

Editor's Introduction

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

What might have been done to prevent the Global Pandemic to come, which started, unknown to virtually anyone, toward the end of this year? Maybe it was inevitable. *Maybe*.

But Art goes ever on too. Like Nature, a bulwark against the cruelest, most indifferent, ignorant & murderous of human nature. Art, like what appears in the following pages, *will not stop either*.

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



Scriptor Press Sampler

Number 21 | 2019 Annual

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

| by Raymond Soulard, Jr. long ancestral greeting POETRY by Joe Ciccone by Joe Ciccone by Sam Knot NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan by Raymond Soulard, Jr. long by Ace Boggess by Ace Bogges by Ace Boggess by Ace Boggess by Ace Boggess by Ace Bogges by Ace B | Poetry | | out of the darkness |
|--|---|-----|--------------------------------|
| DEMAR RAPS by Raymond Soulard, Jr. POETTRY POETTRY By Sam Knot NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Jimmy Heffernan by Raymond Soulard, Jr. POETTRY by Ace Boggess by Raymond Soulard, Jr. POETTRY by Ace Boggess by Regroup Kelly by Leia Friedman POETTRY by Arrina Reisz Newberry by Nathan D. Horowitz by Nathan D. Horowitz by Nathan D. Horowitz by Diana Rosen POETTRY by Diana Rosen POETTRY by Algerion Beagle by Jamara Miles by Algerion Beagle by Algerion Beagle by Algerion Beagle by Colin James POETTRY by Lake Friedman James Beagle by Lake Friedward Jury Lake by Colin James POETTRY by Colin Jam | by Judih Weinstein Haggai | 7 | the call of a loon |
| POETRY by Joe Ciccone by Joe Ciccone by Joe Ciccone by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan by Jamymond Soulard, Jr. | Dream Raps | | |
| by Joe Ciccone by Sam Knot Norts on Gon [Proose] by Sam Knot Norts on Gon [Proose] by Immyr Heffernan MANY MUSICS [ELEVENTH SERIES] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (1) by Ace Boggess file Island or Balt by Gregory Kelly Poetrav by Anthan D. Horowitz by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen Poetrav by Janara Miles by Janara Miles by Janara Miles by Tamara Miles by Ton Shechan Poetrav by Oolin James The Crocodhie King of Bellize [Travel Journal] by Charlie Beyer by Colin James The Crocodhie King of Bellize [Travel Journal] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem Labvarnthine [A New EKKION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (1) confiscion confusion confusion confusion confusion confusion confusion confusion confusion rain, birds, clock switch, war rain, birds, clock switch, w | by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 🕼 | 9 | ancestral greeting |
| by Sam Knot NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (a) NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (a) NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (a) NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (a) NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (a) NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. (a) NOTES ON GOD [PROSE] popular Annual Manual Manua | Poetry | | |
| by Sam Knot Notes on Goo [Prosse] by Immy Heffernan MANY MUSICS [ELEVENTH SERIES] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [| by Joe Ciccone | 40 | * * * |
| Notes on God [Prose] by Jimmy Heffernan by Jimmy Heffernan Many Mustics [Eleventh Series] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. | Poetry | | |
| by Jimmy Heffernan MANY MUSICS [ELEVENTH SERIES] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. by Ace Boggess by Ace Boggess by Ace Boggess fite Istanto or Balt by Leia Friedman POETRY by Gregory Kelly POETRY by Nathan D. Horowitz POPORTRY by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POPORTRY by Tamara Miles POETRY by Tamara Miles | | 42 | |
| MANY MUSICS [ELEVENTH SERIES] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [] 47 morning questions POETRY by Ace Boggess THE ISLAND OF BALI by Leia Friedman POETRY By Gregory Kelly POETRY by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Shechan POETRY by Tom Shechan POETRY by Tom Shechan POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by John Echem Labyrinthine [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [] 104 *** | | | confusion |
| by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 47 morning questions by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 47 morning questions by Ace Boggess 57 ** The Istanko of Ball by Leia Friedman 59 POETRY by Gregory Kelly 62 morning compassion may we all live free from fear all living creatures POETRY by Martina Reisz Newberry 65 PROSE-POETRY by Diana Rosen 67 POETRY by Tamara Miles 69 open windows "What Is Istangannaa" [A Bags End Tale] by Algernon Beagle 71 spring on the kibbutz POETRY by Tom Sheehan 89 POETRY by Colin James 91 The Crocodule King of Belize [Travel Journal] by Charlie Beyer 92 when all is chaos POETRY by John Echem 104 smile and repeat by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 107 **** | • • • | 44 | rain, birds, clock switch, war |
| by Ace Boggess 57 The Island of Ball by Leia Friedman 59 POETRY by Gregory Kelly POETRY by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by John Echem by Raymond Soulard, Jr. ▶ # * * # * # * # * * # * # * * # | | - | |
| by Ace Boggess THE ISLAND OF BALT by Leia Friedman POETRY by Gregory Kelly POETRY by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Jamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James THE CROCCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem Labyrinthine [A NEW FIXTION] Labyrin Hand Indicate the state of th | • • | 4/ | morning questions |
| THE ISLAND OF BALL by Leia Friedman by Leia Friedman by Gregory Kelly by Gregory Kelly by Gregory Kelly by Nathan D. Horowitz by Nathan D. Horowitz by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Diana Rosen POETRY by Jamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Colin James THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [Image] 107 morning compassion may we all live free from fear all living creatures *** morning compassion may we all live free from fear all living creatures *** *** by Open windows honeysuckle and henhouses spring on the kibbutz *** *** *** by Colin James 104 breathing in 4, out 4 breathing in 4, out 4 *** *** *** *** *** *** *** | | 57 | |
