skeleton. Space is a hard thing—sharp as a knife—& the fruit which balances on the edge of every twig is light. The flesh is light, the meat a rainbow, & you will have to eat it if you want to understand. As it was in the beginning so shall it be in the end.

& so shall we call what comes after the end the aftermath. The aftermath is where laughter comes from: a world of fairy dust even more dangerous, for now every non-existent atom is a bomb ready to go off. This is why you have to give things up, learn the many strengths of weakness. There is not one thing you're not until you're nothing: the detonation of the heart.

* * *

*The only way we're getting off this rock
is how this rock gets us off
You have suicide bombed reality.*

* * *

13.

We have flooded. I am listening to the sounds of my wife bailing us out. The scrape of the metal dustpan on the rough concrete floor, rhythmic & with a little ring to it, then the emptying of the bucket, repeat.

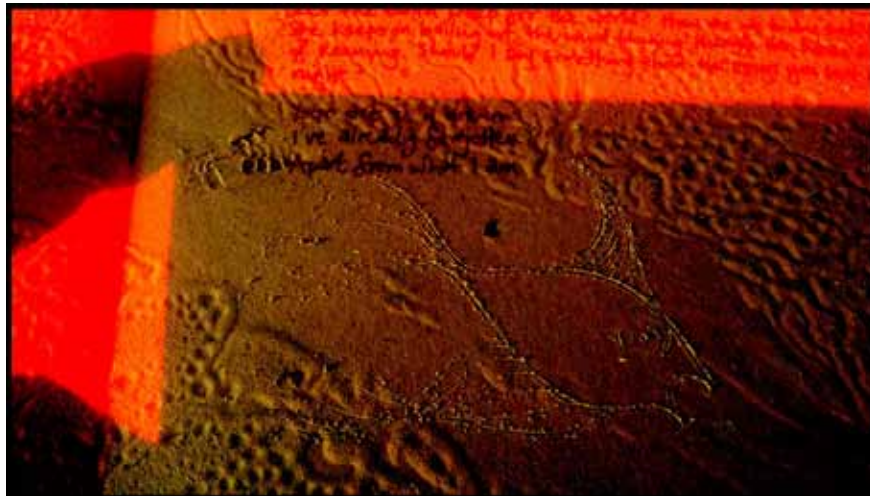
It has happened before but never this bad. We are thinking of buying a proper bailer, whatever they actually use on boats. Is it a flood of emotion, I wonder, the return of primordial powers?

Does the earth weep for the world? How are we to dry such tears? She keeps on bailing out, the wind blowing through the house is a kind of keening. Should I say something about the songs you sent me in the night?

* * *

*Your art is a dream
I've already forgotten
Apart from what I am*

* * *



* * *

14.

The soul is dramatic. I think this is one of the reasons I sometimes get the impression I have been conceived as an overreaction.

What did you have for breakfast?

Universes.

What will you have for lunch?

Nothing.

And for tea?

Tea is for tomorrow & tomorrow is for tea, so, Eterni-tea maybe?

If the Meat Factory is perpetual & perpetuated, Eternity is eternal & non-eventual. In Eternity ends end & beginnings do not begin & meaning can get a foothold. The perpetual can never break through to these kinds of circles, except perhaps through never lasting forever—though it has a habit then of playing over again.

Writing may be a way of breaking my resistance to my own death. Perhaps it isn't really mine but then what is? Nor do I think it can belong to those who may share in it, which is to say it is not ours either, it does not belong to us.

If in Eternity I give rise to who births me non-circularly then I can be born only by death. The soul is dramatic because life is so hard to bear that only death can really bear us. This is why war belongs in heaven & seems always to go wrong on earth. Wrong wrong. This is the kind of necessary that in truth is freedom but which becomes slavery whenever we lie.

The soul is dramatic because it is doing its damndest to tell the truth in a world that can barely make sense of it, which must after all be the true source of the absurd.

* * *

*When the world no longer has any time for you
You've Eternity to listen to the birds!*

* * *

15.

Don't fall foul of the black & white monkeys. Sky alt set circuit against you. If you will but listen you are fit to teach all you need to learn. After circuit is set back down: home. Love is the overreaction, an ultraterrestrial love it will make you a fool to feel. I want to eat beast. Cow pig sheep. I just don't want to eat my friends. Bacon slices of wife's bottom. I am farting like a vegetable war is being fought in my intestines. My stool chart is off the wall. Little black & white monkeys, Lemurs maybe, are they my enemies? Who is doing this to me? Evil interdimensional black & white imps running interference all over my thought train. Will the eternal package be delivered on time? Parp. Any one of those doe-eyed heart beasts could be my companion. I would walk five thousand miles with you, knock-kneed cow, I wouldn't even ask for milk, I just appreciate the quiet & sturdy companionship. My people are horrible don't you think? With their furry-faced over-familiars what run on a river of blood. If it's not oil it is blood. What is their problem with a nice glass of water? How thin does blood have to get before it isn't blood any more. This door's dog lives on reconstituted puree of next door's cat who is currently busy reducing sky population. Most people's passion is a barren field. Blindness. Where is the comfort in not seeing the horror of it all? I wonder how many sporting rectangles of rainforest had to be felled to pour me my morning soy milk? Maybe that's why they're setting off bombs in my bowels? I'll try oat next time. Protein can eat my shit. I'm probably too old to need that much of it. Whitened prism flesh grown on the tendons & bones of a liberated exercise machine, hardly any person left only not in the sense the slave masters are hoping, it's almost all turned to character & the character has gone to seed, windborne conglomerates no manager can manage, crazy cartoon characters coming to life

behind the eyes of insignificantly human faces, every awkward little overcarrying who ever got removed from the great equation: just subtract the problem part, delete erase or just keep them distracted with ever-delayed promises of freedom, fake liberation in some workless automated utopia, meanwhile keep intellectualising the life out the truth, replace the real illusion with a pseudoscientific simulation & let their biology ravage them, let it twist them into machine wannabees or meaty backwards nobodies, anything to avoid the understanding—void the understanding—wordless—dissimilarity—to nothing—only then—free from love—free to love—bound to help—help

more or lesslessly

* * *

*Blake & Whyte:
Tyger Tyger burning bright —I like you best,
Lamb's're shite*

* * *

16.

Gruel is a very calming food, especially chewed. It's a bit harder to get out of bed for though, than for instance coffee. It struck me that it wasn't just as a stimulant that coffee was an effective drug for the working part, but relatedly through its addictive nature: the physical dependency itself pulls you out of bed, gives you something to look forward to whatever else the day may hold. It is not so with gruel. It is hard to look forward to what may be better for you, body & soul, at least to begin with. There are those who would shun such an attitude, as parts of me would, but once we get beyond the easily pleased perhaps there is a kind of pleasure in it all. Satisfaction, such as one gets when one is meditating well: it feels such a perfectly right & fitting thing to do, as if such are the steady points upon which rests all that is at rest in the world. & yet at its heart is a truth it is impossible to want to hear, likely it is only really our suffering that ever drives us to listen to it. It seems a massive overreaction, as if reality got a little bit irritating so we just got rid of the whole thing. It's still there but it's all illusion, mere appearances. What's the point of getting upset about a bunch of mere appearances? To realise the truth I suppose, without which there is no sense to anything, no matter how hard you cling to all the stories in which there oh so clearly is.

I have seen clever western people laugh off the essence of this truth, for instance holding up an old story about a warrior who achieves enlightenment on the battlefield, realising the great illusion as their sword carves through flesh, their implication being that if it is all appearance then there is nothing to stop you chopping or smashing or blowing it all up, when perhaps the more salient point is that the truth is the same wherever or whoever you happen to be when you realise it. I too have struggled to see where morality might get a foothold in such a philosophy but it isn't an intellectual truth, for the simple fact that if real freedom happens to you then existence becomes unspeakably precious. One of my favourite terms for it is Wondrous Existence, of course the essence of what is so wondrous about it is that it does not exist. This is what Beauty means to me, so it really is in the eye of the beholder, but unsubjectively, & only if that eye is beholden to no-one.

I think it makes most sense to the West in the language of Love. Can you be forced to love something or someone & still have that be love? If you can deeply understand freedom as part of the condition

for true love you can see how the truest love comes only when you are no longer a victim of received existence. Then it is pure love & there is no jealousy, no addiction. It isn't the same love that in different hands or eyes is hate & any act that flows from it will be good. Good.

That's the idea anyway & the sooner we realise the sense of its nature the sooner we start out on the path from which any real hope must branch.

* * *

*Your Living Book is so Absolutely Cute
My eyes can cover in a moment
What would take forever to close*

* * *

17.

But it's not gonna help the Great Illusion deal with any of its *real* problems is it mush?

I admit, I don't know. I confess, I do wonder. I realise, of course it shall!

A life without truth is like a person without a soul. So I suppose it's not really about being helpful. I think the worry is all in that word *illusion*, as if it means something akin to *then why even get out of bed?* when it means just as well there is no reason to stay there, less in fact. As if it is the same as living in a post-truth world where you are no longer sure what's real any more, instead of realising you're it. As if it means to let the rich carry on with their thieving or the liars get away with their lies, instead of relieving you of the worst of their influence, steadying you & readying you for the fight (the one you've already won).

Truth be told whatever it means is still unfolding for me, & while I can talk & think about it any old time, & while I know the truth is never not true, it only really lives in the moments that it strikes you. That's the problem with formulaic truth, with things you can state as true because of an arrangement of propositions that can be said to constitute their proof: it makes it possible to speak the truth as a lie. The truth is a living truth & it *feels* alive—it can't really be recited, though poetry & song might give it a good try. It's why it has so much in common with honesty, I guess they are one in revelation, where ordinary human honesty can perhaps be compromised by first swallowing lies. Or so I've heard.

My life has more than one way out now, I can say that. I won't say I've been reborn but I've died right in the middle of things, perhaps more than once, & that's rather refreshing. But I must admit it terrified me & still does. It is at once peaceful & disconcerting. For all the rainbows in my eyes my life has a black heart. A steady & sensitive heart for all it does not beat, as reassuring as my lover's hand upon me, as weirdly cute as the bunny jumping on the bed, as oblique, as distant & intimate as these words must seem, as troubled & settled as my person. *My kind of person.*

We'll be fine.

* * *

*I tried to bake a sunset
but the clouds wouldn't rise*

*I guess I must've left out
that look in your eyes*

* * *

18.

At some point the conversation becomes so enthused it turns into self-proclaiming poetry, we run through the fields shouting Save The Beast while the trees feed on duskbread. Gods of night move like knives through the unbroken light of morning while beneath it all hums the Om of Swords, clashing displays of the elegant victories of Eternity become attenuated thrills in the day-to-day, star-dazzled clay or a forest puddle filled with tadpoles, a nine-banded post-classical rainbow in the metaphysical mood change of a moment, a glimpse of something special behind the invisible equals sign, the unlikely ampersand of ultraterrestrial life.

* * *

*A photograph with all my friends in
the sun will never finish taking*

* * *

19.

The first time I remember ever being truly repulsed by meat was the moment I found a hare's leg in the grass, some years back, a month or so after having released Little Odin, the first hare we cared for & raised after he was wounded by a lawnmower.

I can think of many reasons why I loved that animal so much, enough of them embarrassing, but whatever really bound us went beyond reason, & so it is. When I see a hare, I see family, I see a deep & strange part of me, I see too much.

It was a back leg, mostly covered in fur still but with some flesh & bone at the joint. I was dismayed & disgusted, disappointed in myself. I felt someone foxy was sending me a message, saying I raised him too human, made him too slow & soft. I understood nature as callous, as having no place for a word like *friend*, at least whoever's friend mattering less than the fire in the belly of the beast. All of a sudden I condoned civilization, I agreed that we should build a wall around ourselves & manage things according to our principles, the pinnacle of which seems always to be love. But if it was love it wouldn't be up there, the pinnacle of a pyramid of principles with a wall around it, a holy city of gentle freegans with a meat factory of war-struck migrants clamouring to get in.

But then boundaries is where the love happens. Walls of love & grief, portals of trauma. I should remind myself it is not really the world I am trying to make sense of, I'm just exploring the thread of myself, wandering the corridors of maybe some kind of message looking through the windows of wow. Perhaps it doesn't matter. Not in a bad way more like a flower: a flower has no skin, my limbs are petals, the beat of my heart the drawn out memory of an insect's wings, nectar my blood, my brain a cloud of

pollen, nowhere is not colour —

It wouldn't make any sense if I was trying to convince anyone of anything or make some social commentary or fabricate some recommendation. As the ramblings of a hard-working mad person it makes all kinds of sense. In the heart of certain secrets it rings as true as what cannot be shared.

I have even wondered if I have killed simply by eating meat. Perhaps I failed Little Cloud, our Zen bunny, or I would have if pure joy could ever fail anyone. He died last April. I have promised to write these tales properly some other time, as you know such words as these are but threads in a broader tapestry, maybe even a living carpet in some boundless room where the bookshelves are trees still & the words run with sweet sun-water like veins in leaves.

I cooked a joint—probably pig—that I bought because it was going off. I put the oven dish outside for the rats to lick & that night heard fox for the first time in many years. They reminded me of a story, something between the hares & the bunnies, & I set out trying to write it—maybe that was Lent last year?—I couldn't write it. I started but I couldn't keep it up. I conjured foxy but I never put them back away & if there was a story there it wasn't long before they'd finished it. Left me a little bit—the back legs again—to put in the ground & remember.

If there really is a tree in Eden whose fruit gives the knowledge of Good & Evil I think the fruit must be flesh. Perhaps it is the tree the body of God is buried under. Their bones becomes the wood & their nuts become the nuts & that's why I'm nuts. Why we are insane, I mean. Such trips are so hard to handle the knowledge leads to ignorance, which is always somehow wilful even as it's a given. Imagine if every blink you had to peel your eyes like grapes & drop them into your own insatiably self-satisfied yawn. You would cry such sweet nectar the angels would become insects just to sop you up.

* * *

*What is forever too much
for the moment is enough*

* * *

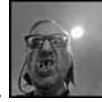


To be continued in Cenacle | 127 | April 2025

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



**Notes Toward
*Many Musics,
 Twelfth Series, xxvi,
 Room of Song***

*"I tell you, there are more worlds,
 and more doors to them,
 than you will think of in many years!"
 — George MacDonald, Lilith, 1895.*

5/25/2024 - 7:20 pm

Tis a room of living Song, without time
 without locale, inviting one in,
 leave your questions, leave them away—

* * * * *

6/1/2024 - 7:14 pm

We Brothers now huddled close,
 touch to touch, & we listened to our King
 tell his travels, best he could reck them,
 from that Wobble tossed us hither to yon,
 from the Beast's Cave, to the one
 tonight, brought us to this Beach.

His face lorn of what wild passions
 had driven him to collect us together,
 drive us ever on & on toward the Island
 of the Tangled Gate. What passions
 braided us to one had also singed
 these ties.

But none of us to let him fall again.
 None of us to lose each other as then.
 Our separate paths had humbled us, true,
 but together again we would weave something new.

He spoke like confession.
He spoke like planting new seeds.

“I bear praise & apology, both, deepest in my heart,
& I wonder: to befriend them each other?
Desire & want too, let them hold, grasp each other.
I want to try & do better, with more & less.
Walk the better man I know how.
Love better, down to the root.

“We lost each other awhile in the Cave of the Beast.
But you know I started losing you when came
my beloved Deidre. When she declined.
When she fled. When she told me in dream
I could not come to her yet. I thought
she doubted me. Roddy & I disagreed, &
thus our break, & thus our war. And, thus,
dear Brother, *I was so wrong.*”

* * * * *

6/22/2024 - 7:11 pm

I wondered those three days
in the Cave of the Beast,
tried even to dream my way back
into them—

They changed me but did me no harm.
Urged me return when I was ready.

The Beast told me in his own way
that I would have to break further,
harder, deeper, before I was ready.

* * * * *

9/21/2024 - 8:30 pm (or so)

King

Is it her voice I hear,
 or waves or wind or just barely colored
 silence?
 Is it her touch near, the which-a-way
 I don't look, mocking, almost?
 Is it her eyes between beats of
 my breaths, curious what's back here?
 Her taste? Her scent?
 A cup of shadows, close to empty
 but almost.

* * *

Dreamwalker

I find myself paging through our shared
 book, Zia, looking for messages I missed,
 new sketches, symbolic page tearings, whatever.
 Now we are saving Many Worlds together
 again, all my Brothers. Will you & I again cross
 paths too?

* * *

Roddy

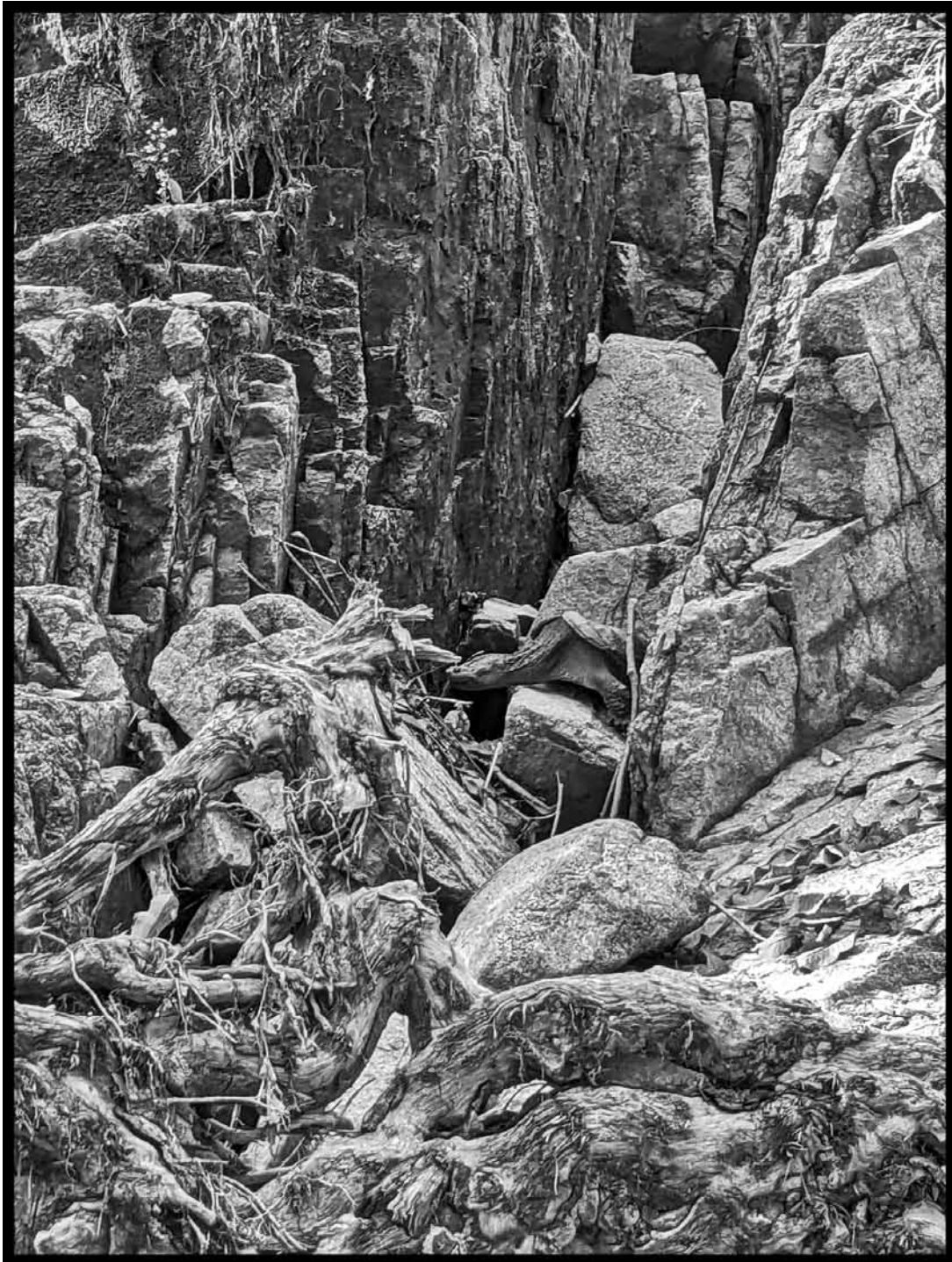
Iris, Creatures, White Woods. From my
 Brothers to all of you, & strangely back.

* * *

Asoyadonna

What of Emandia?
 What don't I know that matters?

* * *



Odom

Everything is closer.
 I see twice further.
 My friend in her coin purse
 looks at me so near like
 words? What would
 she say?

* * *

Francisco

I tell my King, quietly one night,
 I need many canvasses,
 & to paint them to leave,
 what we would have others know.

* * * * *

10/5/2024 - 8:29 pm

There is a Room of Song,
 where each & all sings & floats,
 where questions & answers cup together
 in hand or paw—

What you receive there is what you are,
 but not yet, & so it seems strange,
 like a heavy fear in the darkness—

Open your eyes here—
 Neither darkness nor light your
 friend nor foe but by your nod

Open your eyes here—
 strength cascades through
 ride it! ride it through!

Questions & answers cupped together
 in hand or paw
 Smile. Close but a crack to puff
 in, you, your breath. Smile. Open. Reveal.

* * * * *

10/12/2024 - 9:27 pm

What vessel do you bring
to the Room of Song?
How propose carry your Song
away with you?
You will not remember by ear
once you depart its magick air

No, if you would both enjoy
& recall, your vessel must be true
Clay, stone, bark, paper,
something will impress on these
& not by your hand.

You must trust what you do not know
Shall you come like this, & go.

* * * * *

10/19/2024 - 6 pm (or so)

Or maybe you will bring a token
into the Room of Song
a coin, an old dice, a loved branch
& your will absorb in these,
& carry with you back into the world.

Can a coin sing? An old dice?
Maybe a lucky dream.
Maybe the best high juice.
Maybe when you cum free & smiling.

Just listen like you never have.
Just listen like you don't know how.
Just listen like you are the old dice, the coin.
Like you are the branch, seeking
directions back to, on to your tree.

* * * * *

10/26/2024 - 8:29 pm (or so)

What would you bring back
from the Room of Song?
A remembered dream?
A recovered face?
A hint of the future?

Would you enter with humble
naked trust, & collect whatever
gift you came away with?

Would you enter, a tall doubt,
a need for proof, a stone? A sheer
wall of light?

What if neither will do?
What if you should enter singing?
What if you should dance in?

What if there is no instruction
always true?

Choiceless, choosing?

* * * * *

11/2/2024 - 8:55 pm

What to bring into the Room
of Song to lathe musics from
it to the world without?

Dreamwalker's *Hekk stick*?
Odom's coin purse Imp?

We wanted each of us with a chunk
of the song, none burdened alone
to carry it

And to assemble it again when we all
agreed—

We came & went the Room of Song
many times, never mastering its
mysteries, hardly retaining ourselves
in return

But our plan held—till each came
out with a sixth, none of us would leave.

* * * * *

11/9/2024 - 6:23 pm

The longer the Brother-Heroes spend
in the Room of Song, the more
they begin to sense other Heroes
who have come through—

Bits of advice . . . warning:

“Be sure of your mission & stay true . . . ”

“The Many Worlds assure none success, or successes . . . ”

“Save the Worlds along choosing if yourselves
have a place in it . . . ”

“Believe any can be allies, but not all wish to . . . ”

“You stride tall & feel deep amongst powers
far taller & vastly deep . . . ”

“Dreams . . . Creatures . . . Music . . . ”

They encourage by failing to impede
They encourage by lack of dissuasion
No harsh mock. No spangled modesty.

“You will rarely be sure—
You will never know anything—
Failure only one’s capitulant heart—”

* * * * *

11/16/2024 - 7:41 pm

Dreams. Creatures. Music.
We sit together & discuss these.
The floor feels soft like grass
in this Room of Song.

“Will these help us save the
Many Worlds?” asks the King.
Dreamwalker shakes his head.
“If these are allies, our clues,
it means what we need to do
is think not of enemies but
somehow else.”

“How?” asks Odom curious as a sniff.
“It’s about what we mean by saving,”
muses Asoyadonna.
“We ask the Heroes here better questions?”
asks Francisco.
“And learn what listening means,
as though we don’t,” finishes Roddy.

* * * * *

11/22/2024 - 3:15 pm - Museum of Fine Arts Boston
Georgia O'Keeffe and Henry Moore Exhibition

The Room of Song has no defined size—
 & one's travel through it is unique—
 I think the music itself renders what
 one sees—& the music coheres to do
 this when there is a visitor—

Come to a vast landscape of hills &
 dried bones—the air, the heat, the rare
 moisture shapes them ever on—

But then a kind of green place too—
 & its stones, their shapes, speak
 a tongue—

Transformation guised as emptiness
 to the casual or panicked eye—

I want a hand off among the Brothers—
 so they *cannot separate again*

* * *

Odom

[Georgia O'Keeffe, "Patio Door with Green Leaf," Oil on canvas, 1956.]

Endless doors, & panic, where a body & soul
 do not know, Am I, Am I, Am I, going in?
 Or Am I, Am I, Am I, going out?
 No music in this until the green leaf
 near one, just like every other, but
 the green leaf, *that way to go*

* * *

Dreamwalker

[Georgia O'Keeffe, "Deer's Skull with Padernal," Oil on canvas, 1956.]

Slim twisted grey trunk rise ever high,
 sink ever deep, the skull, its puzzle,
 look-look-see! Through its eyeholes
 not trunk but blue sky, there your
 clue, to grasp those horns & look
 within, see what's really on—not
 mountains, cloudy sky, look & learn.

* * *



*Francisco**[Georgia O'Keeffe, "Gray Cross with Blue," Oil on canvas, 1929.]*

My canvas here is the sky itself,
 hung 'pon my great easel, & me a-crawl
 'pon it, to know & find the detail missing.

* * *

*Asoyadonna**[Georgia O'Keeffe, "Pelvis IV," Oil on masonite, 1944.]*

That blue world nearing, to tell me
 what I am, where I will,
 what possible none know yet. Closer,
 its cool wind in my bones, its odd
 shape, what is missing?

*I want to see what you don't.**I want to help.*

* * *

*Roddy**[Georgia O'Keeffe, "Black Rock on Red," Oil on canvas, 1971.]*

To keep, to carry along, to smash?
 To embrace, share dream, etch its
 cold skin?
 You tell me nothing I know, our tongues incomplete.

* * *

*The King**[Georgia O'Keeffe, "Red Hill and White Shell," Oil on canvas, 1938.]*

Not the sadness at your bottom, knowing
 me from there. Mine own. Not your
 feelings of dusk, my struggle.
 You are moonlight on my red sand.

* * * * *

11/30/2024 - 8:30 pm (or so)

Can the songs turn dark,
 brought out from the Room of Song?
 Can they sink toward human iniquity?
 Be used for power & gain?
 Used to trap & harm?

No. The world's heart is open for all,
 rises by beat & breath of all,
 bears no malice toward anything
 that it, simply, be.

Come for such gain, if you can,
 try to take, try to consume,
 try to tame by fear, by fist.

You will wither into music stranger
 from you, music you do not know,
 music stripped of your years

The Room of Song cares not your history,
 your ideology, your human greed & shame.

All of you just a speckle of flavor in endless
 beautiful music.

* * * * *

12/7/2024 - 7:05 pm

Is there a Beast in the
 center of the Room of Song?
 Is there a center?

Is there silence hid down deep
 in the Room of Song?

Is there a bottom, & below that?
 A roof, & above?

The Brothers leave, not sure
 all they experienced,
 & reluctant to go—

There's more here—
 Yet they must go.



* * * * *



Rivers of the Mind

[A Novel]

*“Purify the colors, purify my mind
Spread the ashes of the colors
over this earth of mine”*

—Arcade Fire, “Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels),” 2004.

Chapter 28:

Escape from Horizon One, Part Two

i. Phillip

Marcia reclined in a black leather chair, one leg crossed over the other. She wore a blue skirt and blouse, her lips done up in a perfect and seductive red, her hair hanging from the sides of her head in perfect curls.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Phillip.” She stood up and gave me a hug. “It’s so wonderful to see you . . . outside of the office.”

“Mind if I buy you a drink?”

“I’d love that.”

“Just coffee, or you want something special?”

“I don’t know. Surprise me.”

“If you say so.” I headed to the cash register.

But before I got there, an eerie feeling overcame me. I looked around the room, and caught sight of the doctor from the field hospital, Dr. Whitebalm. She had on a cartoonish fake moustache and glasses; smiling deviously, she was taking notes. Someone in the seat next to her whispered over her shoulder; they were taking notes too. They were all taking notes. Dr. Whitebalm. The cashier. Marcia.

“What do you people want from me?”

My phone buzzed on the nightstand. Panting, I burst awake, and realized it was all a dream. I looked over at the phone, and saw that it was a call from the chief. I picked it up.

“Good evening,” I said. “What’s that? Missing? Gosh, well, I can.”

I yawned. “I can head in. You called Grace yet? Sure, I can do that. See ya in a jiffy, Chief.”

I sighed as I dialed Grace’s number. It rang twice.

“Hello?”

“Good evening. Hope I didn’t wake you up.”

“No, I’m . . . on my porch right now. Why?” Grace sounded a little strange.

“Chief just called. He wants us to head down to the station. Says one of the people they had in custody after the sinkhole broke out. Meagan Cortez.”

“Oh boy. Umm, I hate to ask this of you, Phill—” she hiccupped, “—ip. Can you pick me up, by any chance? I’m . . . a little drunk at the moment.”

“I can come get you. You sure you don’t want me to tell the chief you can’t come in?”

“No, no. I need to—” she hiccupped again, “get out. I can’t stay here.”

“Everything alright with you and the husband?”



“Oh, everything’s fine. It’s just that— ” Another hiccup. “We all died!” Grace laughed. “And no one remembers! No one!” Grace laughed some more, slowing down gradually. “Huh. I’m going out of my mind. Come take me away. Bye.”

“You got your—”

Huh, she hung up.

I frantically tore off my pajamas and got my uniform on, double-checking myself in the mirror to make sure everything looked all right. As I charged down the stairs, I saw someone in the driveway. My son. He staggered up onto the porch. Looked high. I grimaced, and took a deep breath.

“Oh hey, Dad. Didn’t think I’d see you here,” Ryan said, sounding a little out of it.

“Thought you’d be home by ten.”

“Sorry about that. I lost track of time.”

“It’s three in the morning.”

“Geez. No wonder I’m so exhausted.”

“I’m sure you are. Lucky it’s the weekend.”

“Say, uh, where are you heading?”

“Some, uh, some girl they took into custody broke out apparently. No one knows where she is.”

“Broke out . . . broke out. Meagan Cortez?”

“How’d you know that?”

“Oh, pft, just a, uh, lucky guess. You know.” Ugh!

Ryan rewinds the scene, tries again.

“Who’s Meagan Cortez? You said she broke out?”

“Yep. Not super sure what’s happening. Gotta go pick up Grace.”

“Oh my God, John. You were supposed to watch her. She wasn’t supposed to go out of the house. Sorry, uh, Dad. Phillip. Forget I was ever here.”

Ryan rewinds the scene, tries again.

I hurried down the stairs and out to my car, shifted it into reverse, and then sped off towards Grace’s house. As I pulled up, Grace threw a beer can past me.

“Have you tried Coors Light in the last few hours, Phillip?” she said, hiccupping some more.

“Oh boy, Grace. You are a mess.”

“You know what’s a mess? The mess is that you’ve called me five times and every time you think it’s the first time you called me. Haha! I’m . . . I’m losing my mind.”

“You’re drunk.”

“No! You’re drunk! Fuck off. Pft. Doesn’t even matter.”

“You don’t have to come. I can tell the chief you’re not doing well, you know, but I need to get to the station.”

“No, no. I’m fine. I’m a very civil drunk. I’m very focused. I’m very good drunk. I’m going. I’m . . . I’m a very good drunk. Civil. Focused. Let’s go.”

“Grace, I don’t know.”

“I’m going, Phillip! Everything keeps repeating and I think I’m traveling through time. Do you remember what Coors Light tasted like eight hours ago?”

“You put that beer back where you found it and—OK, get in the car. You just let me do the talking, OK?” I sigh. “If the chief sees how drunk you are, we’re both gonna get our asses handed to us.”

Grace got in the car. “You died,” she said, sounding very sad.

“What the hell are you talking about?” I asked as we drove to the station.

“He took you to the forest and they burned you. And now no one remembers. No one remembers. Ha! Haha! No one remembers. But I remember!”

“Look, Grace, we need to talk about this when you’re in a good state of mind.”

Grace paused, then said, “Can you do me a favor?”

“What?”

“Can you try to feel . . . feel really brave?”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh my god . . . it happened again.”

“What? Sure.”

We arrived at the station. “And maybe I’ll try to act a little sober while I’m at it too. I’ll just wait for you here.”

I headed inside, where the chief was waiting with another man in a military beret.

The chief said, “Thanks for coming in, you two.” Then he looked around. “Where’s Grace?”

“She’s, uh, she’s got a migraine right now, stayed in the car. Had a little bit to drink, but not too much. She insisted on coming in.”

“It’s alright. It’s late. I’ll make an exception.”

I nodded to the other man. “And I don’t believe I’ve met you.”

“No, you haven’t. My name is Colonel Imes. Phillip, right?”

“Right. What seems to be the problem?”

“We found two of our men standing guard at a secure location fast asleep, and Meagan Cortez had stolen one of their identification badges. We’re trying to track it. So far we haven’t seen her go by her house. It’s urgent that we find her. Most of the staff I have at the base go home on the weekend, which is why I’ve called you in. I really am sorry to have to ask so much of you folks, but I truly appreciate it.”

“Of course, sir. Thank you for your service. So what are we looking out for?”

“Meagan Cortez, or her brother, Jacob Cortez,” Colonel Imes said. “Meagan is approximately five feet eight inches tall, about 155 pounds. Dark black hair, hazel eyes, very pale skin, has some bruises of unknown origin. Medical records show a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome, may exhibit some unusual behavior. Her brother is about six-four, 210 pounds, might be wearing a uniform for McDonald’s or for the Kroger grocery store. Also dark black hair, slightly darker skin, and greenish eyes. He drives a red truck, Texas plates: BB3-8199. Meagan, we aren’t sure where she’d go but she works at Walmart. Has a grandmother in the hospital in San Antonio. You get all that?”

“BB3-8899?” I asked, double-checking the notes I’d hurriedly been taking.

“8199.”

“Got it.”

I headed back out to the car, where Grace was waiting. She asked, “Can I see your notes?”

I handed them over, saying, “Sure you can.”

“Huh. Wonder why that changed.”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s lost two pounds every time Colonel Imes told you who to look for.” She laughed. “I know I’m drunk, but I’m not crazy. I don’t know why it’s happening. No one else remembers.”

“Well, we’re just gonna keep a look out. If we can find this girl before the government does, maybe we can get some answers about what’s going on with her.”

Grace put her hand up over her face, and leaned back in her seat.

“Got any ideas?” I asked her.

“Huh. You think she had a ride? Or left on foot?”

“I’m . . . not sure.”

“Well, ” she yawned. “Let’s head towards Blackberry Creek, see if we see anything.”

The two of us drove down the highway towards the edge of town, the road illuminated by the golden yellow glare of the streetlights and our own too-dim headlights. The tops of trees shivered in a faint, ephemeral breeze.

“Hey, did you see that truck?”

I confirmed. “BB3-8199. That’s Jacob. Boy, is he driving fast.”

I sped up to try and match his speed. “Truck looks empty besides him.”

“Alright. So she’s not with him.”

I radioed it in. “Chief, we just saw Jacob’s truck on the 290 heading out of town, but the truck looked empty. Over.”

The chief responded, “Thanks for letting me know. You folks stay on him, and let us know if he gets in contact with his sister.”

I let Jacob get ahead of us a ways. Would’ve written him a ticket but I knew what he must’ve been going through with his sister being in the custody of the government. Best to let him be. He was soon a couple miles ahead of us. His truck bobbed and weaved over the undulating hills, always just barely visible by its headlights. He pulled into a gas station.

Grace looked around, then said, “Let’s see if we can find somewhere to park where we can see what happens.”

“Good idea. How about that self-storage place across the street?”

“Sounds good.”

I fit the car in a spot behind a tall wooden sign, where we could see into the gas station, just barely.

We watched through the window, and then Grace said quietly, “That’s her. Oh my god . . . she’s . . . Wait a second. Don’t . . . don’t tell the chief yet.”

“Good idea.” We watched from a distance as Meagan and Jacob talked. She looked a little disoriented. Very disoriented. He led her out to the truck and they got in, and then talked some more. He got out of the truck, to make a call.

I rolled down my window, to see if we could hear what he was saying.

“Hear anything?” Grace asked.

“Shh. Not . . . quite.” We leaned towards the open window, listening closely. “Something about . . . he thinks she’s . . . under the influence of something. He’s calling a friend to help out.”

We watched as he got back in the truck, and he and Meagan talked some more.

“Seems a little strange. You think they drugged her?”

I paused. “I don’t know. It would explain things. Poor girl.”

Jacob and Meagan pulled out of the gas station and sped down the road.

“Should we tell the chief?”

I thought about it for a second. “It’s gonna be pretty suspect if we say we saw Jacob without his sister and they find them together. Let’s . . . let’s see what—”

Just then, the chief said on the radio, “Any luck?”

I muttered to Grace, “Speak of the devil.”

“Well, answer him!”

“Yeah, Chief, he stopped at the gas station across the street from the Tucker Self-Storage. Didn’t see Meagan, but looked like he took a phone call of some kind.”

“Huh. Well, she’s probably trying to reach out to him. Keep following him, but don’t tip him off or anything. Over.”

I looked at Grace. “You heard him. Guess we’re gonna keep following Jacob.”

I turned off the lights, letting the police car blend in to the night.

After a while, hiccupping again, Grace said, “What’re you gonna say when your version of the story doesn’t match up?”

“Well,” I sighed. “I don’t know. Best case scenario, no one looks into it all that much. Worst case scenario, I have to dip into the old savings account and seek asylum in Ecuador, I suppose.”

Grace was watching closely out the window. “Hold on. They stopped.”

“Alright. Here we go. What’re they doing?”

“Talking, looks like.”

We looked out into the darkness together. “I can’t see into the truck, but from the shadow, he

looks like . . . looks like something's freaking him out. He just . . . just heaved over. Meagan's got her hand on his shoulder, she's trying to calm him down. Talking again. Alright. And they're off."

Grace said, "And the chase continues." We drove on.

Suddenly she grew terrified. "Keep . . . keep your distance."

"Why?"

"I don't know how to explain. Just . . . keep your distance."

"You have another one of those, uh . . . those weird time things?"

"I did, but . . . it's really hard to explain. Meagan can . . . uh . . . Meagan can . . . no, I don't know what she can do . . . it's just . . . we don't want to get too close. Sorry. I know it sounds like I'm going crazy, I just . . . phew. It keeps getting worse. I don't know why this is happening."

"Maybe that . . . that Agent Carter fella slipped you something."

"I . . . I don't know about that. Maybe you're right. OK, they're turning into Pioneer Hills. Make sure you stop at the gate. Goddammit, I'm drunk and I'm doing half the navigation."

"I'm looking at the same road as you, Grace. You just ain't got no filter is all."

We watched as Meagan and Jacob made their way into the neighborhood down the dusty, lightless dirt roads. Grace and I braked to a halt at the gate. The attendant saw our car and snickered.

ii. Good Ryan

I take over the gate attendant's body, knowing I'd need to stall them. The police car pulled up to the gate, and the driver rolled down the window.

I said, "I had a feeling something was off. This some kind of drug bust?"

Phillip answered, "Nope, no drugs involved. Following up on a missing persons report."

"Right. Well, you know what, thank you for all you folks do. We got terrorists in this city now. Crime. Drugs."

"Uh, thank you, sir—"

I cut in, "I tell you what it is. It's all these goddamn Californians, moving out here, trying to change our way of life."

"Right, well, we've gotta—"

"And then, of course, there's the aliens."

"Aliens?"

"Illegal aliens. You know what I'm talking about. Coming across the southern border, bringing their crime, their drugs, their diseases. Spicy food. Rap music. Technological change rendering previously important sectors of the economy obsolete. You know what I'm talking about."

"Seems like . . . you, uh . . . have a lot to talk about. But we've really got to—"

"Oh, oh, of course. I'm sorry. I just got a little carried away. Of course. You need to go. Just, you let me know, you let me know if I can do anything."

"Sure . . . sure will. Say, you know where that red pickup truck was headed?"

"Oh, the red pickup truck. Yeah, the red . . . red pickup truck. Uh, think they went right. Not sure. But like I said, let me know if I can do anything to help. I'm the eyes and ears of this—" And they drove off. Right. Well, I think I bought her about five minutes.

I step out from the attendant's body. A faint smile comes to his face as he remembers a visit to Port Aransas that he took as a child, playing on the beach with his brother and sister. He doesn't see me as I slip out from his booth, back into the forest. I follow close behind the police car.

Grace's migraines make this more challenging than I'd expected. Since I try to do the least amount of harm and the most amount of good, every decision I make has to be weighed against the potential to do more harm to vulnerable people like her.

In the old days, I had not been aware of such auxiliary effects of my powers since I had been so fixated on achieving godhood; then later, fixated on neutralizing my own worst instincts. Only recently had I turned

my attention to helping improve the state of this world.

And soon, it would come to a close. But there are still loose ends to tie together. Wouldn't there always be? Always some point that needs resolution, mending. The best anyone can do is to leave things better than they found them.

The police car stopped when they saw Jacob's truck parked in front of a house. Phillip and Grace watched intently, with hawk-like focus, *minds pervaded by uncertainty. Grace sees me, but does not know how to explain me. She had seen me since she started drinking, a white sphere of indeterminate size and distance hovering just in front of her face.*

Should they call the chief? Or should they continue to risk their careers to protect this fugitive from a government which, in their eyes, seems rife with an arcane malevolence? Ethically, it places them in a conundrum.

Predictably, the smell of marijuana, which wafts through the trees, sends Phillip over the edge. No longer is Meagan innocently trying to escape the clutches of the state. She just snuck out to get high. Phillip feels forlorn as this occurs to him—that all of this risk might have actually been for nothing. He picks up the radio, heart racing enough to cause even the trees outside of the car to fill with dread.

Phillip said into the radio, "Chief, found her. She met up with Jacob at a house out in Pioneer Hills. Strong smell of marijuana coming through the air, but looks like they're just coloring inside. Some kind of an, uh, drug party, I'd say."

The chief answered, "Ha! Well, Colonel's gonna flip when he hears that. They just about got the tracking figured out on that ID badge, but something's been interfering with the signal."

I laugh, "Something's interfering with the signal? Say it isn't so!"

The chief went on, "You got an address?"

"571 Louis H. Wolffenstein Place."

"Alright, why don't you take them in?"

Phillip and Grace heard Agent Carter in the background, sounding groggy and tired, then the chief from a distance, saying, "What's that? You wanted to say something?"

Then Agent Carter took over. "Yes. Officers, I have a somewhat counterintuitive favor to ask of you. Could you please make sure to stay out of sight, and take notes on their activity? While this may seem like a youthful late night folly, it could in fact be an attempt by the subject to covertly funnel our information about the base's activities. Keep an eye out for any cash transactions, any payments. See if you can see anything through the windows."

"Roger that, Agent Carter," Phillip responded.

"Thank you."

iii. Grace

I looked over at Phillip, and said, "Well, I guess we had the right idea after all."

"Suppose we did. How are you feeling?"

"The migraine's getting worse. I keep . . . seeing things."

"Did the alcohol help?"

"Helped me feel sick to my stomach. I shouldn't have drank so much."

"Well, Grace, you're only human. Been a long day."

"Ha! That's for sure."

I didn't know how to tell him how many times we'd had this conversation, or how many times the world had ended that day—how, with every single moment, I anticipated that rusty and menacing voice coming from behind us in the car, leading us towards an army of ghosts.



iv. Phillip

We pulled forward to where we could look down the driveway into the house. Meagan and her brother were down on the floor, coloring, while some twenty-something with shaggy hair and a long beard hunched over a computer, looking serious and frantic.

I started to consider the possibilities. Maybe it wasn't coloring. Maybe it was notes. Maybe the fella on the computer was doing research on the base, trying to help them record the truth. I saw a bong on the table, still giving off faint wisps of smoke.

Not wanting to be seen, I pulled forward, further ahead, where they wouldn't see us, but where we could still see, just barely, into the house.

The fella stood up, said something, and went to go bang on some piano keys. Then he came back, handed something to Meagan. She looked very grateful, very serious and solemn, then stood up, clutching the item in her hands. Then she and Jacob went out back to the car.

She walked slowly, almost on her tiptoes, staring up towards the sky. A look of wonder came over her face. She saw something, something none of us could see.

Suddenly Jacob got really nervous, started backing away. Meagan collapsed to her knees, and shut her eyes, clutching her stomach. Not knowing if he should look for help, he paced back and forth. I rolled down the window, slightly.

Jacob was saying, "Shit, shit . . . Man, I hope she's okay. Fuck . . . I hope they didn't do anything to her." He paused, then his friend came out onto the porch, staggering slightly.

His friend said, "She alright, man?"

"Uh . . . she's—"

"Let me check her out. Not like, *check her out*. You know what I mean."

Jacob looked at his friend desperately. "Cameron, do you know—"

"My older brother had cerebral palsy so I had to take some first aid classes and shit like that. Uh, let me . . ." He kneeled down next to her, checking her pulse. "Her heart rate's a little weird. Breathing seems fast. Probably the nicotine. Uh . . . let me try something . . ."

Cameron held up his hands and started shaking them, his eyes shut. Then he opened his mouth and babbled in tongues, before thrusting them back over her. His hands hovered over her. "Ah, yeah, man, her energy flow is like totally fucked right now. This must have a really powerful spirit or something, man. I don't know. What I'd suggest is you, like . . . you just stand by her side and try to send her some positive vibes, you know what I mean? Positive vibes are probably the best prescription I can give right now. Unless, like, do you want some hot cocoa?"

Jacob looked concerned. "Uh . . . no thanks. But thanks for . . . uh . . . for—"

"It's called energy healing. I learned it in Peru. I'm gonna go meditate for your sister, alright? Let me know if she starts, uh, like convulsing, or doing anything weird. We might need to do some drumming and some chants to try and realign her spirit."

"Right."

The hippy fella went inside, and sat cross-legged on his floor. For a little while longer, Meagan laid there, until her eyes grew wide, and then suddenly she leapt up into the air. Unstable, she teetered back and forth a bit, before vomiting all over the ground. Jacob led her back to the car, and the two of them sped off.

Grace said quietly, "That was . . . that was . . ."

"Weird. Real weird."

v. Grace

After a few seconds, I asked Phillip, "What do you think we should—"

But was interrupted when Agent Carter knocked on Phillip's window. He rolled it down.

“Did you see anything?” Agent Carter asked.

I leaned over and answered, “Kids just sat around, smoked weed, and drew some pictures.”

“Hmmm. Did their friend give them anything?”

Phillip and I looked at each other, and I said, “Looked like a . . . little box of some kind.”

“Yeah . . . we found that. Nicotine gum. Not sure why. Anything else?”

Phillip said, “Nope.”

“It’s very strange. And our satellite tracking system went haywire the moment she breached security. You didn’t see . . . anything else?”

Phillip thought for a second, and then said, “No. We didn’t.”

I added, “Gate attendant looked a little . . . strange.”

“I’ll interview him. See what he remembers. Maybe stop by and have a chat with their . . . friend.”

“He seemed like a real quirky fella.”

“Did he?”

Phillip nodded. “Yeah. Uh, seemed like he might have been under the influence of some uh, hallucinogenic drugs, based on the way he was acting, and what we overheard.”

“That’s a common ploy of certain covert intelligence-gathering organization. They keep their sources in line by getting them addicted to things like marijuana, LSD, heroin. Gives them something to hold over the pawns in the operation.”

“I hadn’t considered that.”

“It’s all very suspect. Anyhow . . . it’s been a long night. You all deserve some rest. I’m going back to my hotel. Perhaps I can buy you folks some drinks later this week.”

I said, “Sounds good to me.”

And Phillip said, “Sure. Got some plans tomorrow, but . . . should work.”

“Alright. So long then. And thank you for all your diligent work.”

* * * * *



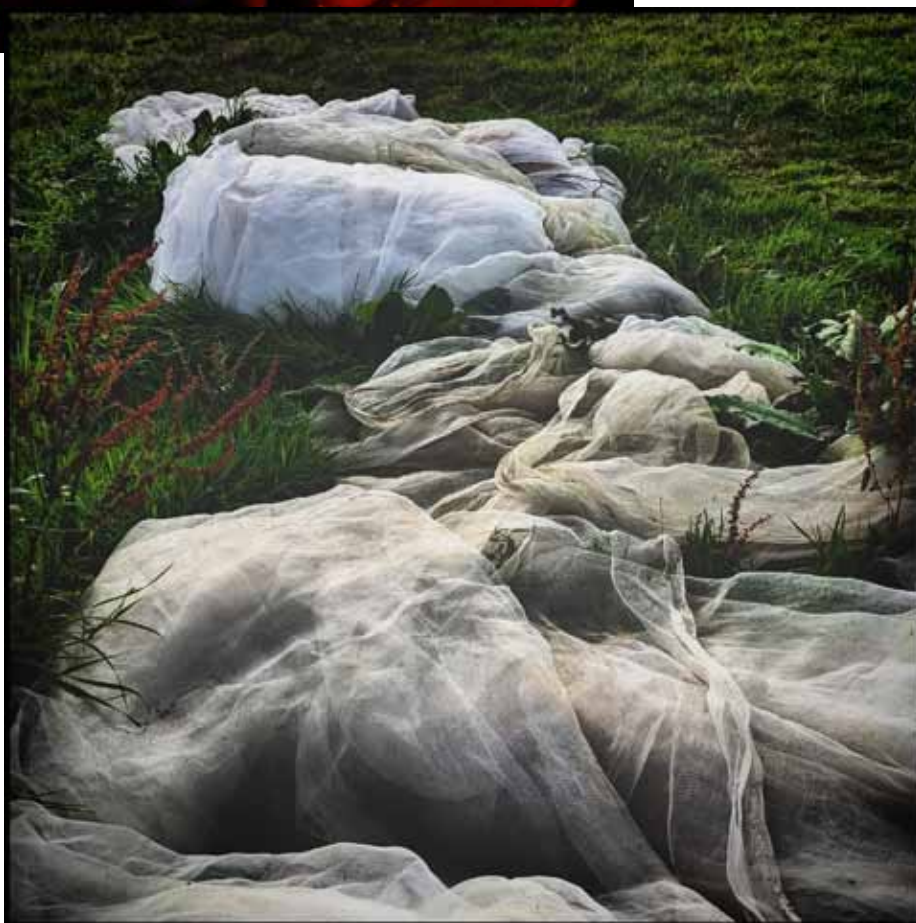
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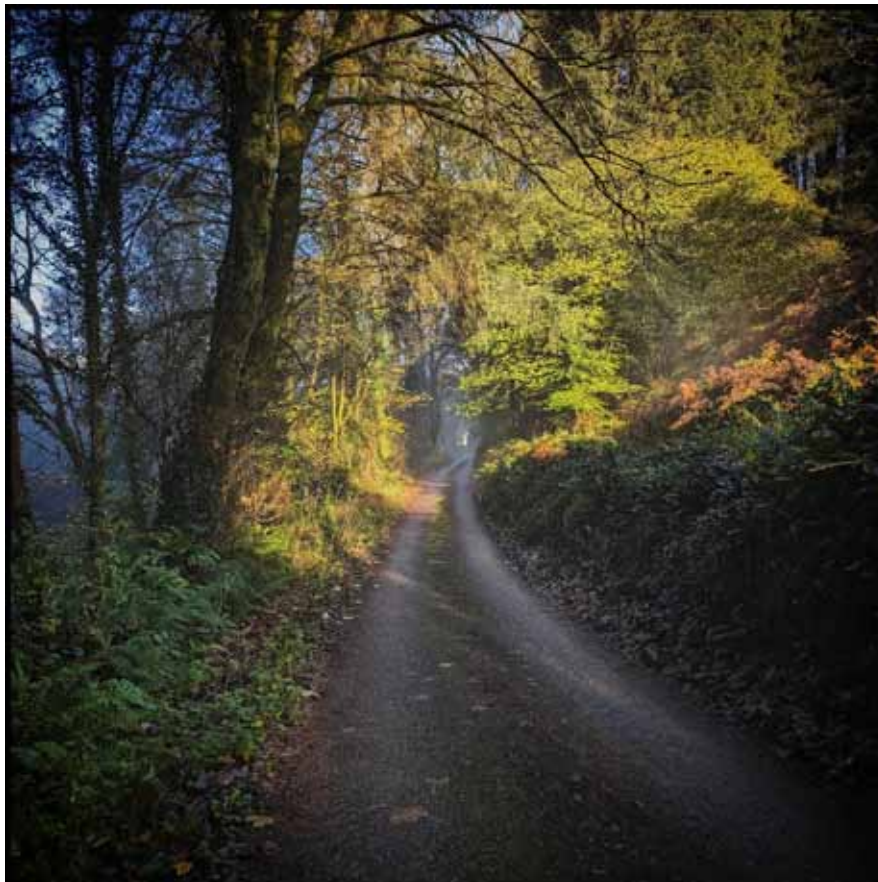














Notes on the Bardo State

For Tibetan Buddhists, the “bardo” state is that otherworldly milieu one enters upon dying. It is an intermediate state between death and re-birth. In the bardo state, an individual is, in a sense, “tested” to determine what is the best or most appropriate re-birth. If one can see that all of the phantasmagoric phenomena going on there are all manifestations of one’s own mind, and can see that one’s innermost consciousness is indeed between death and re-birth, then one will be liberated, and attain a very positive re-birth, if not the heavenly state of *nirvana*.