| by Leia Friedman POETRY by Gregory Kelly POETRY by Nathan D. Horowitz by Nathan D. Horowitz by Martina Reisz Newberry POETRY by Martina Reisz Newberry POETRY by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles "What Is Imagiannae" [A Bags End Tale] "What Is Imagiannae" [A Bags End Tale] by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James by Colin James by Colin James by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer by John Echem by John Echem by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [a repeat **** *** *** *** *** *** *** | , се | 5/ | * * * |
| POETRY by Nathan D. Horowitz by Nathan Esiz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Diana Rosen by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW EKITION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. Image and repeat by Raymond Soulard, Jr. Image and Raymond Soulard, Jr. Ima | | 50 | |
| by Gregory Kelly POETRY by Nathan D. Horowitz by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Charlie Beyer POETRY by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [] | • | 39 | |
| POETRY by Nathan D. Horowitz by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen PROSE-POETRY by Diana Rosen 67 POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan 89 POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James 191 THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer 92 when all is chaos POETRY by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 107 *** | | (2 | morning compassion |
| by Nathan D. Horowitz by Martina Reisz Newberry by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen Prose-Poetry by Tamara Miles "What Is IMagianna;" [A Bags End Tale] by Algernon Beagle Poetry by Tom Sheehan Poetry by Colin James The Crocodille King of Belize [Travel Journal] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem Labyrinthine [a New Fixtion] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [] | | 62 | may we all live free from fear |
| POETRY by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles 'What Is Imagiannae' [A Bags End Tale] by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Colin James POETRY by Charlie Beyer by John Echem Labyrinthine [A New Fixtion] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [1] 165 **** *** *** *** *** *** ** | | 62 | • |
| by Martina Reisz Newberry by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle by Algernon Beagle by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James The Crocodille King of Belize [Travel Journal] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem by John Echem by Raymond Soulard, Jr. A sew fixtion] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. A sew fixtion by Raymond Soulard, Jr. A sew fixtion by Raymond Soulard, Jr. A sew fixtion by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer by Raymond Soulard, Jr. A sew fixtion by Raymond Soulard, Jr. A sew fi | • | 03 | all living creatures |
| PROSE-POETRY by Diana Rosen 67 POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James by Colin James THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem by John Echem by Raymond Soulard, Jr. Parks of the state of the | | 65 | |
| by Diana Rosen POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Colin James by Colin James THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [Image] | • | 0) | * * * |
| POETRY by Tamara Miles by Tamara Miles "What Is IMAGIANNA?" [A BAGS END TALE] by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan by Colin James by Colin James by Colin James 591 The CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [1] 107 open windows honeysuckle and henhouses h | | 67 | |
| by Tamara Miles "WHAT IS IMAGIANNA?" [A BAGS END TALE] by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [6] 107 | | O, | |
| WHAT IS IMAGIANNA?" [A BAGS END TALE] by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan POETRY by Colin James THE CROCCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [1] honeysuckle and henhouses spring on the kibbutz *** when all is chaos breathing in 4, out 4 smile and repeat *** honeysuckle and henhouses spring on the kibbutz *** by Colin James *** 101 **** | | 69 | open windows |
| by Algernon Beagle POETRY by Tom Sheehan 89 POETRY by Colin James by Colin James 71 89 *** 91 The Crocodile King of Belize [Travel Journal] by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer 92 when all is chaos POETRY by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [10] **** | | | honevsuckle and henhouses |
| by Tom Sheehan by Colin James by Colin James by Charlie Beyer by Charlie Beyer by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. Image: Spring on the Riobutz *** *** *** *** *** *** *** | | 71 | |
| POETRY by Colin James 91 THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer 92 when all is chaos POETRY by John Echem 104 LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 19 107 *** | Poetry | , | spring on the kibbutz |
| by Colin James THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer 92 when all is chaos Breathing in 4, out 4 smile and repeat by Raymond Soulard, Jr. | by Tom Sheehan | 89 | |
| THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer POETRY by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 19 107 *** | Poetry | | * * * |
| by Charlie Beyer POETRY by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 107 *** | by Colin James | 91 | |
| POETRY by John Echem 104 LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 107 *** | THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [TRAVEL JOURNAL] | | |
| by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 104 smile and repeat 107 * * * * | by Charlie Beyer | 92 | when all is chaos |
| by John Echem LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 104 smile and repeat 107 * * * | Poetry | | breathing in 4 out 4 |
| by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 🕑 107 | , · · | 104 | _ |
| *** | LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] | | smile and repeat |
| | by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 🖤 | 107 | |
| Notes On Contributors 115 | | | * * * |
| | Notes On Contributors | 115 | |
| SCRIFTOR PRESS | SCRIPTOR PRESS | | |
| the road a spiral | | | the road a spiral |
| grass with puddles and rocks | | | grass with puddles and rocks |