Depending on how soundly one navigates the intermediate bardo state, one is reborn into one of six realms: the heavenly realm, the demi-god realm, the human realm, the animal realm, the hungry-ghost realm, or the hell realm. It would take us far afield here to define each realm, but it is sufficient to note that almost *all* Tibetan Buddhists would like to be re-born into the human realm, so that they can continue their religious practice, and attain Enlightenment in the next or succeeding lifetimes. Each of the other five realms causes venomous attachments to form, binding one negatively to the wheel of death and rebirth. Paradoxically, even the heavenly realm is not very heavenly—it is full of debauchery, jealousy, and catastrophic attachment. Best to be born as a human! This is the primary goal of navigating the intermediate bardo state.

Many Western people, perhaps most, are skeptical of these seemingly mystical notions. We in the West have been taught, to the bone, that the brain, mind, and self are purely the result of physical, chemical and electrical processes inside the body, and especially the brain. Everything that we are, we are taught, is the result of the electrochemical firing of neurons in the brain circuitry. Beyond this physicalist perspective (which argues that *everything* is *physical*), we are taught, all else is mystical *woo*.

From another perspective, however, one which is probably held by more people in the world than the Western one, the West is woefully behind when it comes to psychological and ontological concepts, and those ideas dealing with philosophy of mind and self. It is said, not without reason and evidence, that the East is far superior in its knowledge of this kind.

It would be outside the scope of these *Notes* to get too far into this, which is a topic unto itself, but suffice it to say that there are texts in Tibet and India, dating to over a millennium ago, that describe phenomena that were not discovered in the West until the twentieth century. So, if one wanted to, one could state pretty objectively that the West, while way ahead in science, math, and engineering, is millennia behind when it comes to psychology and possibly philosophy too.

Here in the West, we are taught that something like a bardo state is impossible. It does not mesh with modern physicalist notions of science, and therefore must be nonsense. I think we can dispense here with the “Western-materialism-uber-alles” approach, and simply offer the suggestion that Buddhist Enlightenment is a real thing, and that from this state certain lamas, yogis, and monks can make very radical forays into dimensions above and beyond the one with

which we are familiar.

This has, in fact, been done. Our knowledge of the bardo state is knowledge that has been brought back from the borderline between life and death—if there is even really any line at all. The number of masters who have voyaged to the bardo state while living must be astonishing, and they have been able to furnish a virtual science about death.

The teachings on the bardo state show us both what will happen if we prepare for death, and what will happen if we do not. If we do not choose to confront and acknowledge the reality of our upcoming deaths, we will suffer tremendously in life. The sanctity of Nature that comes with knowledge of the bardo state, which uplifts and gives special meaning to our lives, is totally absent for a person who ignores, fears, or cannot come to any terms with death in this life.

Such a person—usually a Westerner—will suffer sheer dysfunction throughout life, in death, and all lives to come thereafter. A person trapped in this web of suffering will not be able to rise above the waterline of physicalism and materialism, let alone gain the insight required for even the possibility of Enlightenment. One remains bound to the wheel of *samsara*, suffering endlessly.

Conversely, one who has embraced these teachings can expect to be well-prepared for both life and death. The aforementioned serenity suffuses one's whole world, and death becomes not an impending disaster leading to personal and permanent extinction, but rather the crowning moment of one's life, the climax of this incarnation.

And with this comes our true freedom—the freedom to choose our death, and to choose our birth.

* * * * *





Analogies

Quay is to berth
as fence is to park,

museum walls to gallery,
starry night to yellow,

and you, love, at the helm
of our ship, hands gripped tightly
on the wheel,

use all the navigational terms,
receive and execute all commands,

at sea and anchor detail
or straight transit,

arrival or departure
at port. You watch the bridge always.

Bridge is to crossing
as my body is to the expanse
of you, pelagic,

proportions and distances
distorted,

an eye of land,

to the stretch and sheet
of maritime blue
before we disappear.

* * *



Tamara Miles

The Menace Response

We have grown dog's teeth—
spit and snarl, resentment
over food and toys,
our beds a gray burden split
open, edges chewed.

Uncomfortable at night,
Defiant barks at neighbors and each other,
at anything luminous or surprising.

We hide under beds to nip at ankles,
roll back under satisfied but only
briefly; a broomstick is coming,
a whack on the butt, a searing insult.

But it is instinct, we howl,
to protect ourselves,
our investments, our property.

The growling never ends, grows
worse with punishment.

Never quite asleep though bathed
in sunlight, one eye cocked
like a pistol at a closed door,
suspicious of the turning knob,
of the steps even of those we love
coming down the hall.

We don't want to be touched
when we finally dream. In our dreams
we are always running,
running, after a shape ahead.

We will run until we drag it down.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

*“Think for yourself
& question authority.”*
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Nineteen

continued from

The Cenacle | 123 | December 2023

Read the full History at:

http://scriptorpress.com/history_of_scriptor_press.pdf

I tell myself: *just write it*. Sound, simple advice. So, OK, here goes.

Been at this year of this *History* for *three & a half years*. Started it in *Cenacle* 116 | June 2021. Then *Cenacle* 117 | October 2021. *Cenacle* 119 | April 2022. *Cenacle* 120 | Summer 2022. *Cenacle* 123 | December 2023. This the *sixth* issue to finish it finally. Six my number, will take it.

Thus 2012's finishes telling in 2024. And vows in my mind to, plainly said, *catch this shit up sooner than later*. Figure a process that works, & *do it*.

But that's really for later. Finishing telling of this year is for now. And, giving it a sky-high review, I can see how I'd be slow at it. Coming into 2012, my dear friend Jim Burke III had just died suddenly a month before. No December 2011 *Cenacle* or Jellicle Literary Guild meeting.

And 2012 a re-election year for President Obama, no sure thing. I credit the Occupy movement with some of his victory, even as it had essentially long dissipated by the happy November day.

And my job situation was uncertain much of the year, till good luck come in the summer. But the equation of flux thickening for sure.

Meanwhile, I was chasing a big new idea, a writing project to push what I was already doing toward a greater, deeper map. *The Tangled Gate Mythopoeia*, I came to call it later.

By when I wrote most of the original 36 *Tangled Gate* poems in 36 days, President Obama had won re-election. My new full-time job was going well. There were in 2012 a full quartet of *Cenacle* issues, & a new *Scriptor Press Sampler*, as well as a steady 36 weekends of SpiritPlants Radio broadcast work.

These poems, however, were the core of the year. I wrote them because they were along my path, but braided through them is the hard truth is that I would never read them with JBIII listening intently, close by, eyes closed, strumming along. He was present, like always, but in a different way.

And these poems were also the core of the 12/15/2012 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, the ninth & last one we would host at our home in Arlington, Massachusetts. Part of our eventually deciding to move was a better income opening up a door to home owning. Apartment living, even at

its best, is paid occupancy. Nothing more.

But maybe there was an element of finality other than this. Maybe writing the *Tangled Gate* poems was a finale as much as a tribute, & a transition to something new, next. Art commands one to bring it all along—good, bad, joyous, tragic—, but what one does with all must needs change over time too. *There is no choice.*

So this evening I'm telling of here is part of all that. Last Jellicle Literary Guild meeting there, very present to its placement, but also full of glints from ago & hereon.

So, OK, here goes some more.

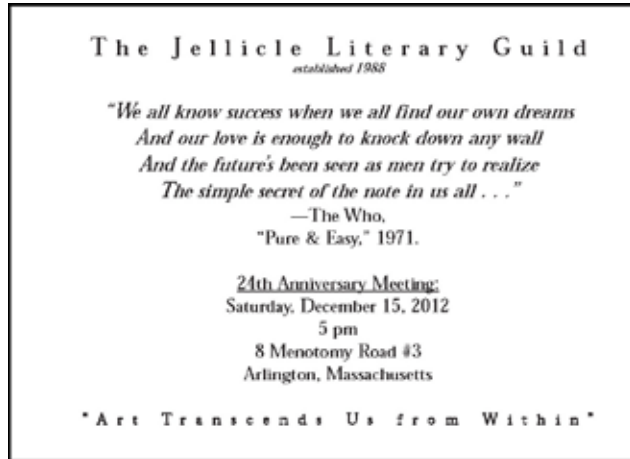
KD & I spent the day cleaning, & finishing *Cenacle* | 83 | December 2012 for printing. New poet friend Joe Coleman arrived first, around 5 p.m. And, after a long stretch, my friend known back to high school, Ralph H. Emerson, & his companion Nancy. Lastly, Melissa Wattenberg, recent poet friend, & new wife to my dear old compadre, Ric Amante. Himself working that night, but present in other ways, as will be described below.

Thus, the 24th anniversary Jellicle Literary Guild meeting began. For newcomer Nancy's benefit, I gave a nickel summing tour of the JG's history, & then dived into the meeting's *JG Flashback*, this time from the the 12/30/1995 meeting, with JBIII singing the 7th anniversary JG song. Conjured on the spot, as he so often did, delightfully, with these.

Handed around copies of *Cenacle* 83, & read from its *From Soulard's Notebooks* to start in. Then Ralph, unexpected by me, gave a lengthy introduction to my *Tangled Gate* poems, explaining my source materials via Edith Hamilton's 1942 volume *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. He did an excellent job of detailing the figures, locales, & dramas of the Greek Cretan labyrinth myth. I was grateful both for having this fresh context for everyone present, & for him giving his time for this presentation.

There was a stretch of poetry: KD reading Martina Newberry's "Christmas Music" from *Cenacle* 83; Joe Coleman reading his poetry not in *Cenacle* 83, including a funny one about an underappreciated guy who plays tambourine in a band; & Melissa reading both her poetry, & some of Ric's too.

Then I jumped into the first of my three *Tangled Gate* readings, first thanking Ralph for well showing the literary sources wherefrom I started, before leaving them behind; & also much crediting W.H. Matthews' 1970 volume *Mazes and Labyrinths: Their History and Development*. I noted that Matthews contended that these phenomena have interested people in countless times & places, thus assuring me my fascination is widely shared.



Ralph then read a sweet essay about his uncle George Emerson, an animal trainer during the “Golden Age of Hollywood.” Funny on-set stories, such as one from the making of *The Yearling* (1946), starring Gregory Peck & Jane Wyman.

Moved on to a recording of my phone call with Ric earlier in the week, who had decided to contribute not his own work, but that of American poet Jack Gilbert (1925-2012). Among his many fine poems, Ric & I particularly reveled in the line “We must risk delight” in Gilbert’s poem “A Brief for the Defense.” Gilbert had died recently, & this caught Ric’s attention, who mentioned to me that he misheard the person telling him on that phone that Gilbert “had died in his poem.” We agreed: may we all be so lucky.

A poet of Ric’s level of mastery taking the time offered him to praise another in indicative both of his humility & maturity as an Artist.

There were more poems read by Joe & by Melissa, & I read a second batch of *Tangled Gate* poems. These were followed by a video of Judih Weinstein Haggai reading her poetry from *Cenacle 83*. Then Melissa read some more of Ric’s poems, & a few by the Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (commonly known by modern readers as just Rumi), the latter of these reprinted in *Cenacle 83*.

Late on, the meeting concluded with the rest of my *Tangled Gate* poems, & a discussion of them I had with Ralph (Melissa & Joe had both gone home). Listening these dozen years later to the meeting’s recording, hearing me & my old friend deep in dialogue, 30 years of friendship traveled, knowing now how he would soon be bound for California, & eventually to leave me behind for reasons still unclear, I am warmed anew anyway by those times, like this night, when we sat close together, talking late into the night, trying to understand ourselves, & the world.

Come Monday, back at pay job; finishing SPRadio work for that turn of the calendar; mulling what writing the *Tangled Gate* poems meant; & what to do with my pens & notebooks next.

Began looking deeper into the writings of American novelist & poet Richard Brautigan (1935-1984), toward including him in my *TransArtBooks* idea in 2013. Took out from the Cambridge Public Library the recently published *Jubilee Hitchhiker: The Life and Times of Richard Brautigan* by William Hjortsberg, & brought it along on our annual plane December trip to see KD’s kin in Eastern Colorado.

This trip started out so nice, with a visit to the *Becoming Van Gogh* exhibition at the Denver Art Museum. Once arrived several hours from Denver to their home near the Nebraska border, there were family holiday dinners, & movies & football games on TV.

Midnight Christmas mass I attended not as a believer, but to express my love & respect for KD’s family, especially her mother Karin.

My Brautigan biography kept me good company; reading about his times in San Francisco in the 1950s, writing for little literary magazines not unlike *The Cenacle*. But also my yearn for the artistic community that produced those magazines then & there.

Of my own work I focused mostly on updating *ElectroLounge* for *Cenacle 83*, as well as online promotion for the new issue.

Along the long car ride back to the Denver International Airport, I read *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (1978) by R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, & Carl A. P. Ruck; thought about writing & press-work; & started my long travel with Brautigan’s novels & poetry.

And then back to pay job. But New Year’s Eve, our 7th wedding anniversary, I got off early, &



we went to a nice Cambridge restaurant called A Passage to India. KD was nursing a cold from airplane travel, as often happens, so she went to sleep early when we got home.

I tried my best to write out 2012 & into 2013. Last holiday season in that apartment, lived in since July 2010. I sat on our beloved green couch, my pen going at midnight. Good enough.

More pay job days. Visit to dentist. SPRadio planning for 2013. And renewed efforts at *Bags End News*, long-needed & wished-for.

Still early January, KD & I traveled up to the coastal town of Ogunquit, Maine, to stay for the first time at the sprawling old Beachmere Inn, with clear view of Ogunquit Beach from our Room 209. Where I am writing from right now, near a dozen years & many annual stays later.



We seriously discussed buying a house that first visit. A few months later, we did, & called our new home the “Bungalow Cee.” And then we would come to call Room 209 “Bungalow A.” And of course a “Bungalow Bee” would enter the picture eventually. But that is for later pages than these.

Walked a fair stretch around the beach & nearby trails, & into the charming little Maine town. Took many pictures. Watched NFL football playoffs. And Peter Jackson’s brilliant *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.

Last of these both daunted & inspired me as I worked on *Bags End News*. Loving his epic creation. Conjuring my own.

It’s peculiar to conclude this long strange chapter in this manner, mulling anew how being here that first time led down new paths in our shared lives.

The furniture in the bedroom, & this living area, with its two armchairs, long work table I’ve enjoyed so often, have changed scant little. Still the framed Edward Hopper picture on the wall, seaside depiction. Still the endlessly beautiful view of the endlessly beautiful Wide Wide Sea.

I struggled arriving to this early January 2013 moment, sharing physical & emotional space with me now, late December 2024, because when my friend Jim Burke III died, my grasp of why I had returned east in July 2010 loosened a bit.

In the years I had been gone, things had changed, subtly as they often do, but inexorably. Without Jim, my oldest moorings let a bit. I worked on new ones, of course.

And, as has always been true, I transfigured my hopes & griefs into Art. Just get deeper as the calendar pages turn.

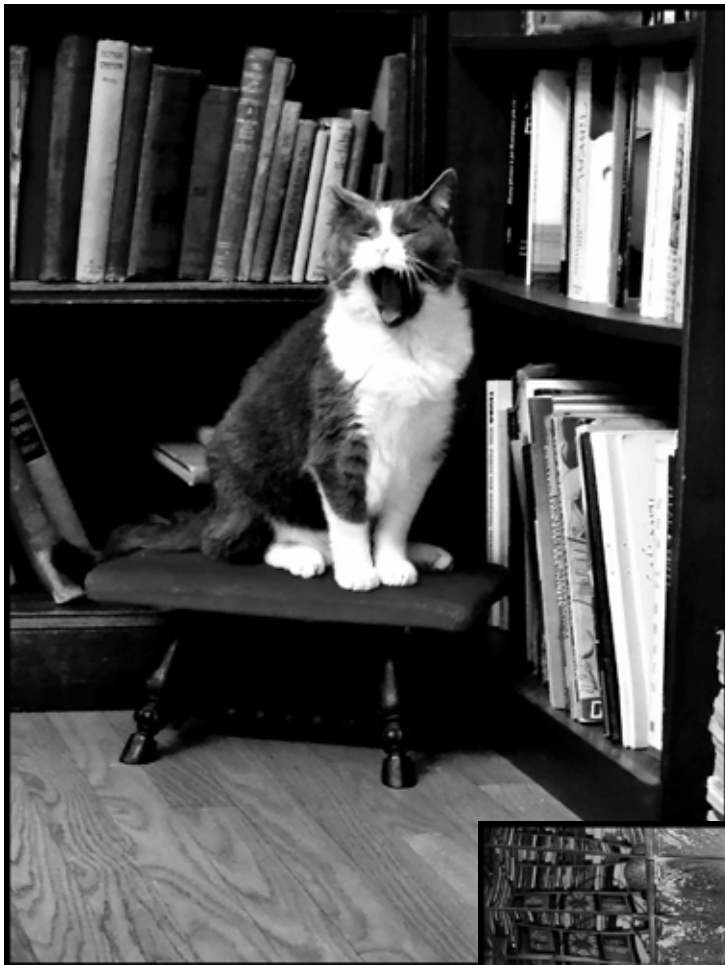


* * * * *

Abandon View











The Hound of the Baskervilles

[Classic Fiction]

Chapter VIII.
First Report of Dr. Watson

From this point onward I will follow the course of events by transcribing my own letters to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which lie before me on the table. One page is missing, but otherwise they are exactly as written and show my feelings and suspicions of the moment more accurately than my memory, clear as it is upon these tragic events, can possibly do.

Baskerville Hall,
October 13th.

My dear Holmes:

My previous letters and telegrams have kept you pretty well up to date as to all that has occurred in this most God-forsaken corner of the world. The longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm. When you are once out upon its bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but on the other hand you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people. On all sides of you as you walk are the houses of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which are supposed to have marked their temples. As you look at their gray stone huts against the scarred hill-sides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. The strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must always have been most unfruitful soil. I am no antiquarian, but I could imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced to accept that which none other would occupy.

All this, however, is foreign to the mission on which you sent me and will probably be very uninteresting to your severely practical mind. I can still remember your complete indifference as to whether the sun moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. Let me, therefore, return to the facts concerning Sir Henry Baskerville.

If you have not had any report within the last few days it is because up to to-day there was nothing of importance to relate. Then a very surprising circumstance occurred, which I shall tell you in due course. But, first of all, I must keep you in touch with some of the other factors in the situation.

One of these, concerning which I have said little, is the escaped convict upon the moor. There is strong reason now to believe that he has got right away, which is a considerable relief to the lonely householders of this district. A fortnight has passed since his flight, during which he has not been seen and nothing has been heard of him. It is surely inconceivable that he could have held out upon the moor during all that time. Of course, so far as his concealment goes there is no difficulty at all. Any one of these stone huts would give him a hiding-place. But there is nothing to eat unless he were to catch and slaughter one of the moor sheep. We think, therefore, that he has gone, and the outlying farmers sleep the better in consequence.

We are four able-bodied men in this household, so that we could take good care of ourselves, but I confess that I have had uneasy moments when I have thought of the Stapletons. They live miles from any help. There are one maid, an old manservant, the sister, and the brother, the latter not a very strong man. They would be helpless in the hands of a desperate fellow like this Notting Hill criminal, if he could once effect an entrance. Both Sir Henry and I were concerned at



Sidney Paget

their situation, and it was suggested that Perkins the groom should go over to sleep there, but Stapleton would not hear of it.

The fact is that our friend, the baronet, begins to display a considerable interest in our fair neighbour. It is not to be wondered at, for time hangs heavily in this lonely spot to an active man like him, and she is a very fascinating and beautiful woman. There is something tropical and exotic about her which forms a singular contrast to her cool and unemotional brother. Yet he also gives the idea of hidden fires. He has certainly a very marked influence over her, for I have seen her continually glance at him as she talked as if seeking approbation for what she said. I trust that he is kind to her. There is a dry glitter in his eyes, and a firm set of his thin lips, which goes with a positive and possibly a harsh nature. You would find him an interesting study.

He came over to call upon Baskerville on that first day, and the very next morning he took us both to show us the spot where the legend of the wicked Hugo is supposed to have had its origin. It was an excursion of some miles across the moor to a place which is so dismal that it might have suggested the story. We found a short valley between rugged tors which led to an open, grassy space flecked over with the white cotton grass. In the middle of it rose two great stones, worn and sharpened at the upper end, until they looked like the huge corroding fangs of some monstrous beast. In every way it corresponded with the scene of the old tragedy. Sir Henry was much interested and asked Stapleton more than once whether he did really believe in the possibility of the interference of the supernatural in the affairs of men. He spoke lightly, but it was evident that he was very much in earnest. Stapleton was guarded in his replies, but it was easy to see that he said less than he might, and that he would not express his whole opinion out of consideration for the feelings of the baronet. He told us of similar cases, where families had suffered from some evil influence, and he left us with the impression that he shared the popular view upon the matter.

On our way back we stayed for lunch at Merripit House, and it was there that Sir Henry made the acquaintance of Miss Stapleton. From the first moment that he saw her he appeared to be

strongly attracted by her, and I am much mistaken if the feeling was not mutual. He referred to her again and again on our walk home, and since then hardly a day has passed that we have not seen something of the brother and sister. They dine here to-night, and there is some talk of our going to them next week. One would imagine that such a match would be very welcome to Stapleton, and yet I have more than once caught a look of the strongest disapprobation in his face when Sir Henry has been paying some attention to his sister. He is much attached to her, no doubt, and would lead a lonely life without her, but it would seem the height of selfishness if he were to stand in the way of her making so brilliant a marriage. Yet I am certain that he does not wish their intimacy to ripen into love, and I have several times observed that he has taken pains to prevent them from being tête-à-tête. By the way, your instructions to me never to allow Sir Henry to go out alone will become very much more onerous if a love affair were to be added to our other difficulties. My popularity would soon suffer if I were to carry out your orders to the letter.

The other day—Thursday, to be more exact—Dr. Mortimer lunched with us. He has been excavating a barrow at Long Down, and has got a prehistoric skull which fills him with great joy. Never was there such a single-minded enthusiast as he! The Stapletons came in afterwards, and the good doctor took us all to the Yew Alley, at Sir Henry's request, to show us exactly how everything occurred upon that fatal night. It is a long, dismal walk, the Yew Alley, between two high walls of clipped hedge, with a narrow band of grass upon either side. At the far end is an old tumble-down summer-house. Half-way down is the moor-gate, where the old gentleman left his cigar-ash. It is a white wooden gate with a latch. Beyond it lies the wide moor. I remembered your theory of the affair and tried to picture all that had occurred. As the old man stood there he saw something coming across the moor, something which terrified him so that he lost his wits, and ran and ran until he died of sheer horror and exhaustion. There was the long, gloomy tunnel down which he fled. And from what? A sheep-dog of the moor? Or a spectral hound, black, silent, and monstrous? Was there a human agency in the matter? Did the pale,

watchful Barrymore know more than he cared to say? It was all dim and vague, but always there is the dark shadow of crime behind it.

One other neighbour I have met since I wrote last. This is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who lives some four miles to the south of us. He is an elderly man, red-faced, white-haired, and choleric. His passion is for the British law, and he has spent a large fortune in litigation. He fights for the mere pleasure of fighting and is equally ready to take up either side of a question, so that it is no wonder that he has found it a costly amusement. Sometimes he will shut up a right of way and defy the parish to make him open it. At others he will with his own hands tear down some other man's gate and declare that a path has existed there from time immemorial, defying the owner to prosecute him for trespass. He is learned in old manorial and communal rights, and he applies his knowledge sometimes in favour of the villagers of Fernworthy and sometimes against them, so that he is periodically either carried in triumph down the village street or else burned in effigy, according to his latest exploit. He is said to have about seven lawsuits upon his hands at present, which will probably swallow up the remainder of his fortune and so draw his sting and leave him harmless for the future. Apart from the law he seems a kindly, good-natured person, and I only mention him because you were particular that I should send some description of the people who surround us. He is curiously employed at present, for, being an amateur astronomer, he has an excellent telescope, with which he lies upon the roof of his own house and sweeps the moor all day in the hope of catching a glimpse of the escaped convict. If he would confine his energies to this all would be well, but there are rumours that he intends to prosecute Dr. Mortimer for opening a grave without the consent of the next-of-kin, because he dug up the Neolithic skull in the barrow on Long Down. He helps to keep our lives from being monotonous and gives a little comic relief where it is badly needed.

And now, having brought you up to date in the escaped convict, the Stapletons, Dr. Mortimer, and Frankland, of Lafter Hall, let me end on that which is most important and tell you more about the Barrymores, and especially about

the surprising development of last night.

First of all about the test telegram, which you sent from London in order to make sure that Barrymore was really here. I have already explained that the testimony of the postmaster shows that the test was worthless and that we have no proof one way or the other. I told Sir Henry how the matter stood, and he at once, in his downright fashion, had Barrymore up and asked him whether he had received the telegram himself. Barrymore said that he had.

"Did the boy deliver it into your own hands?" asked Sir Henry.

Barrymore looked surprised, and considered for a little time.

"No," said he, "I was in the box-room at the time, and my wife brought it up to me."

"Did you answer it yourself?"

"No; I told my wife what to answer and she went down to write it."

In the evening he recurred to the subject of his own accord.

"I could not quite understand the object of your questions this morning, Sir Henry," said he. "I trust that they do not mean that I have done anything to forfeit your confidence?"

Sir Henry had to assure him that it was not so and pacify him by giving him a considerable part of his old wardrobe, the London outfit having now all arrived.

Mrs. Barrymore is of interest to me. She is a heavy, solid person, very limited, intensely respectable, and inclined to be puritanical. You could hardly conceive a less emotional subject. Yet I have told you how, on the first night here, I heard her sobbing bitterly, and since then I have more than once observed traces of tears upon her face. Some deep sorrow gnaws ever at her heart. Sometimes I wonder if she has a guilty memory which haunts her, and sometimes I suspect Barrymore of being a domestic tyrant. I have always felt that there was something singular and questionable in this man's character, but the adventure of last night brings all my suspicions to a head.

And yet it may seem a small matter in itself. You are aware that I am not a very sound sleeper, and since I have been on guard in this house my slumbers have been lighter than ever.

Last night, about two in the morning, I was aroused by a stealthy step passing my room. I rose, opened my door, and peeped out. A long black shadow was trailing down the corridor. It was thrown by a man who walked softly down the passage with a candle held in his hand. He was in shirt and trousers, with no covering to his feet. I could merely see the outline, but his height told me that it was Barrymore. He walked very slowly and circumspectly, and there was something indescribably guilty and furtive in his whole appearance.

I have told you that the corridor is broken by the balcony which runs round the hall, but that it is resumed upon the farther side. I waited until he had passed out of sight and then I followed him. When I came round the balcony he had reached the end of the farther corridor, and I could see from the glimmer of light through an open door that he had entered one of the rooms. Now, all these rooms are unfurnished and unoccupied, so that his expedition became more mysterious than ever. The light shone steadily as if he were standing motionless. I crept down the passage as noiselessly as I could and peeped round the corner of the door.

Barrymore was crouching at the window with the candle held against the glass. His profile was half turned towards me, and his face seemed to be rigid with expectation as he stared out into the blackness of the moor. For some minutes he stood watching intently. Then he gave a deep groan and with an impatient gesture he put out the light. Instantly I made my way back to my room, and very shortly came the stealthy steps passing once more upon their return journey. Long afterwards when I had fallen into a light sleep I heard a key turn somewhere in a lock, but I could not tell whence the sound came. What it all means I cannot guess, but there is some secret business going on in this house of gloom which sooner or later we shall get to the bottom of. I do not trouble you with my theories, for you asked me to furnish you only with facts. I have had a long talk with Sir Henry this morning, and we have made a plan of campaign founded upon my observations of last night. I will not speak about it just now, but it should make my next report interesting reading.

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Chapter IX.
Second Report of Dr. Watson
The Light Upon the Moor

Baskerville Hall,
Oct. 15th.

My dear Holmes:

If I was compelled to leave you without much news during the early days of my mission you must acknowledge that I am making up for lost time, and that events are now crowding thick and fast upon us. In my last report I ended upon my top note with Barrymore at the window, and now I have quite a budget already which will, unless I am much mistaken, considerably surprise you. Things have taken a turn which I could not have anticipated. In some ways they have within the last forty-eight hours become much clearer and in some ways they have become more complicated. But I will tell you all and you shall judge for yourself.

Before breakfast on the morning following my adventure I went down the corridor and examined the room in which Barrymore had been on the night before. The western window through which he had stared so intently has, I noticed, one peculiarity above all other windows in the house—it commands the nearest outlook on the moor. There is an opening between two trees which enables one from this point of view to look right down upon it, while from all the other windows it is only a distant glimpse which can be obtained. It follows, therefore, that Barrymore, since only this window would serve the purpose, must have been looking out for something or somebody upon the moor. The night was very dark, so that I can hardly imagine how he could have hoped to see anyone. It had struck me that it was possible that some love intrigue was on foot. That would have accounted for his stealthy movements and also for the uneasiness of his wife. The man is a striking-looking fellow, very well equipped to steal the heart of a country girl, so that this theory seemed to have something to support it. That opening of the door which I had heard after I had returned to my room might mean that he had gone out to keep some clandestine appointment. So I reasoned with myself in the morning, and I

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ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF

SHERLOCK HOLMES.

By CONAN DOYLE.

CHAPTER IX.

[SECOND REPORT OF DR. WATSON.]
THE LIGHT UPON THE MOOR.



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But whatever the true explanation of Barrymore's movements might be, I felt that the responsibility of keeping them to myself until I could explain them was more than I could bear. I had an interview with the baronet in his study after breakfast, and I told him all that I had seen. He was less surprised than I had expected.

"I knew that Barrymore walked about nights, and I had a mind to speak to him about it," said he. "Two or three times I have heard his steps in the passage, coming and going, just about the hour you name."

"Perhaps then he pays a visit every night to that particular window," I suggested.

"Perhaps he does. If so, we should be able to shadow him, and see what it is that he is after. I wonder what your friend Holmes would do if he were here?"

"I believe that he would do exactly what you now suggest," said I. "He would follow Barrymore and see what he did."

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"I believe that he would do exactly what you now suggest," said I. "He would follow Barrymore and see what he did."

"Then we shall do it together."

"But surely he would hear us."

"The man is rather deaf, and in any case we must take our chance of that. We'll sit up in my room to-night and wait until he passes." Sir Henry rubbed his hands with pleasure, and it was evident that he hailed the adventure as a relief to his somewhat quiet life upon the moor.

The baronet has been in communication with the architect who prepared the plans for Sir Charles, and with a contractor from London, so that we may expect great changes to begin here soon. There have been decorators and furnishers up from Plymouth, and it is evident that our friend has large ideas, and means to spare no pains or expense to restore the grandeur of his family. When the house is renovated and refurnished, all that he will need will be a wife to make it complete. Between ourselves there are pretty clear signs that this will not be wanting if the lady is willing, for I have seldom seen a man more infatuated with a woman than he is with our beautiful neighbour, Miss Stapleton. And yet the course of true love does not run quite as smoothly as one would under the circumstances expect. To-

day, for example, its surface was broken by a very unexpected ripple, which has caused our friend considerable perplexity and annoyance.

After the conversation which I have quoted about Barrymore, Sir Henry put on his hat and prepared to go out. As a matter of course I did the same.

"What, are *you* coming, Watson?" he asked, looking at me in a curious way.

"That depends on whether you are going on the moor," said I.

"Yes, I am."

"Well, you know what my instructions are. I am sorry to intrude, but you heard how earnestly Holmes insisted that I should not leave you, and especially that you should not go alone upon the moor."

Sir Henry put his hand upon my shoulder with a pleasant smile.

"My dear fellow," said he, "Holmes, with all his wisdom, did not foresee some things which have happened since I have been on the moor. You understand me? I am sure that you are the last man in the world who would wish to be a spoilsport. I must go out alone."

It put me in a most awkward position. I was at a loss what to say or what to do, and before I had made up my mind he picked up his cane and was gone.

But when I came to think the matter over my conscience reproached me bitterly for having on any pretext allowed him to go out of my sight. I imagined what my feelings would be if I had to return to you and to confess that some misfortune had occurred through my disregard for your instructions. I assure you my cheeks flushed at the very thought. It might not even now be too late to overtake him, so I set off at once in the direction of Merripit House.

I hurried along the road at the top of my speed without seeing anything of Sir Henry, until I came to the point where the moor path branches off. There, fearing that perhaps I had come in the wrong direction after all, I mounted a hill from which I could command a view—the same hill which is cut into the dark quarry. Thence I saw him at once. He was on the moor path, about a quarter of a mile off, and a lady was by his side who could only be Miss Stapleton. It was clear that there was

already an understanding between them and that they had met by appointment. They were walking slowly along in deep conversation, and I saw her making quick little movements of her hands as if she were very earnest in what she was saying, while he listened intently, and once or twice shook his head in strong dissent. I stood among the rocks watching them, very much puzzled as to what I should do next. To follow them and break into their intimate conversation seemed to be an outrage, and yet my clear duty was never for an instant to let him out of my sight. To act the spy upon a friend was a hateful task. Still, I could see no better course than to observe him from the hill, and to clear my conscience by confessing to him afterwards what I had done. It is true that if any sudden danger had threatened him I was too far away to be of use, and yet I am sure that you will agree with me that the position was very difficult, and that there was nothing more which I could do.

Our friend, Sir Henry, and the lady had halted on the path and were standing deeply absorbed in their conversation, when I was suddenly aware that I was not the only witness of their interview. A wisp of green floating in the air caught my eye, and another glance showed me that it was carried on a stick by a man who was moving among the broken ground. It was Stapleton with his butterfly-net. He was very much closer to the pair than I was, and he appeared to be moving in their direction. At this instant Sir Henry suddenly drew Miss Stapleton to his side. His arm was round her, but it seemed to me that she was straining away from him with her face averted. He stooped his head to hers, and she raised one hand as if in protest. Next moment I saw them spring apart and turn hurriedly round. Stapleton was the cause of the interruption. He was running wildly towards them, his absurd net dangling behind him. He gesticulated and almost danced with excitement in front of the lovers. What the scene meant I could not imagine, but it seemed to me that Stapleton was abusing Sir Henry, who offered explanations, which became more angry as the other refused to accept them. The lady stood by in haughty silence. Finally Stapleton turned upon his heel and beckoned in a peremptory way to his sister, who, after an irresolute glance at

Sir Henry, walked off by the side of her brother. The naturalist's angry gestures showed that the lady was included in his displeasure. The baronet stood for a minute looking after them, and then he walked slowly back the way that he had come, his head hanging, the very picture of dejection.

What all this meant I could not imagine, but I was deeply ashamed to have witnessed so intimate a scene without my friend's knowledge. I ran down the hill therefore and met the baronet at the bottom. His face was flushed with anger and his brows were wrinkled, like one who is at his wit's ends what to do.

"Halloa, Watson! Where have you dropped from?" said he. "You don't mean to say that you came after me in spite of all?"

I explained everything to him: how I had found it impossible to remain behind, how I had followed him, and how I had witnessed all that had occurred. For an instant his eyes blazed at me, but my frankness disarmed his anger, and he broke at last into a rather rueful laugh.

"You would have thought the middle of that prairie a fairly safe place for a man to be private," said he, "but, by thunder, the whole country-side seems to have been out to see me do my wooing—and a mighty poor wooing at that! Where had you engaged a seat?"

"I was on that hill."

"Quite in the back row, eh? But her brother was well up to the front. Did you see him come out on us?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did he ever strike you as being crazy—this brother of hers?"

"I can't say that he ever did."

"I dare say not. I always thought him sane enough until to-day, but you can take it from me that either he or I ought to be in a strait-jacket. What's the matter with me, anyhow? You've lived near me for some weeks, Watson. Tell me straight, now! Is there anything that would prevent me from making a good husband to a woman that I loved?"

"I should say not."

"He can't object to my worldly position, so it must be myself that he has this down on. What has he against me? I never hurt man or woman in my life that I know of. And yet he

would not so much as let me touch the tips of her fingers.”

“Did he say so?”

“That, and a deal more. I tell you, Watson, I’ve only known her these few weeks, but from the first I just felt that she was made for me, and she, too—she was happy when she was with me, and that I’ll swear. There’s a light in a woman’s eyes that speaks louder than words. But he has never let us get together, and it was only to-day for the first time that I saw a chance of having a few words with her alone. She was glad to meet me, but when she did it was not love that she would talk about, and she wouldn’t have let me talk about it either if she could have stopped it. She kept coming back to it that this was a place of danger, and that she would never be happy until I had left it. I told her that since I had seen her I was in no hurry to leave it, and that if she really wanted me to go, the only way to work it was for her to arrange to go with me. With that I offered in as many words to marry her, but before she could answer, down came this brother of hers, running at us with a face on him like a madman. He was just white with rage, and those light eyes of his were blazing with fury. What was I doing with the lady? How dared I offer her attentions which were distasteful to her? Did I think that because I was a baronet I could do what I liked? If he had not been her brother I should have known better how to answer him. As it was I told him that my feelings towards his sister were such as I was not ashamed of, and that I hoped that she might honour me by becoming my wife. That seemed to make the matter no better, so then I lost my temper too, and I answered him rather more hotly than I should perhaps, considering that she was standing by. So it ended by his going off with her, as you saw, and here am I as badly puzzled a man as any in this county. Just tell me what it all means, Watson, and I’ll owe you more than ever I can hope to pay.”

I tried one or two explanations, but, indeed, I was completely puzzled myself. Our friend’s title, his fortune, his age, his character, and his appearance are all in his favour, and I know nothing against him unless it be this dark fate which runs in his family. That his advances should be rejected so brusquely without any

reference to the lady’s own wishes, and that the lady should accept the situation without protest, is very amazing. However, our conjectures were set at rest by a visit from Stapleton himself that very afternoon. He had come to offer apologies for his rudeness of the morning, and after a long private interview with Sir Henry in his study, the upshot of their conversation was that the breach is quite healed, and that we are to dine at Merripit House next Friday as a sign of it.

“I don’t say now that he isn’t a crazy man,” said Sir Henry; “I can’t forget the look in his eyes when he ran at me this morning, but I must allow that no man could make a more handsome apology than he has done.”

“Did he give any explanation of his conduct?”

“His sister is everything in his life, he says. That is natural enough, and I am glad that he should understand her value. They have always been together, and according to his account he has been a very lonely man with only her as a companion, so that the thought of losing her was really terrible to him. He had not understood, he said, that I was becoming attached to her, but when he saw with his own eyes that it was really so, and that she might be taken away from him, it gave him such a shock that for a time he was not responsible for what he said or did. He was very sorry for all that had passed, and he recognized how foolish and how selfish it was that he should imagine that he could hold a beautiful woman like his sister to himself for her whole life. If she had to leave him he had rather it was to a neighbour like myself than to anyone else. But in any case it was a blow to him, and it would take him some time before he could prepare himself to meet it. He would withdraw all opposition upon his part if I would promise for three months to let the matter rest and to be content with cultivating the lady’s friendship during that time without claiming her love. This I promised, and so the matter rests.”

So there is one of our small mysteries cleared up. It is something to have touched bottom anywhere in this bog in which we are floundering. We know now why Stapleton looked with disfavour upon his sister’s suitor—even when that suitor was so eligible a one as Sir Henry. And now I pass on to another thread which I have

extricated out of the tangled skein, the mystery of the sobs in the night, of the tear-stained face of Mrs. Barrymore, of the secret journey of the butler to the western lattice window. Congratulate me, my dear Holmes, and tell me that I have not disappointed you as an agent—that you do not regret the confidence which you showed in me when you sent me down. All these things have by one night's work been thoroughly cleared.

I have said “by one night's work,” but, in truth, it was by two nights' work, for on the first we drew entirely blank. I sat up with Sir Henry in his rooms until nearly three o'clock in the morning, but no sound of any sort did we hear except the chiming clock upon the stairs. It was a most melancholy vigil, and ended by each of us falling asleep in our chairs. Fortunately we were not discouraged, and we determined to try again. The next night we lowered the lamp, and sat smoking cigarettes without making the least sound. It was incredible how slowly the hours crawled by, and yet we were helped through it by the same sort of patient interest which the hunter must feel as he watches the trap into which he hopes the game may wander. One struck, and two, and we had almost for the second time given it up in despair, when in an instant we both sat bolt upright in our chairs, with all our weary senses keenly on the alert once more. We had heard the creak of a step in the passage.

Very stealthily we heard it pass along until it died away in the distance. Then the baronet gently opened his door and we set out in pursuit. Already our man had gone round the gallery, and the corridor was all in darkness. Softly we stole along until we had come into the other wing. We were just in time to catch a glimpse of the tall, black-bearded figure, his shoulders rounded, as he tip-toed down the passage. Then he passed through the same door as before, and the light of the candle framed it in the darkness and shot one single yellow beam across the gloom of the corridor. We shuffled cautiously towards it, trying every plank before we dared to put our whole weight upon it. We had taken the precaution of leaving our boots behind us, but, even so, the old boards snapped and creaked beneath our tread. Sometimes it seemed impossible that he should fail to hear our approach. However, the

man is fortunately rather deaf, and he was entirely preoccupied in that which he was doing. When at last we reached the door and peeped through we found him crouching at the window, candle in hand, his white, intent face pressed against the pane, exactly as I had seen him two nights before.

We had arranged no plan of campaign, but the baronet is a man to whom the most direct way is always the most natural. He walked into the room, and as he did so Barrymore sprang up from the window with a sharp hiss of his breath and stood, livid and trembling, before us. His dark eyes, glaring out of the white mask of his face, were full of horror and astonishment as he gazed from Sir Henry to me.

“What are you doing here, Barrymore?”

“Nothing, sir.” His agitation was so great that he could hardly speak, and the shadows sprang up and down from the shaking of his candle. “It was the window, sir. I go round at night to see that they are fastened.”

“On the second floor?”

“Yes, sir, all the windows.”

“Look here, Barrymore,” said Sir Henry, sternly; “we have made up our minds to have the truth out of you, so it will save you trouble to tell it sooner rather than later. Come, now! No lies! What were you doing at that window?”

The fellow looked at us in a helpless way, and he wrung his hands together like one who is in the last extremity of doubt and misery.

“I was doing no harm, sir. I was holding a candle to the window.”

“And why were you holding a candle to the window?”

“Don't ask me, Sir Henry—don't ask me! I give you my word, sir, that it is not my secret, and that I cannot tell it. If it concerned no one but myself I would not try to keep it from you.”

A sudden idea occurred to me, and I took the candle from the trembling hand of the butler.

“He must have been holding it as a signal,” said I. “Let us see if there is any answer.” I held it as he had done, and stared out into the darkness of the night. Vaguely I could discern the black bank of the trees and the lighter expanse of the moor, for the moon was behind the clouds. And then I gave a cry of exultation, for a tiny pinpoint of yellow light had suddenly transfixed the

dark veil, and glowed steadily in the centre of the black square framed by the window.

"There it is!" I cried.

"No, no, sir, it is nothing—nothing at all!" the butler broke in; "I assure you, sir—"

"Move your light across the window, Watson!" cried the baronet. "See, the other moves also! Now, you rascal, do you deny that it is a signal? Come, speak up! Who is your confederate out yonder, and what is this conspiracy that is going on?"

The man's face became openly defiant.

"It is my business, and not yours. I will not tell."

"Then you leave my employment right away."

"Very good, sir. If I must I must."

"And you go in disgrace. By thunder, you may well be ashamed of yourself. Your family has lived with mine for over a hundred years under this roof, and here I find you deep in some dark plot against me."

"No, no, sir; no, not against you!" It was a woman's voice, and Mrs. Barrymore, paler and more horror-struck than her husband, was standing at the door. Her bulky figure in a shawl and skirt might have been comic were it not for the intensity of feeling upon her face.

"We have to go, Eliza. This is the end of it. You can pack our things," said the butler.

"Oh, John, John, have I brought you to this? It is my doing, Sir Henry—all mine. He has done nothing except for my sake and because I asked him."

"Speak out, then! What does it mean?"

"My unhappy brother is starving on the moor. We cannot let him perish at our very gates. The light is a signal to him that food is ready for him, and his light out yonder is to show the spot to which to bring it."

"Then your brother is—"

"The escaped convict, sir—Selden, the criminal."

"That's the truth, sir," said Barrymore. "I said that it was not my secret and that I could not tell it to you. But now you have heard it, and you will see that if there was a plot it was not against you."

This, then, was the explanation of the

stealthy expeditions at night and the light at the window. Sir Henry and I both stared at the woman in amazement. Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?

"Yes, sir, my name was Selden, and he is my younger brother. We humoured him too much when he was a lad, and gave him his own way in everything until he came to think that the world was made for his pleasure, and that he could do what he liked in it. Then as he grew older he met wicked companions, and the devil entered into him until he broke my mother's heart and dragged our name in the dirt. From crime to crime he sank lower and lower, until it is only the mercy of God which has snatched him from the scaffold; but to me, sir, he was always the little curly-headed boy that I had nursed and played with, as an elder sister would. That was why he broke prison, sir. He knew that I was here and that we could not refuse to help him. When he dragged himself here one night, weary and starving, with the warders hard at his heels, what could we do? We took him in and fed him and cared for him. Then you returned, sir, and my brother thought he would be safer on the moor than anywhere else until the hue and cry was over, so he lay in hiding there. But every second night we made sure if he was still there by putting a light in the window, and if there was an answer my husband took out some bread and meat to him. Every day we hoped that he was gone, but as long as he was there we could not desert him. That is the whole truth, as I am an honest Christian woman, and you will see that if there is blame in the matter it does not lie with my husband, but with me, for whose sake he has done all that he has."

The woman's words came with an intense earnestness which carried conviction with them.

"Is this true, Barrymore?"

"Yes, Sir Henry. Every word of it."

"Well, I cannot blame you for standing by your own wife. Forget what I have said. Go to your room, you two, and we shall talk further about this matter in the morning."

When they were gone we looked out of the window again. Sir Henry had flung it open, and the cold night wind beat in upon our faces. Far away in the black distance there still glowed

that one tiny point of yellow light.

“I wonder he dares,” said Sir Henry.

“It may be so placed as to be only visible from here.”

“Very likely. How far do you think it is?”

“Out by the Cleft Tor, I think.”

“Not more than a mile or two off.”

“Hardly that.”

“Well, it cannot be far if Barrymore had to carry out the food to it. And he is waiting, this villain, beside that candle. By thunder, Watson, I am going out to take that man!”

The same thought had crossed my own mind. It was not as if the Barrymores had taken us into their confidence. Their secret had been forced from them. The man was a danger to the community, an unmitigated scoundrel for whom there was neither pity nor excuse. We were only doing our duty in taking this chance of putting him back where he could do no harm. With his brutal and violent nature, others would have to pay the price if we held our hands. Any night, for example, our neighbours the Stapletons might be attacked by him, and it may have been the thought of this which made Sir Henry so keen upon the adventure.

“I will come,” said I.

“Then get your revolver and put on your boots. The sooner we start the better, as the fellow may put out his light and be off.”

In five minutes we were outside the door, starting upon our expedition. We hurried through the dark shrubbery, amid the dull moaning of the autumn wind and the rustle of the falling leaves. The night air was heavy with the smell of damp and decay. Now and again the moon peeped out for an instant, but clouds were driving over the face of the sky, and just as we came out on the moor a thin rain began to fall. The light still burned steadily in front.

“Are you armed?” I asked.

“I have a hunting-crop.”

“We must close in on him rapidly, for he is said to be a desperate fellow. We shall take him by surprise and have him at our mercy before he can resist.”

“I say, Watson,” said the baronet, “what would Holmes say to this? How about that hour of darkness in which the power of evil is exalted?”

As if in answer to his words there rose suddenly out of the vast gloom of the moor that strange cry which I had already heard upon the borders of the great Grimpen Mire. It came with the wind through the silence of the night, a long, deep mutter, then a rising howl, and then the sad moan in which it died away. Again and again it sounded, the whole air throbbing with it, strident, wild, and menacing. The baronet caught my sleeve and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

“My God, what’s that, Watson?”

“I don’t know. It’s a sound they have on the moor. I heard it once before.”

It died away, and an absolute silence closed in upon us. We stood straining our ears, but nothing came.

“Watson,” said the baronet, “it was the cry of a hound.”

My blood ran cold in my veins, for there was a break in his voice which told of the sudden horror which had seized him.

“What do they call this sound?” he asked.

“Who?”

“The folk on the country-side.”

“Oh, they are ignorant people. Why should you mind what they call it?”

“Tell me, Watson. What do they say of it?”

I hesitated but could not escape the question.

“They say it is the cry of the Hound of the Baskervilles.”

He groaned and was silent for a few moments.

“A hound it was,” he said, at last, “but it seemed to come from miles away, over yonder, I think.”

“It was hard to say whence it came.”

“It rose and fell with the wind. Isn’t that the direction of the great Grimpen Mire?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Well, it was up there. Come now, Watson, didn’t you think yourself that it was the cry of a hound? I am not a child. You need not fear to speak the truth.”

“Stapleton was with me when I heard it last. He said that it might be the calling of a strange bird.”

“No, no, it was a hound. My God, can there be some truth in all these stories? Is it possible that I am really in danger from so dark a cause? You don’t believe it, do you, Watson?”

“No, no.”

“And yet it was one thing to laugh about it in London, and it is another to stand out here in the darkness of the moor and to hear such a cry as that. And my uncle! There was the footprint of the hound beside him as he lay. It all fits together. I don’t think that I am a coward, Watson, but that sound seemed to freeze my very blood. Feel my hand!”

It was as cold as a block of marble.

“You’ll be all right to-morrow.”

“I don’t think I’ll get that cry out of my head. What do you advise that we do now?”

“Shall we turn back?”

“No, by thunder; we have come out to get our man, and we will do it. We after the convict, and a hell-hound, as likely as not, after us. Come on! We’ll see it through if all the fiends of the pit were loose upon the moor.”

We stumbled slowly along in the darkness, with the black loom of the craggy hills around us, and the yellow speck of light burning steadily in front. There is nothing so deceptive as the distance of a light upon a pitch-dark night, and sometimes the glimmer seemed to be far away upon the horizon and sometimes it might have been within a few yards of us. But at last we could see whence it came, and then we knew that we were indeed very close. A guttering candle was stuck in a crevice of the rocks which flanked it on each side so as to keep the wind from it and also to prevent it from being visible, save in the direction of Baskerville Hall. A boulder of granite concealed our approach, and crouching behind it we gazed over it at the signal light. It was strange to see this single candle burning there in the middle of the moor, with no sign of life near it—just the one straight yellow flame and the gleam of the rock on each side of it.

“What shall we do now?” whispered Sir Henry.

“Wait here. He must be near his light. Let us see if we can get a glimpse of him.”

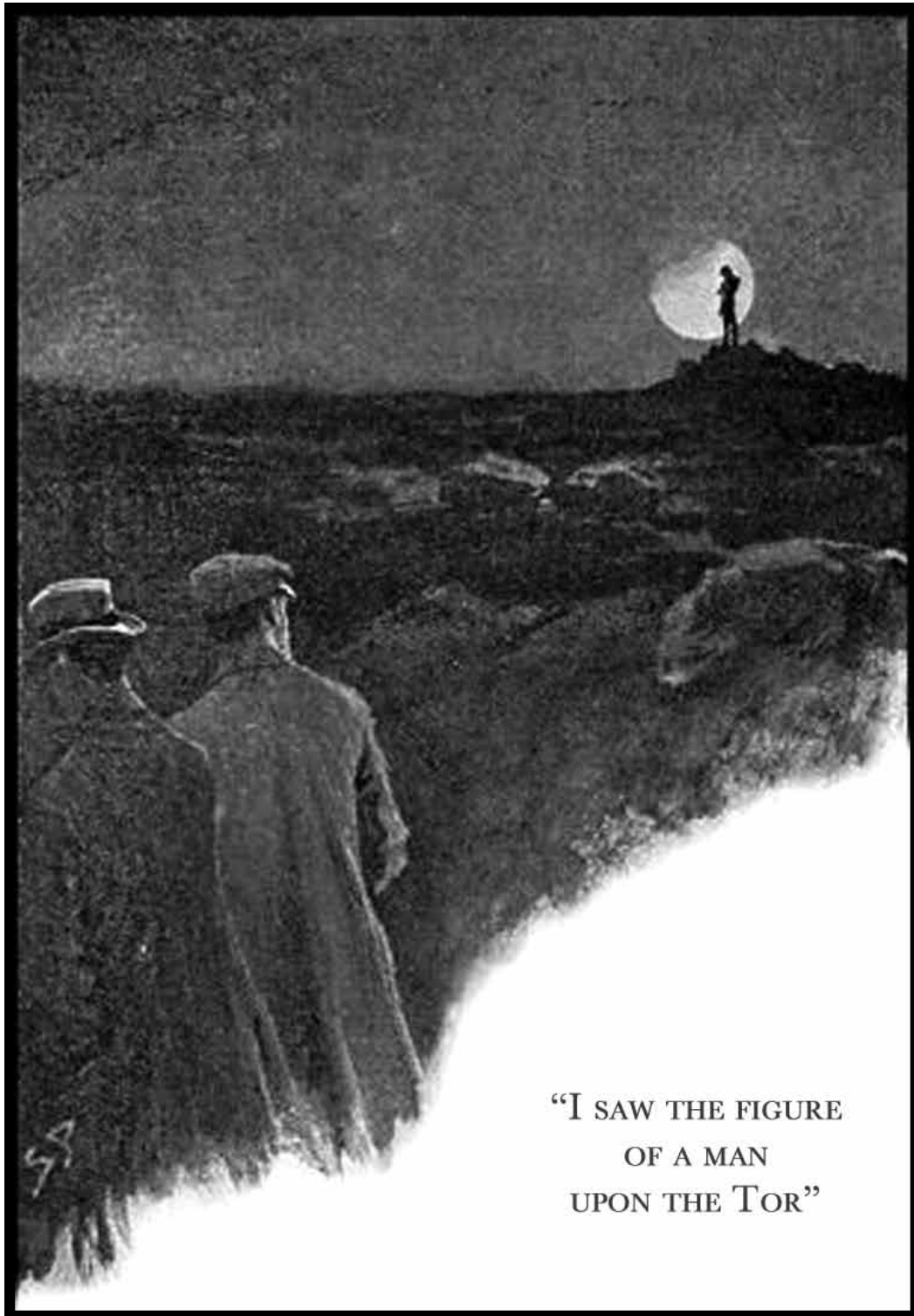
The words were hardly out of my mouth when we both saw him. Over the rocks, in the

crevice of which the candle burned, there was thrust out an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hillsides. The light beneath him was reflected in his small, cunning eyes which peered fiercely to right and left through the darkness, like a crafty and savage animal who has heard the steps of the hunters.

Something had evidently aroused his suspicions. It may have been that Barrymore had some private signal which we had neglected to give, or the fellow may have had some other reason for thinking that all was not well, but I could read his fears upon his wicked face. Any instant he might dash out the light and vanish in the darkness. I sprang forward therefore, and Sir Henry did the same. At the same moment the convict screamed out a curse at us and hurled a rock which splintered up against the boulder which had sheltered us. I caught one glimpse of his short, squat, strongly-built figure as he sprang to his feet and turned to run. At the same moment by a lucky chance the moon broke through the clouds. We rushed over the brow of the hill, and there was our man running with great speed down the other side, springing over the stones in his way with the activity of a mountain goat. A lucky long shot of my revolver might have crippled him, but I had brought it only to defend myself if attacked, and not to shoot an unarmed man who was running away.

We were both swift runners and in fairly good training, but we soon found that we had no chance of overtaking him. We saw him for a long time in the moonlight until he was only a small speck moving swiftly among the boulders upon the side of a distant hill. We ran and ran until we were completely blown, but the space between us grew ever wider. Finally we stopped and sat panting on two rocks, while we watched him disappearing in the distance.

And it was at this moment that there occurred a most strange and unexpected thing. We had risen from our rocks and were turning to go home, having abandoned the hopeless chase. The moon was low upon the right, and the jagged



Sidney Paget

pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining background, I saw the figure of a man upon the tor. Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes. I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay before him. He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. It was not the convict. This man was far from the place where the latter had disappeared. Besides, he was a much taller man. With a cry of surprise I pointed him out to the baronet, but in the instant during which I had turned to grasp his arm the man was gone. There was the sharp pinnacle of granite still cutting the lower edge of the moon, but its peak bore no trace of that silent and motionless figure.

I wished to go in that direction and to search the tor, but it was some distance away. The baronet's nerves were still quivering from that cry, which recalled the dark story of his family, and he was not in the mood for fresh adventures. He had not seen this lonely man upon the tor and could not feel the thrill which his strange presence and his commanding attitude had given to me. "A warder, no doubt," said he. "The moor has been thick with them since this fellow escaped." Well, perhaps his explanation may be the right one, but I should like to have some further proof of it. Today we mean to communicate to the Princetown people where they should look for their missing man, but it is hard lines that we have not actually had the triumph of bringing him back as our own prisoner. Such are the adventures of last night, and you must acknowledge, my dear Holmes, that I have done you very well in the matter of a report. Much of what I tell you is no doubt quite irrelevant, but still I feel that it is best that I should let you have all the facts and leave you to select for yourself those which will be of most service to you in helping you to your conclusions. We are certainly making some progress. So far as the Barrymores go we have found the motive of their actions, and that has cleared up the situation very much. But the moor with its mysteries and

its strange inhabitants remains as inscrutable as ever. Perhaps in my next I may be able to throw some light upon this also. Best of all would it be if you could come down to us. In any case you will hear from me again in the course of the next few days.

* * * * *

Chapter X.

Extract from the Diary of Dr. Watson

So far I have been able to quote from the reports which I have forwarded during these early days to Sherlock Holmes. Now, however, I have arrived at a point in my narrative where I am compelled to abandon this method and to trust once more to my recollections, aided by the diary which I kept at the time. A few extracts from the latter will carry me on to those scenes which are indelibly fixed in every detail upon my memory. I proceed, then, from the morning which followed our abortive chase of the convict and our other strange experiences upon the moor.

October 16th.—A dull and foggy day with a drizzle of rain. The house is banked in with rolling clouds, which rise now and then to show the dreary curves of the moor, with thin, silver veins upon the sides of the hills, and the distant boulders gleaming where the light strikes upon their wet faces. It is melancholy outside and in. The baronet is in a black reaction after the excitements of the night. I am conscious myself of a weight at my heart and a feeling of impending danger—ever present danger, which is the more terrible because I am unable to define it.

And have I not cause for such a feeling? Consider the long sequence of incidents which have all pointed to some sinister influence which is at work around us. There is the death of the last occupant of the Hall, fulfilling so exactly the conditions of the family legend, and there are the repeated reports from peasants of the appearance of a strange creature upon the moor. Twice I have with my own ears heard the sound which resembled the distant baying of a hound. It is incredible, impossible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of nature. A spectral

hound which leaves material footmarks and fills the air with its howling is surely not to be thought of. Stapleton may fall in with such a superstition, and Mortimer also; but if I have one quality upon earth it is common sense, and nothing will persuade me to believe in such a thing. To do so would be to descend to the level of these poor peasants, who are not content with a mere fiend dog but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes. Holmes would not listen to such fancies, and I am his agent. But facts are facts, and I have twice heard this crying upon the moor. Suppose that there were really some huge hound loose upon it; that would go far to explain everything. But where could such a hound lie concealed, where did it get its food, where did it come from, how was it that no one saw it by day? It must be confessed that the natural explanation offers almost as many difficulties as the other. And always, apart from the hound, there is the fact of the human agency in London, the man in the cab, and the letter which warned Sir Henry against the moor. This at least was real, but it might have been the work of a protecting friend as easily as of an enemy. Where is that friend or enemy now? Has he remained in London, or has he followed us down here? Could he—could he be the stranger whom I saw upon the tor?

It is true that I have had only the one glance at him, and yet there are some things to which I am ready to swear. He is no one whom I have seen down here, and I have now met all the neighbours. The figure was far taller than that of Stapleton, far thinner than that of Frankland. Barrymore it might possibly have been, but we had left him behind us, and I am certain that he could not have followed us. A stranger then is still dogging us, just as a stranger dogged us in London. We have never shaken him off. If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties. To this one purpose I must now devote all my energies.

My first impulse was to tell Sir Henry all my plans. My second and wisest one is to play my own game and speak as little as possible to anyone. He is silent and distraught. His nerves have been strangely shaken by that sound upon the moor. I will say nothing to add to his anxieties,

but I will take my own steps to attain my own end.

We had a small scene this morning after breakfast. Barrymore asked leave to speak with Sir Henry, and they were closeted in his study some little time. Sitting in the billiard-room I more than once heard the sound of voices raised, and I had a pretty good idea what the point was which was under discussion. After a time the baronet opened his door and called for me.

“Barrymore considers that he has a grievance,” he said. “He thinks that it was unfair on our part to hunt his brother-in-law down when he, of his own free will, had told us the secret.”

The butler was standing very pale but very collected before us.

“I may have spoken too warmly, sir,” said he, “and if I have, I am sure that I beg your pardon. At the same time, I was very much surprised when I heard you two gentlemen come back this morning and learned that you had been chasing Selden. The poor fellow has enough to fight against without my putting more upon his track.”

“If you had told us of your own free will it would have been a different thing,” said the baronet, “you only told us, or rather your wife only told us, when it was forced from you and you could not help yourself.”

“I didn’t think you would have taken advantage of it, Sir Henry—indeed I didn’t.”

“The man is a public danger. There are lonely houses scattered over the moor, and he is a fellow who would stick at nothing. You only want to get a glimpse of his face to see that. Look at Mr. Stapleton’s house, for example, with no one but himself to defend it. There’s no safety for anyone until he is under lock and key.”

“He’ll break into no house, sir. I give you my solemn word upon that. But he will never trouble anyone in this country again. I assure you, Sir Henry, that in a very few days the necessary arrangements will have been made and he will be on his way to South America. For God’s sake, sir, I beg of you not to let the police know that he is still on the moor. They have given up the chase there, and he can lie quiet until the ship is ready for him. You can’t tell on him without getting my wife and me into trouble. I beg you, sir, to say

nothing to the police.”

“What do you say, Watson?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “If he were safely out of the country it would relieve the taxpayer of a burden.”

“But how about the chance of his holding someone up before he goes?”

“He would not do anything so mad, sir. We have provided him with all that he can want. To commit a crime would be to show where he was hiding.”

“That is true,” said Sir Henry. “Well, Barrymore—”

“God bless you, sir, and thank you from my heart! It would have killed my poor wife had he been taken again.”

“I guess we are aiding and abetting a felony, Watson? But, after what we have heard I don’t feel as if I could give the man up, so there is an end of it. All right, Barrymore, you can go.”

With a few broken words of gratitude the man turned, but he hesitated and then came back.

“You’ve been so kind to us, sir, that I should like to do the best I can for you in return. I know something, Sir Henry, and perhaps I should have said it before, but it was long after the inquest that I found it out. I’ve never breathed a word about it yet to mortal man. It’s about poor Sir Charles’s death.”

The baronet and I were both upon our feet. “Do you know how he died?”

“No, sir, I don’t know that.”

“What then?”

“I know why he was at the gate at that hour. It was to meet a woman.”

“To meet a woman! He?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And the woman’s name?”

“I can’t give you the name, sir, but I can give you the initials. Her initials were L. L.”

“How do you know this, Barrymore?”

“Well, Sir Henry, your uncle had a letter that morning. He had usually a great many letters, for he was a public man and well known for his kind heart, so that everyone who was in trouble was glad to turn to him. But that morning, as it chanced, there was only this one letter, so I took the more notice of it. It was from Coombe Tracey, and it was addressed in a woman’s hand.”

“Well?”

“Well, sir, I thought no more of the matter, and never would have done had it not been for my wife. Only a few weeks ago she was cleaning out Sir Charles’s study—it had never been touched since his death—and she found the ashes of a burned letter in the back of the grate. The greater part of it was charred to pieces, but one little slip, the end of a page, hung together, and the writing could still be read, though it was gray on a black ground. It seemed to us to be a postscript at the end of the letter, and it said: ‘Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o’clock.’ Beneath it were signed the initials L. L.”

“Have you got that slip?”

“No, sir, it crumbled all to bits after we moved it.”

“Had Sir Charles received any other letters in the same writing?”

“Well, sir, I took no particular notice of his letters. I should not have noticed this one, only it happened to come alone.”

“And you have no idea who L. L. is?”

“No, sir. No more than you have. But I expect if we could lay our hands upon that lady we should know more about Sir Charles’s death.”

“I cannot understand, Barrymore, how you came to conceal this important information.”

“Well, sir, it was immediately after that our own trouble came to us. And then again, sir, we were both of us very fond of Sir Charles, as we well might be considering all that he has done for us. To rake this up couldn’t help our poor master, and it’s well to go carefully when there’s a lady in the case. Even the best of us—”

“You thought it might injure his reputation?”

“Well, sir, I thought no good could come of it. But now you have been kind to us, and I feel as if it would be treating you unfairly not to tell you all that I know about the matter.”

“Very good, Barrymore; you can go.” When the butler had left us Sir Henry turned to me. “Well, Watson, what do you think of this new light?”

“It seems to leave the darkness rather blacker than before.”

“So I think. But if we can only trace L.

L. it should clear up the whole business. We have gained that much. We know that there is someone who has the facts if we can only find her. What do you think we should do?"

"Let Holmes know all about it at once. It will give him the clue for which he has been seeking. I am much mistaken if it does not bring him down."

I went at once to my room and drew up my report of the morning's conversation for Holmes. It was evident to me that he had been very busy of late, for the notes which I had from Baker Street were few and short, with no comments upon the information which I had supplied and hardly any reference to my mission. No doubt his blackmailing case is absorbing all his faculties. And yet this new factor must surely arrest his attention and renew his interest. I wish that he were here.

October 17th.—All day to-day the rain poured down, rustling on the ivy and dripping from the eaves. I thought of the convict out upon the bleak, cold, shelterless moor. Poor devil! Whatever his crimes, he has suffered something to atone for them. And then I thought of that other one—the face in the cab, the figure against the moon. Was he also out in that deluge—the unseen watcher, the man of darkness? In the evening I put on my waterproof and I walked far upon the sodden moor, full of dark imaginings, the rain beating upon my face and the wind whistling about my ears. God help those who wander into the great mire now, for even the firm uplands are becoming a morass. I found the black tor upon which I had seen the solitary watcher, and from its craggy summit I looked out myself across the melancholy downs. Rain squalls drifted across their russet face, and the heavy, slate-coloured clouds hung low over the landscape, trailing in gray wreaths down the sides of the fantastic hills. In the distant hollow on the left, half hidden by the mist, the two thin towers of Baskerville Hall rose above the trees. They were the only signs of human life which I could see, save only those prehistoric huts which lay thickly upon the slopes of the hills. Nowhere was there any trace of that lonely man whom I had seen on the same spot two nights before.

As I walked back I was overtaken by Dr. Mortimer driving in his dog-cart over a rough moorland track which led from the outlying farmhouse of Foulmire. He has been very attentive to us, and hardly a day has passed that he has not called at the Hall to see how we were getting on. He insisted upon my climbing into his dog-cart, and he gave me a lift homeward. I found him much troubled over the disappearance of his little spaniel. It had wandered on to the moor and had never come back. I gave him such consolation as I might, but I thought of the pony on the Grimpen Mire, and I do not fancy that he will see his little dog again.

"By the way, Mortimer," said I as we jolted along the rough road, "I suppose there are few people living within driving distance of this whom you do not know?"

"Hardly any, I think."

"Can you, then, tell me the name of any woman whose initials are L. L.?"

He thought for a few minutes.

"No," said he. "There are a few gipsies and labouring folk for whom I can't answer, but among the farmers or gentry there is no one whose initials are those. Wait a bit though," he added after a pause. "There is Laura Lyons—her initials are L. L.—but she lives in Coombe Tracey."

"Who is she?" I asked.

"She is Frankland's daughter."

"What! Old Frankland the crank?"

"Exactly. She married an artist named Lyons, who came sketching on the moor. He proved to be a blackguard and deserted her. The fault from what I hear may not have been entirely on one side. Her father refused to have anything to do with her because she had married without his consent, and perhaps for one or two other reasons as well. So, between the old sinner and the young one the girl has had a pretty bad time."

"How does she live?"

"I fancy old Frankland allows her a pittance, but it cannot be more, for his own affairs are considerably involved. Whatever she may have deserved one could not allow her to go hopelessly to the bad. Her story got about, and several of the people here did something to enable her to earn an honest living. Stapleton did for one, and Sir Charles for another. I gave a trifle myself. It was to

set her up in a typewriting business.”

He wanted to know the object of my inquiries, but I managed to satisfy his curiosity without telling him too much, for there is no reason why we should take anyone into our confidence. Tomorrow morning I shall find my way to Coombe Tracey, and if I can see this Mrs. Laura Lyons, of equivocal reputation, a long step will have been made towards clearing one incident in this chain of mysteries. I am certainly developing the wisdom of the serpent, for when Mortimer pressed his questions to an inconvenient extent I asked him casually to what type Frankland’s skull belonged, and so heard nothing but craniology for the rest of our drive. I have not lived for years with Sherlock Holmes for nothing.

I have only one other incident to record upon this tempestuous and melancholy day. This was my conversation with Barrymore just now, which gives me one more strong card which I can play in due time.

Mortimer had stayed to dinner, and he and the baronet played *écarté* afterwards. The butler brought me my coffee into the library, and I took the chance to ask him a few questions.

“Well,” said I, “has this precious relation of yours departed, or is he still lurking out yonder?”

“I don’t know, sir. I hope to heaven that he has gone, for he has brought nothing but trouble here! I’ve not heard of him since I left out food for him last, and that was three days ago.”

“Did you see him then?”

“No, sir, but the food was gone when next I went that way.”

“Then he was certainly there?”

“So you would think, sir, unless it was the other man who took it.” I sat with my coffee-cup halfway to my lips and stared at Barrymore.

“You know that there is another man then?”

“Yes, sir; there is another man upon the moor.”

“Have you seen him?”

“No, sir.”

“How do you know of him then?”

“Selden told me of him, sir, a week ago or more. He’s in hiding, too, but he’s not a convict as

far as I can make out. I don’t like it, Dr. Watson—I tell you straight, sir, that I don’t like it.” He spoke with a sudden passion of earnestness.

“Now, listen to me, Barrymore! I have no interest in this matter but that of your master. I have come here with no object except to help him. Tell me, frankly, what it is that you don’t like.”

Barrymore hesitated for a moment, as if he regretted his outburst, or found it difficult to express his own feelings in words.

“It’s all these goings-on, sir,” he cried at last, waving his hand towards the rain-lashed window which faced the moor. “There’s foul play somewhere, and there’s black villainy brewing, to that I’ll swear! Very glad I should be, sir, to see Sir Henry on his way back to London again!”

“But what is it that alarms you?”

“Look at Sir Charles’s death! That was bad enough, for all that the coroner said. Look at the noises on the moor at night. There’s not a man would cross it after sundown if he was paid for it. Look at this stranger hiding out yonder, and watching and waiting! What’s he waiting for? What does it mean? It means no good to anyone of the name of Baskerville, and very glad I shall be to be quit of it all on the day that Sir Henry’s new servants are ready to take over the Hall.”

“But about this stranger,” said I. “Can you tell me anything about him? What did Selden say? Did he find out where he hid, or what he was doing?”

“He saw him once or twice, but he is a deep one, and gives nothing away. At first he thought that he was the police, but soon he found that he had some lay of his own. A kind of gentleman he was, as far as he could see, but what he was doing he could not make out.”

“And where did he say that he lived?”

“Among the old houses on the hillside—the stone huts where the old folk used to live.”

“But how about his food?”

“Selden found out that he has got a lad who works for him and brings him all he needs. I dare say he goes to Coombe Tracey for what he wants.”

“Very good, Barrymore. We may talk further of this some other time.” When the butler had gone I walked over to the black window, and I looked through a blurred pane at the driving

clouds and at the tossing outline of the wind-swept trees. It is a wild night indoors, and what must it be in a stone hut upon the moor. What passion of hatred can it be which leads a man to lurk in such a place at such a time! And what deep and earnest purpose can he have which calls for such a trial! There, in that hut upon the moor, seems to lie the very centre of that problem which has vexed me so sorely. I swear that another day shall not have passed before I have done all that man can do to reach the heart of the mystery.

To be continued in Cenacle | 127 | April 2025

* * * * *



Sidney Paget



Bags End Book #22: Uniting the Six Islands Part 1

This story and more Bags End Books
can be found at:
scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

Uniting the Six Islands?

Your old Beagleboy journalist pal Algernon Beagle is grateful 4or many things in this big strange world. It's good to say them & write them down 4or all to see sometimes.

I guess one big thing to say is that I am grateful to be living in mah homeland called Bags End. I'm not really too sure where I come from originally. I think there was mah Beagle body of bones & fur be4ore there was a me filling it up with mah weird words & ways. And then there was all of me from then on, but I wasn't in Bags End yet. I am grateful mah dearly beloved Mommy Beagle & just as much dearly loved Princess Crissy got me to here. I can't say why, but crazy old Bags End fits me perfectly. I don't always understand it, but I get it. Something like that.

Bags End News
 No. 435 September 23, 2017
 Editor: Algenon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny
 Apprentice: Willy Nilly Froggy

Uniting the 6 Islands?

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Bags End News
 No. 436 September 30, 2017
 Editor: Algenon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny
 Apprentice: Willy Nilly Froggy

I'm thee Liberry with
 Lorey Buny & Willy Nilly!

Mah beloved newz papr haz
 for mosst of itz history beene
 mee & mah jeer friend's doord
 sistr Lorey B
 beegelboye je
 too so out
 & Lorey help
 all rited
 newz papr fo
 Nothe re
 thee weyez
 I kam fell
 nitz itt howe
 that in klood
 Wuns in

Bags End News
 No. 437 October 7, 2017
 Editor: Algenon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny
 Apprentice: Willy Nilly Froggy

^{Secret}
 Seeking Wiz Wizdums inn
 Thad Kreechur Komon!

Mah Apprentiss Reports Willy
 Nilly hadd travelld from mah
 homeland of Barend to his
 homeland of Kreechur Komon
 inn Serch of Secret Wiz Wizdums
 that wood help us lern about
 thee 6 Islands that mah friend
 Princess Cressy wantid united agan.
 I didnt ~~know~~ knowe iff wun veteren
 beegelboye journalist & hiss still priny
 rocky Apprentiss. cood make itt happen
 Roadway not. ^{trytoo?}
 But wee cood find out whatt
 hadd hapend too make thoz Islands
 speak & jee each othr lik skerted

I am happy Miss Chris was here to take me in & be mah local people-folks, & her Toy Tall Boy Ramie too. And mah adopted Bunny Family of Pat & Pete & Sheila & Lori & Sharon & Petey too. Even mah own other family of Alexander Puppy & mah crazed relatives Alice & Doctor Horatio Algernon.

Well, this is the kind of list where a guy's heartbone gets all worked up, & soon I'm even putting Betsy Bunny Pillow & Leo the Dark Man & Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow on it. And all the places nearer like Imagianna & Dreamland & the White Woods, & farther ones like Oz & Hundred Acre Wood & Fraggles Rock.

So I guess really honestly, if you're reading this beloved newspaper of mine, also on the list, I am giving you a kind pat on your noggin or whatever, & saying thank you.

But is there some point to all this nice mushiness? I guess it's a question, & a hard one at that, & one I've been thinking about since near to the last issue of this newspaper.

Where does all this, all these nice & strange guys & words & ideas come from? How did all of us get here? I am sure glad we did but, still, how?

Your old pal Algernon is not always prone to thinking such big questions. I usually keep to the smaller ones since I don't always even get answers for those.

But it was near to the end of that wonderful Royal Thumbs Production, "Welcome to X's Carnival of Mysteries & Wonders!" which I rited all about in Bags End Book #21: What is the Creature Carnival?, that I was with mah dear friend Princess Crissy in her Castle's Royal Throne Room, & she said to us gathered there, including her bestus buddy Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, & those nice Creature Common guys CC & Willy Nilly Froggy, & the Royal Thumbs, & the tiny Thought Fleas from the White Woods, that she wanted to unite the Six Islands.

Now she didn't have more to say about it, she can be a pretty talkless smiling girl when she wants to be, but I can sure say that her said words stayed with me even when I was back in Bags End.

The "Welcome to X's Carnival" Grand Production had had some parts in it about the Six Islands. Like how long ago they were clustered together, just like how the Creatures like to nap, but something had fallen from the skies into their waters, & they had spooked & fled.

But even in this Grand Production there was nothing about uniting them again! How would anyone do that? With a tow truck or a tugboat? That's silly to think.

How had they fled each other anyway? Places, even strange ones like the White Woods & the Bunny Pillow Farm, don't hardly ever move.

And why did Crissy want to unite them again? I could only speculate in the com4orts of mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch while napping & watching the sun set in her crazy or quiet costume of colors.

Then, one of those drowsing times not long later, there was a polite tap at mah porch's window. I knew it was not most round here, who would skip tapping & just barge on in.

But when I looked, I could not see anyone. So I pushed the window open & there was that little Creature Common fellow, & mah newspaper's Apprentice Reporter, Willy Nilly Froggy!

We greeted with smiles & I carried him careful by paw to mah comfy armchair, & set him next to me to visit & talk.

"How are you, Algernon Beagle?" he asked, all freckled & friendly in his fine froggily frock.

"O, good, I suppose. How are you?"

He smiled bigger, if that was possible. "I am ready for our next story!"

"Hmm. Next?"

He nodded happy. Such a nice little guy that I wished I had one.

"I don't know, Willy Nilly," I admitted.

"Well, let's find one!" he said, still all smiles. Hard 4or me to resist such rookie journalist charms.

Hmm. "Willy Nilly, I don't usually find one. Usually they find me in a letter, or a poster, or some big guy's new grand scheme."

Well, Willy Nilly was still smiling big, but now he had his small green paw under under his chin, which means thinking hard in Creature Lingua, I have learned.

I tried this too, this paw-under-chin stuff, & sure enough, I had beginner's luck.

"Say, Willy Nilly, do you know about the Six Islands story?"

"I know some, Algernon Beagle," he said, still smiling big.

"Well, then, Apprentice, let's go see mah dear newspaper riter-downer & smart guy friend & adopted sister Lori Bunny to talk this over," I said, thinking I could not let this smiling Apprentice's enthusiasms down.

Willy Nilly smiled even biggerer, & said, "Let's go, Algernon Beagle!"

And so, Dear Readers, that's what we did. We left mah Milne's Porch, & walked through the Bunny Family's Apartment, Willy Nilly riding on mah headbone, 4or safety & speed, & we went to look 4or Lori where she usually was after school, like this day happened to be.

I mean the Bags End Liberry, of course. She shares her favorite corner table, by a sort of magickal picture window, with the nice language-knowing green-eyed guy called Allie Leopard. She goes there a lot, & doesn't mind a visitor or 2 sometimes.

She looked up from her thick book, adjusted her smart guy spectacles, smiled at me & Willy Nilly, & said, "Ready 4or a new story?"

* * * * *

In the Bags End Liberry with Lori Bunny & Willy Nilly!

With the 3 of us now together, it was like having a newspaper staff meeting. The Bags End Liberry is kind of a new place to tell about. Mah dear friend Princess Crissy in Imagianna had one time asked me if we had a liberry in Bags End, like she does in Imagianna. I knowed we had something small, like a room of books, & I knowed Lori Bunny liked to go there sometimes, & sit at its corner table.

"Hmm," said Crissy, finger upon her chin, almost Creature-like, but tricky smile all her own on her pretty face.

And I guess you long-time Dear Readers won't be surprised to know that one day not long after that Lori Bunny was telling me all excited about how our Liberry was now big & deep & mysterious.

Crissy had left Lori's corner table just like it was, but she added a strange & magickal window next to it that Lori could look through when she wanted to. Just had to pull up the shade to see. It showed what was going on in various Neighbors' places like Dreamland, Imagianna, Bunny Pillow Farm, & the like. Or you could ask 4or a place if you had one in mind. Lori tolded me she was still experimenting with it.

The shade was drawn now because Lori be4ore me & Willy Nilly came was quietly reading a big book.

But she was happy to see us & that it was time 4or a new newspaper story. She adjusted her smart guys spektakleez & listened closely as I talked.

I tolded her what Crissy had said about uniting the Six Islands.

"Do your books here tell about how to do that?" I asked. "Or just about how something fell from the skies & spooked them to flee?"

Lori Bunny adjusted her smart guy spectacles & thinned 4or a moment.

"There are some books about the Six Islands." She hopped off her chair & brung us over to a bookshelf & showed us a book. "This is called The Tangled Gate," she said. "This tells some stories about back then, but it doesn't tell much about them spooking & fleeing."

Hm. Lori raised her orange paw & went looking through some other books, muttering & reading words.

Finally she looked up at me & Willy Nilly, not very happy. "None of these books really tell much of those times. Maybe there are others I don't know about. But all any of these talk about is how long ago the Six Islands clustered like Creatures, till something fell from the skies, & spooked five of them to flee to different places, & that's how it's been ever since. But you know all that."

I nodded but then a new question occurred to me. "Lori, does this mean that our neighbors like Imagianna & Bunny Pillow Farm & Dreamland & Creature Common & the White Woods live on different Islands, or in different parts of the same Island?"

Lori looked at me & again adjusted her smart guy spectacles & said, "I don't know, Algernon. I think there is more to all of this than is easy to understand, or to find in books. It could be you have to find wise people who know Secret Wise Wisdoms that haven't been written down in history books in Liberrys like this."

I nodded. "Thank you, Lori! Come along, Apprentice Reporter!" And Willy Nilly, who had been even quieter than me, listening like Creatures do, followed me back to the com4orts of Milne's Porch, where we sat together close 4or awhile.

I figgered we could have a quiet think about all of these things, not guessing any bright idears were going to come of this.

But then maybe a small idear came to me, & I talked.

"Willy Nilly, are there any wise fellas back in the Creature Common who would know Secret Wise Wisdoms of all these things?"

And Willy Nilly, sitting small next to me, but with big smile & a bijillion freckles, said, "Well, Algernon Beagle, there are many wise or strange or both fellas in the Creature Common. Maybe one of them knows more than the history books tell!"

I thinned. I decided. "OK, then, Apprentice Reporter, let us go right now to the Creature Common & find out!"

So with Willy Nilly riding on mah schnoggin 4or safety & speed, we made our way down to the level of Bags End where there is the Marie the Traveler picture.

And I had to remember that the Marie picture is also kind of a magick portal, & so pass through it & not crash.

I closed mah eyes, & walked on through, with Willy Nilly, & no crashes this time around!

* * * * *

Seeking Secret Wise Wisdoms in the Creature Common!

So here we were, 1 veteran beagleboy journalist & his still pretty new rookie Apprentice, come to the Creature Common, to try to find out what had happened to make those Six Islands spook & flee each other like terrified Creatures. And maybe what it would take to unite them again.

Arrived to the landing that's next to the doorway to the Creature Common. Willy Nilly hopped off my schnoggin & hurried on his small Froggy feet into the Common.

"Come on, Algernon Beagle!" he cried merrily. "Hurry, Boss!"

I hurried!

But in not being such a little guy as Willy Nilly is, I ran nozebone straight into mah dear friend & I guess you could say fellow storyteller, CC!

"Algernon Beagle!" he said, delighted, & then he picked me right up to com4ort mah nozebone too. Sat us on the bed where he & that pretty lady called Miss Kassi live near the Creature Common.

"Hi, CC, sorry about that!" I said, but enjoying his kind tendings anyway. Wondered about mah Apprentice Reporter Willy Nilly & his assignment to I guess find out all the Secret Wise Wisdoms he could from his fellow Commonards about the Six Islands, but I was pretty sure he would be OK, & probably find out a lot of good things too.

"How are you, CC?" I asked him politely.

"I am glad you are here, Algernon Beagle," he said. "Do you remember those Famous Travelers, Marie, Joe, Daniel, & Derek the Islander?"

I nodded. I knowed them well, from past stories I rited about them, & Grand Productions too. And Marie's portal-picture out in the landing of course, too.

"Well, they are looking to find out how to unite the Six Islands too."

Mah mouth dropped. "Really?"

CC nodded. "The Travelers Tales has been all about this looking 4or awhile. Then I read in your fine newspaper--"

"That you rited one time too, remember!" I reminded friendly.

He smiled. "That was so much fun! Anyway, I was hoping you & Willy Nilly would come here along your story's way so I could tell you."

Now I thinked. "CC, how would I find them to talk to? I mean, where are they right now?"

CC looked over to Miss Kassi, who I noticed had been listening quietly to our talkings. They both put their fingers on their chins at the same time, like a song or trick or something. But, really, just thinking like Creatures do.

"CC, you could bring them here to talk it over with Mister Algernon Beagle," said Miss Kassi, smiling at me & reaching over to skritch mah 4orehead. I remembered her good skritchings well.

Well, I guess CC liked that idear because he handed me to Miss Kassi & he went on with what I guess he was doing be4ore we crashed into each other. Which was getting ready to tell the Travelers Tales like he does most nights.

He gathered up MeZmer the White Bunny, Holly the squeaky Hedgedyhog, Buddy the little flowery Bear, & Cuke, who is a nice green spiny fellow.

"Wait 4or me here, Algernon Beagle!" he said with a smile.

Well, I was nicely skritchted & comfy fine to wait & listen to the Travelers Tales from where I was but, funny to tell you, I falled asleep right there in Miss Kassi's grasp! I guess it happens sometimes with good skritchings & comfy laps.

Still, when I woked up I was shocked, & then twice over because CC was

saying, "He's right here. Come along, Mister Algernon Beagle!"

And, though I am not sure how he did it, there on the landing where CC tells the Travelers Tales were all those Traveler people-folks guys! Marie, Joe, Daniel, & Derek, every one of them!

Well, this was a nice reunion! And nicer when I come over to them on the landing & they sorta passed me around to hug. Then put me back down but sort of hunched low to mah shortness.

Then I looked at all of those friendly faces to me & thought hard to say an undum thing.

Finally, I talked & hoped 4or the luckiest. "I think we're all kind of looking 4or the same answers. About the Six Islands, I mean."

They nodded. And Daniel, sort of the lead Traveler guy of them, said, "Would you like to come with us, Mister Algernon Beagle? We could use your beagleboy journalist smarts on our travels!"

At first I thought now everyone would laugh at the dum beagle but then they didn't, & I remembered I wasn't in Bags End right now.

"O, um. OK. I would like that. I admire your, um, travels a lot." They all smiled & nodded at me.

I looked around. "Where is your boon companion the Tumbleweed, Daniel?"

He smiled. "Oh, he is visiting with some friends. We will see him again soon."

I looked at CC & said, "What's next?"

CC said, "Well, all of you could go see your dear friend Princess Crissy, who set you off on this story. I bet she can help with good idears too!"

I nodded & said, "I guess I will be in your story like you are in mine?"

CC laughed & nodded too. Then, be4ore I could figger one thing or another, I found mahself with all these Travelers in the Fairies Clearing that Marie's picture shows! Wow! That CC sure packs some quick storytelling mojo!

Then I noticed there were more of us here. These were those famous bloo-eyed Kittees, & their pretty Friend Fish, & their also amazing & famous Boat-Wagon!

Joe talked now after everyone had sort of gotten used to all of us arrived here in a group. "So how do we get to Imagianna from here?"

This was a good question. I could see we were in some part of the White Woods, but I had never gotten to Imagianna from here be4ore.

Then I noticed Marie & her thinking finger on her chin. She smiled & pointed at a button on the Boat-Wagon dashboard.

Lotta letters on that button. I looked up at her 4or help in sorting them out a bit.

She smiled kindly at me & said, "It says Imagianna, Algernon Beagle! Let's all pile in & go!"

* * * * *

To Imagianna with the Famous Travelers!

Your old beagleboy journalist pal Algernon has traveled with many a guy & fellow in his times, & pretty lucky most of the times too. I mean, even traveling with Betsy Bunny Pillow or Sheila Bunny is good when a story is there to be gotten.

And there was not long ago when my path crossed with these Famous Travelers in Grand Productions about them & their early days. I tolded these

Bags End News
 No. 438 October 14, 2017
 Editor: Agernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny
 Apprentice: Willy Nilly

Too Imagianna with
three travelers!

You old beagle boy journalist
 old Agernon has travelled
 with three or four fellow
 in his time; a pretty lucky most
 of the time to. I been
 am travelling with Betsy
 Bunny Killow or Sheila Bunngee
 izz good pen a storey iz there
 the bee zotes.

An then were not long ago
 were my path kro
 the hamuss Tra
 ion Wat was ~~not~~
 Grand Produkshun
 & then early days.

Bags End News
 Double Issue!
 No. 439/440 October 28, 2017
 Editor: Agernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny
 Apprentice: Willy Nilly

Wat iz the Blue Sutekas?
 Author: Misterys

I kann saye onestly I
 humbly & happily that Princess
 Crissiean or Imagianna, or
 Crissie too, jam of density
 too good to records, iss wen
 ut man does tends I for
 a lone time. Even be for I kann
 too Bagzend, tho3 lone time
 app. time I dont really remember
 all awl butt storeys shee fold
 me, shez bin man thikk
 a thian friend.

But thatt desent mean
 I have evry bit about heriz,

stories in Bags End Book #17: The Myth of the 4 Famous Travelers! & Bags End Book #20: Go Into the Sea!

But we had never really traveled on shared new adventures before, which made this time so interesting & special.

It's like we had all been wondering more about those Six Islands, & what had happened to them & why. Even the Royal Thumbs Grand Production not long ago, that I tolded you Dear Readers about in Bags End Book #21: What is the Creature Carnival? had some parts to do with them.

And I admit to not yet knowing a lot of history of things. I mean, it took a long time for me to just find out about Bags End's early days, & even those aren't really fully knowed yet.

I guess I have also been learning about mah dear friend Princess Crissy's Emandian kinfolks from far away, & her brother Iggy the Inspector & all was some history.

But how all this pulls together into one big story? I guess I was too busy chasing current crazy doings to know more.

Sometimes, though, what's true is that nobody has the whole big story in their paws. Someone or someones have to go digging.

Well, that's where this story comes in, Dear Readers, & why mah good friend CC had brung together the 4 Famous Travelers of his stories, Marie, Joe, Daniel, & Derek, with me, & why too we were buckling into the Kittys & Friend Fish's Boat-Wagon. Making sure we were all buckled in.

"Safety first!" everyone shouted merrily, & lucky I remembered in time too.

Marie was in the front seat next to the Kittees & Friend Fish. Smiling at all of us in the back seat, she pressed the Imagianna button, & off we went! I guess these kinds of buttons help the Kittees & Friend Fish & Boat-Wagon to find their way. Seems to always work pretty good too.

Anyway, they peddled & peddled us all through the pretty White Woods, which I can tell you from mah many close watchings are not all white trees, but it's more like they are all the colors that glow together like the fur of that nice MeZmer the White Bunny.

It was comfortable in the back seat with Daniel & Joe & Derek the Islander. They were friendly close holding me. And I was pretty surprised how short a time it was before we were leaving the White Woods & now rolling along the golden green hills of Imagianna!

I started looking closely & then, when I saw it, I cried out, "Hey! There's Crissy's Castle! Drive toward that, you Kittees & Friend Fish!"

I guess I didn't have to tell the Kittees their own driving business, but I think they knowed I was just really excited.

We rolled right up to the front door of Crissy's Castle, & everyone unbuckled & got out.

"Allow me, Traveler guys," I said, with a kind of debonair flourish of mah paws. Yah, right. But I talked on anyway. "Let me knock first, cuz I know well the ways of Boop her servant & bestus buddy." I guessed those Traveler guys saw that I was trying to help, cuz they just nodded & smiled, & let me step right up & knock.

Boop is never slow to answer a knock on his door. When he saw all of us, his pleased smile was big as day, & he hurried us with a friendly paw into Crissy's Throne Room.

There we found Crissy on the floor &, to mah surprise, she was surrounded by what looked like many issues of Bags End News!

"Hey! That's mah newspaper!" I cried.

Crissy's Princess dress was sorta flung on her Throne, & she was in her

usual & favoritest R.E.M. shirt & blue jeans. That's like her native costume.

"Algernon!" she said, all happy, & jumped up to hug & kiss me. She nodded & smiled at the Travelers who were feeling kind of polite with her being a Princess & all. She's not that kind though.

Daniel talked up. "How are you, Iris?"

Crissy smiled. "Good. Nice to see you outside of dreams."

Daniel nodded, smiling too, & I remembered how they know each other by other names in dreams. Hmm, me says.

"I was doing research on all you have written so far about the Six Islands," she explained to mah still-wondering look. Hmm. I nodded OK though. Crissy is a strange girl, but my dear one always.

Then she smiled & said, "Let's all go out to my 1928 Paris Porch to talk!" & she led us there right away.

I saw Marie smiling at that name, & remembered how she is a schoolteacher & all. I thought I would ask her about that name some time so I wouldn't look dum to Crissy. Though I am sure she would say that was not possible, & not even be mean about it.

Anyway, we all went out to 1928 Paris, which has a long comfy couch 4or sitting, & a nice armchair just like mine on Milne's Porch. And its view is usually of the endless golden green hills of Imagianna, though with one tricky Crissy smile it can be other things, I have learned.

Crissy waited till we were all nicely settled on the couch, & then she sorta walked her talk in front of us.

"Be4ore the Six Islands were spooked, they all lived close together 4or a long time in a sort of sleeping-waking unitary consciousness," she said.

Ut-oh. "A what?" I asked. Lucky 4or mah ignorance, I think nobody but Crissy knowed what that all meant.

"It means all were awake & sleeping all at once. A kind of always dreaming," said Crissy, & now I got the words but their meaning was still hard to get.

Daniel talked. "So what spooked the Six Islands woke them, & all on them woke up too?"

Crissy nodded. "So now there was waking time & sleeping time."

Joe talked. "And Dreamland became like a separate place? Not just the whole world anymore?"

Crissy nodded to that too.

Derek, who is the quietest of the Travelers, now talked. "What was it that fell from the sky?"

Crissy's look was pretty strange as she talked. "It was the Blue Suitcase."

We were all quiet 4or a moment. The way the Travelers looked at each other, I wasn't sure that they didn't know about this strange Blue Suitcase.

Crissy talked more. "It was sent by the Architect from the future to help save the world this time through."

I looked up at Daniel. "Aren't you the Architect guy in dreams with Crissy?"

Daniel nodded. "I wish that was more helpful to us. I don't remember about this."

It felt like I was falling behind all this too, & be4ore I could beg a beginner's class in Suitcases, Crissy crouched down be4ore us, & reached under the couch we sat on, & pulled out a Blue Suitcase!

"Goodness! I know that Suitcase!" cried Marie, who had been sitting next to me, quietly listening &, 4or a moment, there was a confused sort of everyone talking.

Wow, Dear Readers!

* * * * *

What is the Blue Suitcase?
(& Other Mysteries)

I can say honestly & humbly & happily that Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna, or Crissy to fans of dancing to good 45 records, is one of mah dearest friends, & 4or a long time. Even be4ore I came to Bags End, those long times ago, times I don't really remember at all too good but 4or stories she told me, she's been mah thick-n-thin friend.

But that doesn't mean that I know everything about her, no Sir. Crissy is in some ways a pretty girl people-folks, smiling & dancing to R.E.M. records, & in other ways a magickal Princess Guardian of Bags End, & probably a lot of other things I don't know.

That's just how it is with dear friends, I have learned. You know them, you love them, but there is always that some or a lot of mystery about them.

What was it like be4ore those Six Islands waked up, spooked like Creatures, & fled? Everyone always in a dream 4orever together? I don't know. Like Dreamland, but no waking up?

But I don't think that's a little thing. Did they walk around in their always Dreaming? Did they get tired & sleep in their always Dreaming? Did they dream inside their always Dreaming?

I guess these questions came to me in a messy way as I sat with the Travelers in Imagianna, on Crissy's 1928 Paris porch, learning from her about those times.

She had just been talking about the Blue Suitcase that did all the falling & splashing & waking & spooking like Creatures the Six Islands back then. And showing us the Blue Suitcase itself, which caused Marie to cry out & jump to her feet, looking at it like it was gonna attack or escape or something.

Crissy put a calming hand on Marie's shoulder. "Not this one. It's the Original One. All the others are its Iterates."

Even I knowed that word. It means "one, none, many," & you just gotta accept it, no matter how weird.

Marie nodded, & calmed down a bit. Crissy smiled & said, "Let's go to my Secret Room, & look inside it."

And she led us back into her Castle, & straight to her Secret Room. It's the one I have rited about with the weird green light & the soft cushions with strange designs on them. And Crissy's books she rited back when she was Christina, up on a high shelf. And some strange pictures on the walls. Oh, & the Red Bag, in the corner way back, that leads to her Writing Room. Um. Yah. All that.

So we all found seats together, & Crissy placed the Blue Suitcase be4ore us, & clicked open its lid.

We all peeked in. There were a lot of strange things inside that Crissy took out some of to show. She plucked up a green-&-gold sack, & unpacked it, one item by one.

A pretty girl's hairbrush. A knife. And a black-&-white Pandy Bear!

"Is that Rosa!ita?" I asked, excited think I might know at least one thing.

Crissy smiled at me, & all of us, & said, "This is the Original Imp. She may help us."

Joe suddenly talked. "But will she?" I guessed he is dubious of Imps. But herself talked in a weird calm voice. "Of course I will." Wow! I didn't think Imps trucked much in mah native English. They seemed to like their funny noises more.

"Hi, Rosalita!" I said all friendly, hoping 4or the best.

"My name is Screeeee ee ee ee ee ee ee e e e e e echhhhhh!" the Imp yowled long & crazy & crazier as she went.

Well, I leaped into Daniel's lap, who holded me & tried to com4ort mah Imp yowling terrors with some nice pats on mah headbone.

Crissy then put away all these items, including the crazy yowling Imp, now quieter.

She was smiling at us, & waiting like it was up to us next to do. This was a good question. Nobody said anything 4or a moment.

Then the swinging door to the Secret Room pushed in a bit, & there was Boop looking in & smiling. He looked at Crissy in particular among us, & said, "Your Highness, I was wondering if showing our guests to the Liberry would help in their travels?"

Crissy thinked 4or a moment, & then smiled bigly. "Yes, Boop, that's a great idea! Let's go!"

She jumped up, & went right out of the Secret Room, & we all hurried along behind her, through many hallways, until we came in a crowd to a door which had a pretty green-&-gold sign on it, with a picture of a book.

She pushed the door open, & led us into this really big room. I'm not sure how to tell how big, but let me try.

It was like being inside a place, but looking up at the cloudy sky with no ceiling ever. And then looking far into the distance of open fields on a foggy day, & feeling like there was no far place ever.

All this & books too! Books up there, framing those high glowing windows, & tiny books lining the stairs deeper into the Liberry. Bookcases that looked like they went on 4or miles & miles.

And, 4or the com4ort of readers, so many chairs & couches! It was an amazing place to see that I had never knowed was here.

I could have asked Crissy why we never went there be4ore but, like I said, she's a strange girl. She probably never thinked to tell me when I was visiting her. She was more thinking about dancing to fun records, which is a very Crissy thing to do.

Still here we were, & I figgered out that she knowed this place pretty well. She let us look amazed 4or a few minutes, & then she pointed to what looked like a misty place in the distance below.

"That's where we need to go." And she led us down a long winding staircase to this misty place, right into the mist, all of us, & then we discovered what was inside it. Mah jawbone dropped.

There were words floating in the air all around us, & pages appearing & disappearing, landing on mah fur, & then gone, like snowflakes or soap bubbles, over & over.

I looked at the others & they were fascinated too. I think Crissy was smiling & watching us 4or a bit with our amazements, but then she tolded us to take hands & paws & sit down together in a circle.

"Let's all close our eyes together, & hmmm now," Crissy said softly, & so we did like she said, paw to hand, in a circle, hmmmming 4or a long time. It was very friendly, & kind of sweet, & close, & then it was something else too.

"Think about these adventures, & where to go next," she said softly again.

It become kind of a shared Dreaming 4or all of us, at least I was

pretty sure we all felt this same dream.

It felt like flying &, as it cleared, I could see Islands below, one after the next, clustered up, & I thought: "O! It's the Six Islands back when they were clustered like Creatures, before they spooked & fled!"

There were White Woods on all of them, thick & all over, no paths, & I guessed whoever was down below was, um, dreaming awake, or however Crissy had said it better.

But something else too. And it was like I shared this thought with all of my friends, touching paws to hands. It was the feeling that this would never be again like this. Even if we united the Six Islands, it wouldn't be the same. This felt both true & sad to know this.

Then it's like our Dreaming travel moved along, & we came to the center of the Six Islands, to where it seemed like they almost touched, & it was right there that we seed there was a little place of water, like a pond, & suddenly we were all diving right into that pond, but of course it was really the Wide Wide Sea too that surrounds the Six Islands, then & now.

We dived in, & it was darkly black, & I wondered what would be shown us? It went on & on & on &, just when I was nearly mad with darkness, & mah wonderings, there was a glowing ahead, & it's like we now saw roots. Roots coming down from the Six Islands, & they were clustered like Creatures down there too! When the Six Islands spooked, these roots must have come apart too, & that's why they fled! They lost touch of each other! No more clustered roots!

Was this how to unite them again? Rejoin their cluster of roots?

Then it seemed like we were rising toward the surface, & I thought maybe we would come back to Crissy's Liberry again soon, but then I heard herself's voice say softly in mah earbone: "I will see you soon, best of all beagles! Rite a good story like always."

Suddenly we were all back somewhere on land, Dear Readers. The 4 Famous Travelers & me. No Crissy, Kittees, Friend Fish, or Boat-Wagon. I noticed Marie had a Blue Suitcase in hand, & I wondered if it was sent along from Crissy.

And it was like a dark hallway we were in somehow, but there was the sound of noisy merriment in the distance, & so we walked along it, Daniel in the lead. Then there were folks nearby & he saw someone he knowed & rushed ahead.

When I finally got a look at who through these much-taller-than-me people-folks guys, I saw that it was Crissy's dear friend Bellla the bloo-&-pink Creature Piglet, whose tricky smile practically matches Crissy's own.

But the talking next only confused me. Actually the talking & more, because Bellla grandly flourished the bloo cape she had on, & revealed underneath Rosa!ita the little black-&-white Pandy Bear Imp, & some other guys, who I betted were Creatures too! A pretty little Bear Creature, & little yellow Duckee Creature with handsome orange feets, & a sort of round green Ball Creature of a girl wearing a warm blue hat, & with yet another tricky smile!

Daniel said, "Well, if it isn't Miss La & Miss Ta, the Great Heroes of Yore!"

Bella smirked friendly to her friends & said, "Hello, Daniel the Famous Traveler, & your group of Famous Travelers! And these are our friends too, called the O'Kult!"

Well, Dear Readers, I had thought that I knowed all the famous folks around, but I humbly confess that I don't.

I tried to remember if I had heard about Great Heroes who looked just

like Rosa!ita & Bellla of the Creature Common, but I guessed must be Iterates somehow.

I wanted to be in on all this friendliness too, but mah ignorance was not to be ignored. I think I accidentally whimpered nearly dog-like out loud.

Well, Marie picked me up, gave me a good hug, & then studied me 4or a moment, finger upon her chin.

"What's the matter, Mister Algernon Beagle?" she asked me in the nicest voice.

Everyone else was looking at me too, but I could just feel not a mean guy in the bunch. So I talked plain & true, as is my best try at things.

"Well, it's strange 4or me right now, because you called those guys Great Heroes of Yore, & somehow I don't know about them. Could you tell me about your fames, so I can admire too?" I said all this just as humbly as I could, hoping it would be OK.

Everyone laughed, but again no meanness. Bellla, who I guess 4or now I'll call Miss La, gestured her paw 4or me to sit with her &, um, Miss Ta, the Imp by the way, & their O'Kult, in their comfy armchair. Who was I to resist such kindnesses, with comfy armchair to boot? So that's where Marie put me, & then she & the other Travelers pulled up chairs too.

Miss La & Daniel looked at each other like: who should talk first? Finally, Daniel did.

"A long time ago, even be4ore I knew the Tumbleweed, I wasn't really that great a Traveler. I mean, I didn't know all about it cuz I was new."

I nodded cuz at least I remembered the Grand Production about some of his early days. I tolded about that too in Bags End Book #17: The Myth of the 4 Famous Travelers! & Bags End Book #20: Go Into the Sea!

Daniel smiled at those Great Heroes, & said some more, "Then we met, & we started to travel together, & learn about how the best adventures & travels help others."

"We helped the Thought Fleas find their Rutabaga Soup ladle," said Miss La, & Miss Ta cackled too.

And, strangely, as has happened be4ore, that strange word made me feel calm, & not cry out mah terrors over talk of food.

"Eventually, we parted ways, good friends, & I have heard from time to time of their legendary adventures," finished Daniel. But then talked more. "And now of course they are the Great Heroes of Yore, Miss La & Miss Ta!"

OK. Fine. Now I talked, feeling less the fool. "I am sure me & some of mah Dear Readers who haven't heard yet would love to hear you tell more!"

Well, those Great Heroes had sure been on a lot of adventures! After saying goodbye to Daniel, they had climbed up a tall rainy mountain called Mount Cloudy Day. Then they had traveled a weird road called the Imaginal Hikeway. Then they had traveled back to ancient times to one of the Six Islands, & met some friendly natives, & even visited the Great Cavern under the Tangled Gate!

I guessed that's when they started getting famous, cuz they went on a lecture tour to teach others how to be Great Heroes too, & even come along with them. They traveled to a Secret Island, & found the Great Horn that plays the world's Hmmm.

Then their greatest adventure be4ore now was traveling several Islands to find those colorful Moosei Creatures, & help them fix the colors of the world gone weird.

"Hey! That happened in Bags End too!" I cried, remembering. "And in Imagianna. Mah friend Princess Crissy told me not to worry though, cuz some Great Heroes would save the day. Then she wanted to dance with me to a lot

of R.E.M. records."

I paused, remembering, everyone looking at me, but still friendly. "And, um, the colors got fixed! That was you Great Heroes, Miss La & Miss Ta?" I asked, feeling amazed.

Miss La smirked her tricky smile, so much like her friend Crissy's. And Miss Ta cackled of course.

"Wow!" I said. "I feel so humbly glad to be on this new adventure with all of you Great Heroes & Famous Travelers!"

And they all said nice things about me, but I will keep those in mah own humble pocket.

Maybe I can learn how to be a Great Hero too, & teach others how!

To be continued in Cenacle | 127 | April 2025!



* * * * *







Mad Jack

[Prose]

xi. Reunion at the Radical's Funeral

Thirty years later, an old radical from the 'hood shriveled and died. He had been gassed with police-issue pepper spray at the WTO riots a year earlier. A huge lump in his throat never stopped growing, till it choked off his esophagus and starved him to death. There was a memorial downtown where we all made remembrance speeches. Some of the Crane Boys were there. Corky approaches me, proclaiming that Robert Townsend is looking for me.

"Never heard of him," I say.

"Well, he sure knows you."

I'm thinking FBI all over again.

"Well, who the fuck is he?"

"You know him. Here he comes now."

Bob comes up the sidewalk, tripping and skipping a little, like a young child not sure where his feet are. He is more filled out, chunkier, and his pink plump face is still covered in a maniacal smile amid the graying stubble. His teeth are tiny and yellow, as if they shrank. He wears wrinkled hand-me-down clothes that don't fit, don't match. He looks like a bum, dressed up by a bum, for a memorial. We are *at* a memorial.

An awkward hug with damp sweat spots. A word salad pours out of his mouth, just as in days of old.

"Jake! Jake! My brother! Yep. Hey, man, It's so great to see you. I've been in prison for twenty years. Some nice Quakers have, hic, put me up out in Port Angeles on the Olympic Peninsula. Wendy and James are really nice Quakers. I came down for Ralph's funeral cause I knew him back in the day when—"

"Wait a minute, Bob. You've been in jail for twenty years?"

"Yeah, yeah. Twenty! Twenty fucking years. I just got out early for good behavior."

"You think that was a good idea?"

"Haha!" There's that crazy laugh again. "Hell yeah. Haha! It's time to get out."

"Wadya do? Murder someone?"

Great peels of laughter pour out of the guy. Haha! When will the maniacal hilarity subside and a conversation ensue? I thought the madness was the result of taking drugs, but it seems to have permanently altered Bob's brain into a speed freak for life. A "tweaker," as they are called today. Talks fast about nothing, constantly fidgeting, can't stand still.

"Haha! No, man. You know I be peace."

Actually, I *don't* know that.

"It was *drugs*, man. Just good drugs."

"You must have had a shit-load to get twenty years. Did ya have a truck-full?" I ask.

"Truck? Haha! I did, man. I did. We made drugs. Ya, lots of trucks. I was the cook. We made millions. Money, *money*. Me and an old guy named Van Litograph. He was a counterfeiter. But he died in prison."

"Seems there's a bit more to this story than you are telling me."

“There is, man. Hey, ya gotta come out to my place. Take the ferry. Stay with me for a few days. Catch up. Have a smoke. It’s near where I lived for years with our, heh, drug empire. We supplied the West Coast down to Redding. Redding, California, yeah. And all of Oregon and Washington. People couldn’t get enough. Our market was all growing. Haha! Right now I have to find a bathroom for my ulcerative colitis.”

“Do you mean clitoris?”

“Huh? What?”

“Sounds shitty. Whatever ya got.”

For starters, I’ve never heard him use a big word like “colitis.” But this seems just the tip of his medical vocabulary. And, as to being a cook with chemical skills, I don’t buy it. This guy couldn’t mix cream with his coffee, much less make an illegal drug.

Other funeral guests are asking for my attention, wanting nostalgic stories about when the old dead radical and I ran a light show business. Bob and I talk awhile longer, though, while he chugs a small bottle of Maalox for his “gastronomical dissociative dissonance,” and then we part ways. An historic hypochondriac, methinks.

xii. Catching Up With Bob

A few days later, I convince my girlfriend that we have to go see this guy. She is reluctant, as Bob is a sandbox buddy of mine, and she instinctively knows that my attention will be diverted from her. She will be the odd duck out, not included in great tales of piracy.

I’m not sure how we find his fixed-up garage, next to the big house with the Quakers living in it. But things seemed cordial and orderly. Not a junkie’s den, anyway. We smoke weed and blab and blab at a table half covered in pill bottles.

Eventually the girlfriend, who is hopelessly bored, announces she is going to bed. There is only one bed in the open-room garage, so Bob and I whisper. I ask what the pills are for. “Everything,” he says. “I have blood clots of which they cut out a few in prison.” He shows me a tiny scar on his neck. “So I’m on four kinds of blood thinner. Once I got the hepatitis under control with gamma globulin, they had to remove my gall bladder. But I also have some bacteria in my testicles that gives me a low-grade infection.”

“Oh yeah. I had that. My balls hurt for four years till the doc chopped out my prostate with an electric steak knife.”

“My prostate is so large it takes forty minutes to piss.” He seems somewhat proud of this point.

“You have hep C?” I ask, shifting my chair back.

“I have hep A, B, C, D, and the last doctor says E.”

“And what the fuck is that?”

“It’s the liver, man. The liver is gone bad. So I take a vaccine pill for that, along with the other pills. Yeah. Doctor told me to eat these five medications, yeah, for the hep stuff. Then there is Paroxetine for the PTSD, and Prozac and Zoloft for the bipolar thing. But I really like Lexapro. These serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors seem to help for the depression caused by my OCD medication. Wish I could get the epinephrine straight up.”

“Why do I think you need that?”

“Haha! Shit, I *need* it, man. I fucking *need* it. Haha!”

“Are ya *sure* ya need all this pill stuff? I mean besides the crazy pills. Seems a bit excessive. What happens if ya try to cut out some pills?”

“Cut out! *Cut out!* No way, man. I’d drop dead, of course. Last three doctors say I need all this stuff. Haha! Yeah. I like to take pills. All drugs. I be liking all drugs.”

“You’re like an AMA guinea pig. A lab rat. A pharmacological sucker who pays Big Pharma.”

“I don’t pay. I don’t pay nuttin’. The government, Social Security, Washington Health Department. Everything is free as long as I keep my appointments.”

We then get on to talking of prostate problems, PSA readings, and procedures. We become louder and louder for emphasis as we speak of ball pain, and rectal exams.

Suddenly, the girlfriend erupts in fury,

“*Get out, assholes!* You are keeping me awake with talk of your balls. Fuck your nutsacks!”

We secretly wish. She shouts profanities at us, her brow crumpled like tossed toilet paper, her face bright red. We are keeping the Princess awake. Privilege goes to the bone, apparently, and even though she is a guest, her slight discomfort is a death sentence for us, if it were in her power.

So we cower out. Heads sunk into our shoulders. Saying, “sorry, sorry, sorry,” and not meaning it. We try not to make eye contact with the now glowering pajama-clad harpy standing on the bed. She is brandishing her tiny fist.

Bob and I sit outside in the dark on a hard bench overlooking the bay. The air is soft and warm in the sea mist. I like this better anyway, than the rattling table covered in pills. We smoke tobacco and weed at the same time, causing a small cloud that hovers over our seats in the still air.

xiii. Turds-for-Nerds

Back at the tippy table in the Montana evening with Jan and Cousin Marty. The beer guzzling is demanding some kind of munchies to stuff in our bodies.

“Anybody want any poppers?” Jan asks. This is appropriate biker food, jalapeños stuffed with cream cheese. She appears already stuffed with cream cheese and we pray there are no leaks.

“Hell ya. Bring ‘em on!” the Cuz bellows. He is up to wanting everything, and consuming everything, constantly. These poppers are not really food, but some kind of anal cleaning mechanism. I visualize Jan’s satisfaction of sitting on the pot. But it is not a good vision.

“*Pussy juice!*” I erupt involuntarily.

“What did you say? That is horrible, ya filthy fuck,” Jan snarls.

“Purple moose. I thought I saw a purple moose,” I defensively say.

“Aw, bullshit. You said, ‘pussy juice.’ Which is funny, but nasty,” interjects the Cuz.

“No, Purple Moose,” I stick to my guns.

“So how do you get coprolalia? Is it a virus? Is it contagious?” he asks.

“Oh, it’s not contagious,” Jan says. “Sometimes regular people make similar linguistic mistakes.” Our rotund medical expert then lights another cigarette.

“Yes,” I say. “Like, I was at a train station the other day, and tried to say to the large-breasted counter clerk, ‘I’d like two tickets to Hampton.’ But instead what came out of my mouth was ‘I’d like two titties to lay hands on.’”

“Yer such a tit man,” declares the Cuz.

“Am not! Don’t lay your perversion on me,” I say indignantly.

Then he has his own story. “I was sitting at the dinner table with my previous wife, and I meant to say ‘please pass the peas.’ But what came out of my mouth was, ‘You fucking bitch! You have ruined my life!’”

“You stupid men. Always blaming your life troubles on women,” Jan declares.

“But they *are* to blame. Aren’t they?” I counter.

“Only in your dreams, pal,” she retorts. Rather a weak reply, I think, and so cliché. I wonder if it’s the poppers driving her IQ even further down into the fart zone?

“Go in the house and get us some more beers, bitch, I mean babe. And where’s dinner?” orders the Cuz, trying to personify a tough biker, but just coming off as an asshole.

“*Chickenfuck,*” I groan.

“You men are such turds,” says Jan, but she gets up to obey anyway. Dagger stares drill into the side of the Cuz’s head. But he doesn’t care. Doesn’t notice. Being rich allows for any insult to be ignored without consequence.

“*Turds. Turds. Turds-for-Nerds.*”

“Calm down, Jake. The beer is coming. So what’s the damn point of this longwinded crap-ass story?” the Cuz demands to know, now in trouble with the woman.

“This is a treasure story, ya impatient cell phone junkie,” I blast. The Cuz has been rudely scrolling through TikTok videos as the narration proceeds. He has the attention span of an ADD-ridden toddler. No manners. Where’s *his* Ritalin?

I smile and sit back with a new bottle of barley suds. I take great pleasure in relating this long tale of treasure.

Jan waddles out of the house with a tuna casserole. A can of Swanson’s mixed veggies has been thrown in. She calls it “dinner.” I call it cat food.

“Hm, smells like *big girls*,” sniffs the Cuz.

“That’s disgusting. You are disgusting,” Jan snaps.

“*Penis problems?*” I uncontrollably screech.

“Fuck. Not you too?” she sighs.

“What? *What?* All I said was ‘peas are a problem.’ I’m allergic.”

“I heard you. Now back to the story,” demands the Cuz.

I take a long sip of warm beer, and continue where I left off.

xiv. Buried Treasure

Back on the Olympic Peninsula, on the nighttime bench by the sea, I finally have a chance to ask, “So, Bob, what was this drug you were making?”

“The sweetest Ecstasy that ever went up a nose, or was pressed into Molly. It was a high quality MDMA, 3,4 Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, with a dash of phenobarbital to keep ya from over hyping. Hehe, hyping. It hyped ya up and mellowed you out at the same time. Ya wanted to kiss everyone.”

“Did you ever do any kissing?”

“Oh, hell yeah!” he replies a little sheepishly. I can’t imagine how any woman would kiss this unwashed fidgety person. The loony factor alone would keep them a block away. He has *virgin* written all over him. But I can’t say what he did in prison. Or what was done to this weakling. I really *don’t* want to know.

“So your recipe was a mix of MDMA and a dash of Reds? Anything else? How is that psychedelic?”

“That is proprietary secret information.”

“Bullshit. You just can’t remember. What made your drug more special than other street shit? *Rabbitas.*”

“Huh?”

“Grab-your-gas. I mean, forget it. Go on.”

“Oh, man. It was *killer*. The *finest* buzz on the West coast. Hype ya way up but give you a feeling of love and togetherness. You’d feel like you could run the world. Yeah! I was into everything, man. Had to have it all. Antiques, furs, real estate, collections of small things. Weed by the bale, cars, I had it all. *All*, I tell ya.”

“And how was that possible?”

“We were *rich*, man. Stinking rich. Money was rolling in way faster than we could count it. All twenties and tens. We weighed it to estimate how much we had.”

“I’ve heard of this. Figured it for bullshit. *Buttbuttbutt*. How did you get supplies?”

“Back then, there were no DEA controls. Stuff like isophthalic acid could be bought at any scientific den or supply house. Then we had Sudafed Smurfs going to every drug store and loading up on antihistamines. We had three hundred boxes coming in a day. Haha!”

“So ya had a lab and all that?”

“Fucking A. Damn straight. Had a huge old barn I cooked in. Haha! Yep. Never used a fume

hood or any of that safety shit.”

“It shows.”

“Huh?”

“*Frogfeathers.*”

“What?”

“Nuttin. Go on.”

“I’d cook in the early morning, and by noon we had a pound to go out to the runners. Fuck yeah.”

“What were runners?”

“Dealers. Street-sellers. Candy men. You know, brother! You were one. Haha! They were all hanging around in the farmhouse. Along with the bitches. Bitches were everywhere. Hell yeah. Everybody was fucking ’em, but they particularly liked me and Van Litograph, as we had all the money. But Van Litograph was too old to screw, and I was too strung out.”

“So where’s the story here? A bunch of strung-out junkies is not really a story.”

“Oh yeah. Haha! One day we figured we had too much money. Bitches were stealing it left and right. We couldn’t put it in a bank, and couldn’t spend it fast enough, no how, to keep up with the inflow. So we decided to bury it.”

“Do what? Bury it?”

“Yeah, yeah. We had this farm, you know, with the barn, and we decided to put in a cherry orchard. Van Litograph had spent his childhood in Japan and loved the cherry blossoms. There was a tree here and there in people’s yards, but he liked to be in a full rain of cherry blossom petals. What the rich man wants, the rich man gets.”

“*Pussybitch.* I mean, how big was the orchard?”

“There was a small section of field below the house and barn that looked good. So we went to the biggest tree nursery in the Northwest and bought twenty cherry trees. Had them all trucked to the place at once. We rented a backhoe to plant them all.”

“Who drove it? You couldn’t have driven it. You can hardly walk a straight line, or drive a car.”

“Haha! *No.* But old Van knew his stuff. Used to drive machines way back in his day, digging septic fields. So we laid it all out. Five rows of four trees each, spaced about twelve feet apart. But in one hole, we threw everything in.”

“Threw what in?”

“*Money.* Treasure. Furs. We had the *big* ammo cans that were waterproof. We wrapped bundles of fifties and hundreds in plastic, and stuffed them in three huge cans. We threw in some diamond rings and other jewels too before we sealed them. Yeah, yeah. Van had dug one hole down twenty feet. I wrapped the cans in fur coats and threw the three of them in.” Bob is extremely lucid describing this, as though he is seeing it before his eyes.

“What? Why the fur coats?”

“I dunno. Haha! Just had so many of them. And was tired of the bitches trying to run off with ’em. So this way I figured they’d be safe.”

“Glad you’re are not in the nuclear missile program, with such a weird definition of *safe*. How much money do ya think you packed in the ammo cans?”

“I think it must have been, like, \$250,000. All fifties and hundreds.”

“You said that, but not that it was a quarter million.”

“And then we threw in Van Litograph’s plates. The counterfeit plates for two dollar bills. Don’t know why he threw those in. I guess he figured he would not be needing them anymore.”

I gotta ask. “What was with the two dollar bills? Why two dollars?”

“Even back twenty years ago, the two dollar bill was kinda weird. People were happy to get one for collections. He was still printing them, when we started up. Haha! Helped finance all the lab equipment and pay runners. We would go to the big county fairs and sell packages of a hundred to the

carnies, the ring toss guy, the shooting gallery, the rubber duck guy. We would take the real money from them at a slight discount, then the carnie would use them for change and whatever. They were good. Perfect. Van Litograph was the best plate-maker the world has known. The paper wasn't a problem. He got some kind of silk paper from Japan, with the red and blue hairs in it. I believe he had it made special over there."

"Damn. A quarter-million dollars in old untraceable bills. And the counterfeit plates. All that shit would be worth a fortune now. Twice what it was when ya buried it."

"I know, I know. It's just sitting there."

"Why haven't you gone back for it?"

"The *feds*. I think the feds are waiting for me. They know about it from the bitches. After they threw me into stir, they sat on the property for a year or more, waiting for someone to come back and dig it up. But nobody knows exactly where it is. Haha! Think I need an antihistamine."

Bob takes out a small bottle, shakes out three pills of different colors, and downs them in a gulp. I'm thinking about that hole. *No way* is it twenty feet deep. A standard backhoe will only dig twelve feet, with difficulty. Probably the hole was only ten feet deep. But hyped up, stoned out, reeling in substance abuse, it must have looked to them back then like a cavern to the center of the earth.

"So what's with this property now? Why hasn't anyone dug it up?"

"No one knows it's there, man. Van Litograph died in prison, so I'm the only one who knows. Well, I did tell my landlords, the Quakers here, and that Wendy lady is really interested. Wants to buy the property and dig it up for herself. Think she's waiting for me to die, or something. She has a gift shop in town, but doesn't do much business. It's off the highway, and there's no walk-in traffic. Her husband thinks I'm full of shit."

"Well OK. What's the status—*Rape the horse!*—I mean stay the course!—of the property now?"

"The feds tore down the barn and the old farm house, thinking we stashed money in the walls, or something. Haha! They cleaned out all the lab equipment, of course, and the barn was full of expensive antiques, furs, motorcycles. All sorts of stuff they took as 'evidence.' Shitheads. But of course they stole it all for their own. But they wanted the money, bad. They dug around the house where they thought it might be, but it was fifty feet away in the orchard. So then the property went into some kind of default as a criminal confiscation. Yeah. The bank grabbed it, and sold the place for a song. Last I done seen it, a trashy single-wide trailer had been moved on the site of the house."

"And what? Who lives there?" I am eager to know everything.

"Two lesbian bitches. They got three baby kids who run around in the rain and mud without pants. Bitches never go anywhere, just stay and fuck each other in the trailer."

"Sounds nasty. Have you offered to buy the place from them? What's the place worth?"

"Well, now the place is worth at least a hundred grand, as it's so close to the water. Like two blocks to the sea, and Highway 101. So if ya bought it, ya might break even. And, besides, ya can't buy it. The feds are still all over it and they would nail you."

Paranoia runs deep. It is unlikely the "feds" give a crap about the place now. It is long gone on the books and forgotten. The criminals are dead or did their time. Now they are Social Security recipients, old and diseased. The irony is that these two impoverished bitches are sitting on a quarter of a million dollars not fifty feet from their back door. A shovel and some moxie would change their lives forever. If they only knew the "spot."

"There's gotta be a way, Bob. We can't just let all that loot sit there. Buried treasure. If they ever went anywhere we could snatch it. This sounds like a sure thing. Just have to get the lesbians out of the way, and now the Quakers too. It's 3 a.m. now. Lemme sleep on it, and we'll talk more about it tomorrow. Do you sleep?"

"No," is all Bob says. I can see he is still wired, from what I don't know. But his eyes are still wild, and the little hair that he has is standing straight up. He has white foam on the edges of his mouth like a rabid hydrophobic.

“Good night, Bob. Great talking with ya.”

“Yeah man. I love ya, man.”

With that, I tiptoe back into the garage, and try to slip under the covers without the girlfriend noticing. But no, she wakes easily, and reacts to my disruption with growls of anger and sneers of dissatisfaction. Lying there, as if on a bed of eggshells, my mind fixates on the buried treasure, keeping me bug-eyed awake for another hour.

xv. Three Whores at Once

Back at the dinner table in Montana, the hobo dog lies hopeful at our feet.

“Finally down to the shit,” bellows my cousin, who has torn himself away from his cell phone to acknowledge that he has actually been listening.

“Hey, I’m a cook. I love to cook too,” Jan interrupts.

“You call this stinky shit cooking?” the Cuz whines.

“Just eat it and shut up,” she snaps. The remains of the casserole eventually make it under the table to the grateful masterless dog.

I feel I have to interject. “Yeah, speaking of stink. A fella that was really into cunnilingus went into the dentist with a toothache. The dentist said, ‘You don’t need a dentist. You need a barber!’” Snicker, snicker.

“Do filthy minds run in your family, Marty? Is there some DNA strand that reads for horny pervert?”

“Yes, I do think so. My dad used to have three whores at once in Germany,” the Cuz proudly replies.

“And is that some kind of badge of honor? Are you the product of a German whore?”

“Absolutely yes to the first. And no to the second,” replies the Cuz. “Mom was a prudish New England girl from Brown University. And just look at us,” waving his hand towards me. “We are practically twins. DNA duplicates.”

“It’s true, but Jake is better looking. You are sort of a Xerox copy, degraded on the edges,” Jan proclaims.

“I resent that,” says the Cuz.

“I agree with the first part. And can see your point on the second,” I smirk.

“You’re fired,” says the Cuz.

“So you will not be needing that toilet installed?”

“OK. One more day,” he threatens.

“*Cockeyedwednesday*,” I inadvertently chime in. “I believe that’s tomorrow, if I’m not mistaken. Hey, let’s continue this tomorrow evening.”

“Yeah, good night.”

“Night.”

Jan loads the dishes on her ample chest, and then rattles off to the kitchen.

As promised, I continue the story the next evening around the table.

xvi. Quaker Jewelry Shop

When the dawn smears itself in grays and yellows about the room, I thrash awake next to the warm lumpy body. Slipping out the back door of the garage, I relieve myself in a pile of old iron. Still in my underwear, I try to slide back under the covers for some girlfriend warmth, but am greeted with a cold scowling, a cursing whim of steel. I am shoved to the floor as she flusters her clothes back on. All I can think about is how badly she must have to piss. *Pissassdiddly*.

Bob is sitting at the table, fiddling with a dozen porcelain figurines, the kind you see cluttering old lady shelves. Miss Grumpy disappears for twenty minutes into the Quaker house bathroom. Bob

is rambling on and on about selling and packaging these trinkets on eBay. It is as though he is giving a primer class on Internet trading platforms. Rolls of tape and flats of cardboard are against the wall.

Halfway through his lesson on how to tape a package properly, the girlfriend returns, bright-eyed and hungry, and delightfully with a tolerant disposition. Into the local village we drive to the ubiquitous McDonald's that could be in any village worldwide. We could be in Guatemala or Vladivostok, but we are instead at some crossroads of highways on the Olympic Peninsula.

After our McDonald's breakfast, we go to a cheap strip mall. There, next to an Asian fingernail shop, is Wendy the Quaker lady's gift and jewelry store. This is a polite visit, to show our awe for a fellow friend. Inside is the usual crap, from Chinese-made tiny totems to knitted hats. We greet Bob's landlord, standing behind the glass counter containing fake turquoise/silver jewelry, chunks of abalone shell in twisted silver wire, with an agate strangled in the middle.

She has that kind of lean on the counter associated with bar flies. There is a slight BO, and some obvious long hairs sneaking out of her armpits.

The girlfriend later says to me, "Yuck! Who would buy a thing from her? She was disgusting!" "What was so foul about her?"

"My god! Did you see her nails! They were black with grime."

I did *not* see her nails. Nor did I see her shoes. Nor any other feminine detail that I should have. I did notice that she had a jealous smirk toward me, a kind of sideways look that said, "This Bob is *mine*. He's told me about the treasure and, Quaker or not, I'll kill you if you get in my way."

It was both a scary look and a flirtatious look. Damn, females are peculiar creatures.

xvii. Gender March for Freedom

Jan interjects into the story, unable to constrain herself. "Only because men are such dim-witted animals that they can't understand us."

"It's boring work to try to understand an idiot," snaps the Cuz.

"End the gender march for freedom. Let tell me tell my story," I tell them.

I then resume.

xviii. The Orchard

The Quaker has to stay and "man" the shop, and the girlfriend needs to lie down again, to digest or something. She actually wants to distance herself from the babbling Bob and my macho eruptions. That suits us just fine. We can hot box the car and tour the lost drug empire of the Northwest. The girlfriend is dropped off at the garage, and we light up.

Even though it is daylight, the Northwest roads are crowded with trees, shading the highway into a wet overbearing darkness. South on the 101, along Hood Canal, we come to a right turn near Brinnon, which diverges into a few roads leading into the rain forest. Trailers and rundown one-bedroom shack houses are scattered in the trees.

"No, not that one. Take a left."

Left is barely a paved lane passing a few modern houses.

"That's where the feds are," Bob says, and hunkers down in his seat with this declaration, his eyeballs level with the dashboard.

"Well, there's no feds out here, on this Tuesday morning in the drizzle," I reply.

"Oh no, man, they're watching. Watching for me to come back and dig up the money."

"Unlikely, Bob. You've been gone for twenty years."

"Pull over here." I do so.

There are a few sparse trees along the road, then an empty field leading up to some ramshackle trailers. Just below one trailer is a small orchard.

The trailer looks like it is sinking into the Northwest ground. It sits at a slight angle, the

front support rotting away. Green moss covers the thin aluminum roof, and black mildew patches are painting the outside like the skin of a Holstein cow. Pampers are blowing across the lawn, and sticking in the now-blooming cherry trees. No doubt that poor Van Litograph's ghost is looking on in horror at the brown-smear'd diapers hanging in the limbs, amid the pink-colored glory. Long grass has grown deep in the orchard, and blackberry vines snake into the lower branches. Untrimmed dead sticks protrude from each tree, showing the orchard's overall neglect. The trees are all over fifteen feet high now and, though completely ignored, they look pretty healthy and strong.

"That's it," declares Bob. "That's where the barn was, where we cooked and stored all the antiques. And the orchard. It's there. Buried under the tree."

"Which tree?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Well, what if something happened to you? I'd need to know, brother. Besides, how am I supposed to get it for you, if I don't know which tree?"

Bob is silent for a moment, engaged in deep thought. His brow is furrowed as if in pain.

"OK, but never tell anybody. That Quaker bitch is hounding me all the time to find out which tree it is. Like she's gonna dig it up. She *wants* it. No question."

"My lips are forever sealed," I assure him.

"OK. It's the third row down, and the second tree in from that side," Bob finally says, gesturing vaguely with his right hand.

"Under that one?"

"Yep. Twenty feet down. Three ammo cans packed with sealed hundred dollar bills. And the counterfeit two dollar printing plates—"

I cut him off before hearing the story all over again. "Can we tunnel from here to the orchard? Seems a long way."

"No fucking way with the house right behind us. We gotta find another way."

"I got ideas. Lemme think about it a little. How to get rid of the trailer trash and dig up the treasure? It can be done, but ya gotta have brass."

"And the FBI is watching. Those feds will be on us. They will take the money and lock me back up," Bob whines.

"Bob, no one is watching. Besides, we'll be more clever than that."

"That Quaker wants to buy the land and is trying to figure how to do that. But these lesbians have nowhere to go. This trailer is the end of the road for them. They ain't budging."

"Oh, they'll budge when the right thing happens."

"What will that be?"

"*Thinking*. Keep your panties on. Hey, you got a light? What's a guy gotta do around here to get high?"

Returning back to Bob's garage, I find the girlfriend is notably irritated. Hands on her hips, a piercing glare.

"Where have you assholes been?" she demands.

"Oh, just out for a drive," Bob and I snicker.

"Well, get your ass in gear or we'll miss the ferry. I'm all packed." Big surprise.

And so our visit to the treasure is over. No hundred dollar bills this trip. But a dozen nefarious ideas now in hand.

To be concluded in Cenacle | 127 | April 2025



Colin James

Establishing a Drum Beat

Trill fingers,
corrupt enlightenment.
Thrice points in threes.
I got the *rhythm*,
can you hear?

Almost like stepping.
Man, I'm *floating*.

I cavort into town.
Saved your advice
for after dinner.

Somewhere there is
perfume in the air.
Flowers and superstitions,
others for other.

* * *

Cat's Got You Won

I like my underclothes
laid out just so . . .
The underwear and socks
you know, toiletries.

I mean this is all
kind of normal.
There hovers not
a sexual innuendo.

The drying tree is for airing,
The window drapes pristine.
A card table between beds
might unfold, no one knows.

* * *

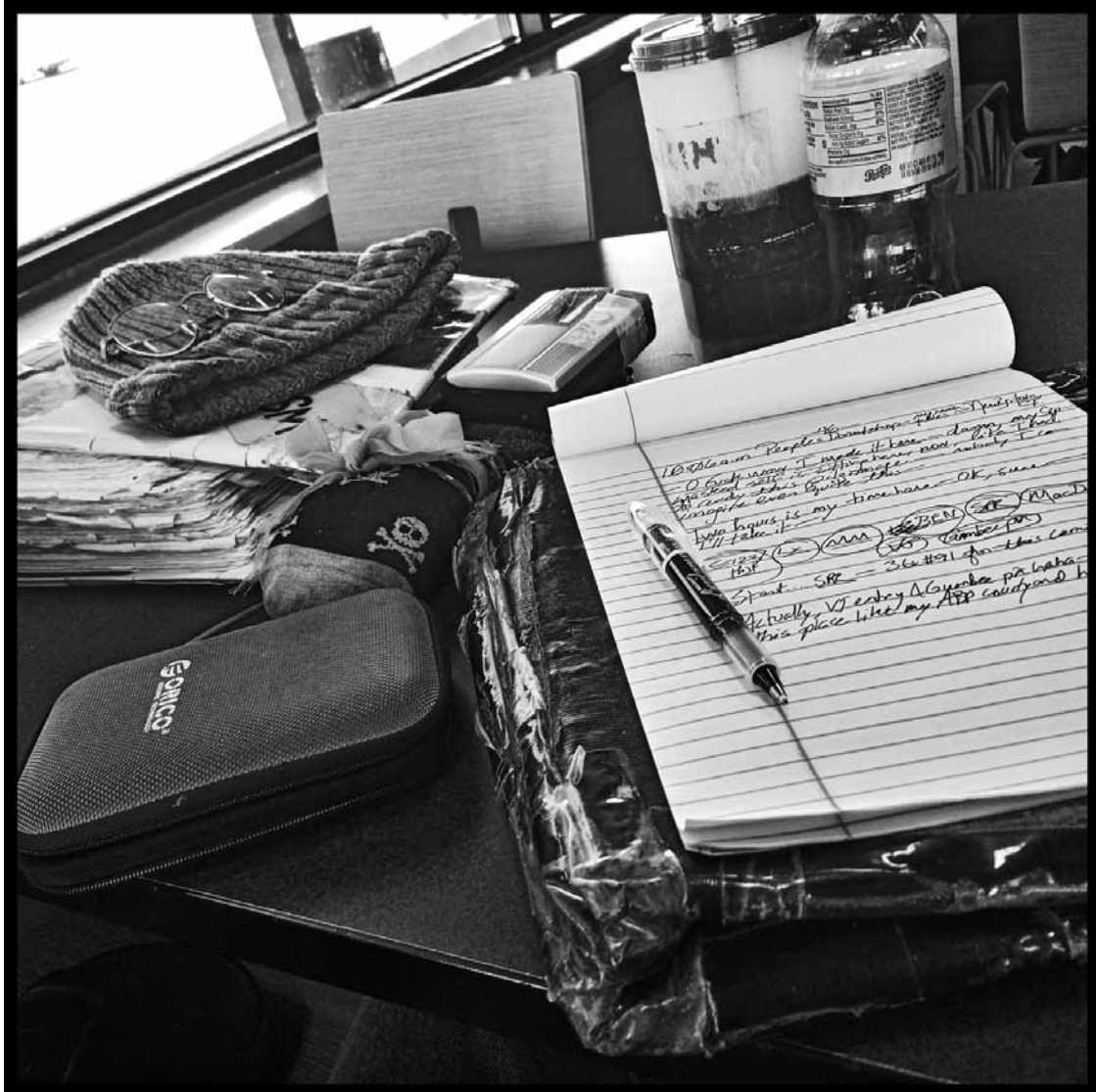
The Paralytic Consort

I knew one person in London.
I would stand on the corner,
waiting for her to walk by.

Then she started getting a lift,
from an admirer at work,
and I had to step in gradually,
swinging from the hips.

* * * * *





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Twelve

"I tell you, there are more worlds
and more fears to them
than you will think of in many years!"
—George MacDonald
Littin, 1875

xxxvii.

Peoples Donutshop, is where. From one perspective, a Dunkin' Donuts in New Britain, Connecticut.

From mine, long from mine, the Peoples Donutshop. And where is it these days?

Well, let's see. Tis a plaza of sorts. Near is a Finest Supermarket & a Liquor Depot. Off-track betting parlor a door or two down. McDonald's far end. Some of here, some of elsewhere.

Open 24 hours, 7 days a week, like it used to be.

Nearby the old factory town center. Liberry. Miss Washington Diner. Department store or two. Park square in center. Public busses passing by.

Also nearby is the on-ramp to Boulevard, which leads on, eventually, to The Arcadia. Well, OK, that's new.

OK, so that's some geographical context. Tantalizing, for sure. But not narrative.

Not yet. But start in & discover more.

"I hold up the four paws of my mind,
& crave indulgence."

—George MacDonald, *Adela Cathcart*, 1864.

I arrived to this table this time from a trip I began from Boston several days ago. Last came down here in March 2022. October 2019 before that. So twice since Pandemic hit in March 2020. More yearly

before that going back to about 2014, year my mother died. Come down for her funeral, nobody to host me here anymore, I stayed in the local downtown hotel in this city. Lived years here, though long ago—

Come now to visit places like this from my Ago, to remember, & to do new work too.

When I lived near here, those long years ago, I came here & wrote the fixtions leading eventually to this one.

Different tables over the years. Guessing since '88? 35 years. *Wow*.

Narrative? This place is now part of the *Tangled Gate Mythopoeia*. Always was, but now I know where it is. Boulevard off-ramp.

A red-hatted man walks by, aided by a fancy wooden walking stick. Strange here, & so.

I can't be here often, but I can include it in my fixtion more formally.

Boulevard is from a long ago *Bags End News* story; appeared again in a more recent one.

The Arcadia is, as mentioned, from those long ago fixtions. A kind of almagam of bookstores & cafes from various Agos.

And Arcadia is a variation of Emandia. Which feeds into a larger fixtional cosmology.

Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment.

Narrative? Not there yet, I suppose.

Next, to toss dice & coins.

xxxviii.

OK—so dice toss = 6
 Coins = 1 heads, 1 tails
 Now what? Icons back into
 blue-green coin purse but message got—

Last time I wrote this book past 3 in the morning? Oh, a fucking while—And what to do by it? Make 3 am shit up & see what happens—

So I leave the Peoples Donutshop, carrying my Blue Suitcase, bookbag strap on my shoulder, my MeZmer-decorated headphones jacked into beloved Polly iPod, music dreamy but upbeat for walking—oh I'll walk now—

What sticks is what matters, the details that—yah—so I find myself walking up the off-ramp to Boulevard—or is it Turnpike that leads eventually to Boulevard? And thus to The Arcadia?

I stick as far to the side as possible, no sidewalk or breakdown lane or whatever—just a rough edge to keep along—

Cars go by, trucks, vans, just these? Well, I'm sure more too—Many Words, many transportation kinds—

OK—now on—OK, yah, tis Turnpike, which I'll bet sure as shooting shit leads to Boulevard & then The Arcadia—

Why bound there again? Because it's where the center of gravity is pulling—& I don't know for sure the what or the why, & this interests me—

Cool day, autumnal blue sky cool. Good for walking, for sure-not-sure-where walking—

See, it's past 3 am where I sit writing, but this scene is I'd guess late morning—like my fixtional self on this page took a different route from the one I did—I then was bound by bus & bus back to Boston—where I am—but this fixtional one has gone this way—

What kind of traffic flashes by me? Well, I'd guess a lotta lanes, from slow to quite speedy—gotta account for all—

And I vaguely wonder—how to account for all the versions of The Arcadia along the many turns of the many calendars? Or not so much?

Maybe a bit—

I peek back in the pages—
six years at least since a mention in this book? And only a handful before that since *Lx* started in *2006*?

And now suddenly all this?

Is The Arcadia = Emandia thing more than words?

Is The Arcadia a remnant of Emandia, transported, preserved, now somehow open for business more fully? No longer disguised, simply, as a bookstore?

Is The Arcadia = Emandia needed for what's to come? Helping survive it as last time? Has it simply been emerging all along?

How can a live portion of a long-gone world be here? Where is here?

Is this place shared by the Many Worlds, like Abe's Beach, the Attics, the Ancienne Coffeehouse, & so on?

I am now arriving, faster than seems possible? Maybe I got a ride? Say "Thanks."

"Thanks!"

"Any time, Raymond!"

OK, so now returning . . .

Will I find Dylan? Rebecca? Young Nnnolan?



Strangely, I arrive to yet another part of The Arcadia.

Come to a hallway, long long hallway—green & golden colored—so I think to myself: “Crissy colors, Imagianna colors. OK then.”

Remembering the coins & dice in my little blue-green coin purse, I start counting the doors as I walk along. Come to the 6th pair of them, across from each other, almost.

1 heads, 1 tails. OK. Close my eyes & turn in a circle, slowly, counting down from 6. Open eyes. Look at the door before me, & say aloud, “heads.” Then turn to other door, say, “tails.” Grasp golden doorknob on green door, turn, push in, & arrive . . . somewhere unexpected?

Oh my.

xxxix.

But wait a moment, if you please, *hark!* Let the unanticipated words come, one at a time, do.

Well, OK, now, or then, I guessed this & seem kind of right.

You see, I got to wondering all this Arcadia business, & it occurred to me that, yes, Arcadia/Emandia is expanding. A seeming gone world, in time & space, arriving *here & now*.

How? Can one world arrive into, among, within another? Can they co-habitate in a shared space? Like the fingers of two hands twining?

That might be how best to put this: or even better: *two worlds braiding*.

Why?

To understand this, one must learn the *Story*. What sources, roots, undergirds this *Tangled Gate Mythopoeia*.

Settle back & take all this in for a spell.

Long ago, in the time before time, was *Unitive Time*. How this came to be the oldest books call *Evolution*. What this all really is, is still a mystery. The Star Spiral of the Many Worlds were clustered much closer together, a kind of *Synthesis*.

Then came a *Wobble*, what the oldest books also call *Ferment*. Called one or the other, it's when something breaks down or changes into *many* things over time.

The Many Worlds of the clustered Star Spiral spooked & fled from the *Wobble*. This was the next *Evolution*. They eventually evolved into the more familiar curving spread of stars & worlds known & loved so well in the *Mythopoeia*. Thus the next *Synthesis*.

Then came the *Great Violence*. Was it caused by a *Wobble* too? No known books tell of this.

But this seemed to be the next *Ferment* in which all in the Star Spiral was nearly consumed. There were Great Heroes [Gate-Keeper's Mentor & his strange Yellow Building compatriot, among others]



who saved all they could, even as most of them were consumed too. Those they saved came to live in one place, one world not destroyed. Some called it *Arcadia*. But its true name is *Emandia*. This was *Evolution*.

The world of Emandia long long existed alone. Then it began to decay in body & spirit. So the Emandians sent the select of their population to find other worlds to live on. By spaceships, by Red Bags, by other means too. 36 worlds in the Star Spiral were targeted. This was *Synthesis*.

Then one of the Emandian spaceships struck a fragment of *Wobble* from the Great Violence [this was Gate-Keeper's people]. And this fragment then broke into countless *Wobbles* occurring in the *Mythopoeia* stories. *Ferment*.

The Six Brother-Heroes are, in sum & simple, tasked to protect the Many Worlds, as Great Heroes had tried to before.

This information adapted from *Bags End News*, which Algernon Beagle writes so well [o! shucks, guy!].

That learned, next is the Architecture of Dreams.

xl.

It begins with Moss. Well, it really begins with Moss at the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock, now going on in the Thought Fleas Clearing in the White Woods. All invited, of course.

There are many ways to travel Dreamland & the Dreaming. That's one thing.

Another is that one can travel by Moss from one place to another. Usually by waking.

But what about both? How would this be?

Another step back. The Story previously told, *Evolution-Synthesis-Ferment*, is told by Moss at the Festival. How is by the famous Moss Po-et, Mr. Alvinarah Poesy. A handsome brown-striped Fox Creature with pretty bloo eyes & long whiskers. Travels always with his boon companion, Naria Narwhal. Alvinarah also wears a lovely crimson chapeau,

Alvinarah, working with Miss Flossie Flea & others (like Lori Bunny & Boop), has created an area of the Festival where most everything is covered in Rainbow Moss. Stones, small trees, long beds of Moss. These Moss, when touched as one goes along, tell the Story of *Evolution-Synthesis-Ferment*. Which is important for all to know now, since tis a time of *Ferment* again.

But learning this Story, in this vivid way, is more complicated for people-folks than Creatures & Thought Fleas & other native denizens of the White Woods.

To come to this Moss Artwork of the Story, & experience as one moves from Mossy stone to stone, tree to bed, people-folks must be schooled in the Architecture of Dreams, & then taught how to travel Mossy Dreamways.

Else, they touch & fall into Mossy Fugues, best described as helpless tumble into the dreams of other people-folks.

To travel well Mossy Dreamways, one must learn these elements:

1. *Music* – always there is music, & one must hark an ear well to catch it;
2. *Details* – big & little, lingered on, slow to study & collect them;
3. *Memory* – these may be, likely, bits of the Dreamer’s memories, study & collect these too;
4. *Narrative* – what is the story? Learn to ride it & recall it;
5. *Mood* – what is the feel of the Dreaming? Sad? Happy? Again, collect it; &
6. *Weird* – what is possible only in the Dreaming?

The Dreamer grows better at gathering these along by learning a *Hmmm* to guide, & a dance to stay nimble & light & moving well. This learning is called *Sama*.

The Story will then reveal, be arrived to, & the Dreamer will then fully experience the Story, & be arrived eventually back to the waking, & the welcome of Alvinarah, Naria, Miss Flossie, & everyone else gathered.

[Returned again to Bungalow A on the shores of the Wild Wild Sea Dance—

[And a dream of a market of logs—& there the Trucker-Poet come along, laughing with a friend—

[Sees me & approaches close—

["I thought we had/have a fraternity!" he whispers hard.

[Do we? Did we? Still?]

Mossy Fugue: he seemed to be traveling long & far & unknown & by weird chance ended up at her house.

She was weightless & surprised in his grasp. He was in the other room, vain, useless.

She floated in colors in his grasp, like a rainbow of curved shadows, unsure, curious, forward & back to touch like all the world is a glare to know—

He doesn't matter—vain, useless—

They are gone on together, & build them an ark of words & touches—knowing each other by eliminating all that is unimportant; that is to say, most of everything—

desire becomes love but love cannot exist without it—

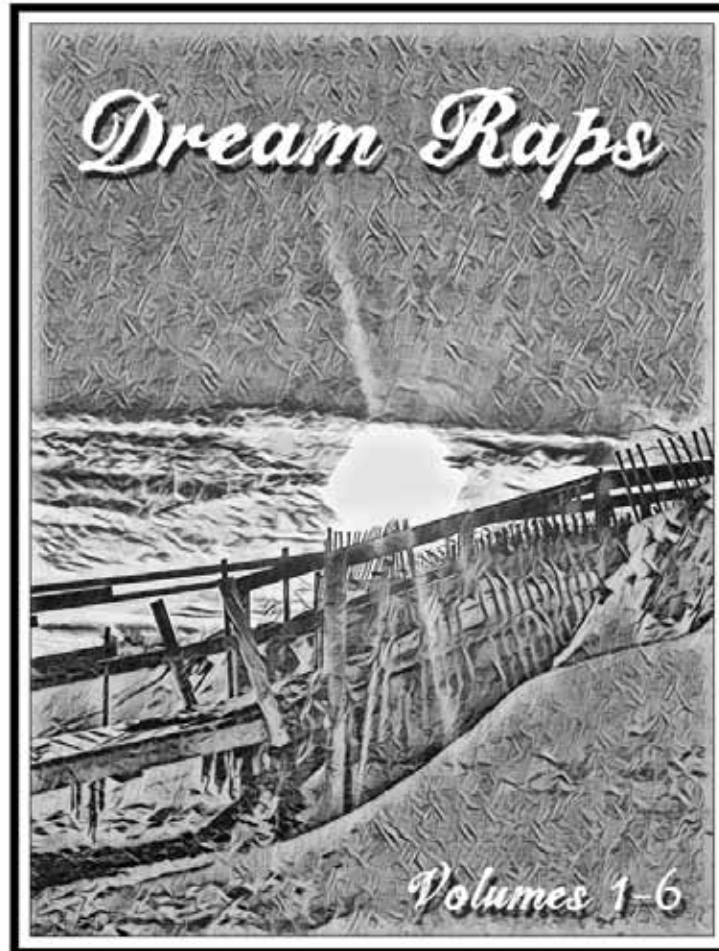
—And others until the areas of Rainbow Moss are blocked off—not forbidden—nothing is forbidden in the White Woods—but signs & advisors—

Most stay away, or want to learn how to experience the Story well—a few prefer Mossy Fugues, & often need to be led, shaken & wan, to Miss Flossie Flea's special recipe Rutabaga Festival Soup, for comfort, & a return to clarity.



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Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. His artwork appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Owe you a catching-up phone call sometime very soon, brother! More of his work can be found at: <http://purigare.tumblr.com>.

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. We are *both* pissed at the guy with the shitty aim. More of his writings can be found at therubyeye.blogspot.com.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1859, & died in Crowborough, Sussex, England in 1930. He was the author of four novels and fifty-six short stories about the legendary detective Sherlock Holmes & his boon companion, Dr. Watson.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at electrolounge.boards.net. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet, & perhaps join, those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Judih Weinstein Haggai passed on October 7, 2023, on the first day of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Her haiku & recent longer poems will ever appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless. She also hosted the excellent radio show of the same name on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). It will recur from time to time, in posthumous honor.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His prose & poetry appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His prose in this issue is from the working draft of his forthcoming book, *Societies of the Spirit: Spirituality and Mysticism in Five Traditions*.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Book 2 of his published quadrilogy of *Nighttime Daydreams (Bat Dreams)* was published in 2019. He hosts the excellent radio show “Nighttime Daydreams” on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). Regarding his poems in this issue, he notes these were “[w]ritten as song lyrics by the Suno AI music algorithm following the prompt ‘A song in English about my (female) cat in the style of Andre Breton’s surrealist poem ‘My Wife (Ma femme)’; give the song a title taken from a line in the song’ – then curated, shaped, and edited by me.”

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Down in Florida with the wife for most of January. Beware the human-shaped gators, brother. They're stupid but they bite.

Sam Knot lives in rural France. His poetry, prose, & artwork all appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Working on visions with visions within visions, atop visions, dreamed of in all-night hammock outings. Visit <https://iamalonebutwearenot.com/> for more of his work.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her prose & poetry & photographs appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Regarding my *Vow of Opposition* in this issue, she says, "I sign my name beside yours." Thank you, soul sister!

Martina Reisz Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her most recent book of poetry *Beyond Temples* was published in April 2024 by Deerbrook Editions. Ready to man the ramparts in 2025, as much as neither she nor I wish to do so. More of her writings can be found at martinaneberry.wordpress.com.

Epi Rogan lives in Cork, Ireland, though she is originally from Alaska. Her fantastic photography appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. More of her work can be found at [instagram.com/pieorgan](https://www.instagram.com/pieorgan). Enjoying sharing our publications back & forth. Hers is called *Flotsam*, found at linktr.ee/Flotsammag.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. Nineteen years ago, you took on my impoverished, scribbling hide . . . *thank you & love you* are not close enough to true words of gratefulness . . .

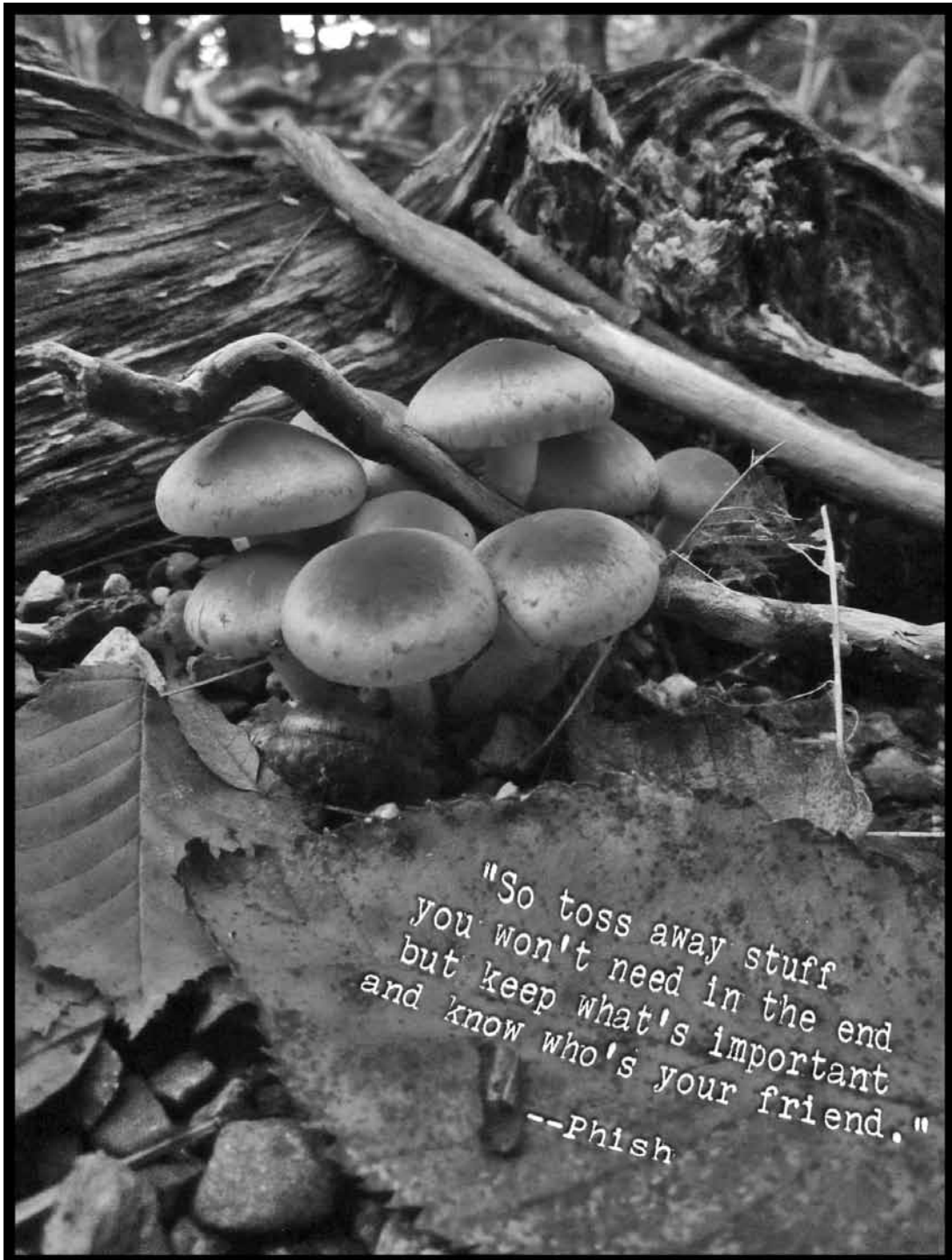
Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. When most alive, writing & writing & writing & . . .

Louis Staebler lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. His wonderful photography appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. More of his work can be found at [instagram.com/louiestaebler](https://www.instagram.com/louiestaebler).

Madelaine Taylah lives in Victoria, Australia. She is a welcome new contributor to *The Cenacle*. She is currently exploring a poetry passion project since completing her Honours degree in Literary Studies in 2023. More of her work can be found at [instagram.com/thatgirl_books](https://www.instagram.com/thatgirl_books), and at thatgirlbooks.blog.

Timothy Vilgiate lives in Austin, Texas. His *Rivers of the Mind [A Novel]* is regularly serialized in this journal. The radio version of *Rivers of the Mind*, an amazing work in any form, can be found online at riversofthemind.libsyn.com.





"So toss away stuff
you won't need in the end
but keep what's important
and know who's your friend."

--Phish