2024

Scriptor Press Sampler is published annually by Scriptor Press, 2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, USA 98107 Email: editor@scriptorpress.com | Web: http://www.scriptorpress.com Front & back covers by Raymond & Kassandra Soulard. Interior graphic artwork by Raymond & Kassandra Soulard, except where noted.

Judih Weinstein Haggai



experience each step

Raymond Soulard, Jr.





Dream Raps

Why are we here?

Because we're here

Roll the bones

Why does it happen?

Because it happens

Roll the bones

—Rush, "Roll the Bones," 1991.

And Again

And again, some way among will, whim, & wish, there's remembrance. Sometimes clearing the way on is first, & then clearing the way back. *Remember old, thus remember new*

Oh, OK, wow, I must have leaned too close to the black-&-white television set on its little purple stool. I am sitting on our green couch watching *TripTown* with, I slowly realize, my lover & our friends the Creatures.

Then I turn & look down that hallway, following something, a shadow on the wall, following into that occasional room. A man's head with blue strands of hair.

Flick my Bic & there revealed is the ancient Gate-Keeper of **RemoteLand**, or so he looks. My very favorite film, freakiest of the freaky. Has a Gate-Keeper, not a director.

Crouched, rocking back & forth, he starts talking slowly & obscurely to a place just over my head about being from Raleigh, North Carolina, slowly, obscurely, saying: *I'm tryin' to will my trips to be more like my dreams & my dreams to be more like my trips. You know what I'm sayin', brotha'?*

Sometimes I'll be battin' a Frisbee back & forth between my dreams & my trips! I'll throw the Frisbee from my trips, & I'll catch it in my dreams, & then I'll throw the Frisbee from my dreams & catch it in my trips!

And sometimes I'll use this pilla' that seems to follow me around, this yellow pilla' dressed in a purple cloak. Sometimes I'll use the pilla' to bat the Frisbee back & forth between my dreams & my trips. & that's pretty good. That's pretty good, don't you say, brotha'? Don't you say? You from Raleigh, North Carolina too? They got the four-&-twenty blue hills o' Heaven there, I'll aver they do.

And I look at him & say, No, man, I'm not from Raleigh, North Carolina. But why don't you stay around here for a while? Here, you can sleep in this empty room here. I'll get you a pillow.

No, man, I've got my pilla'.

How about a nice warm blanket for you to curl up in, Mr. Freaky **RemoteLand** Gate-Keeper? I've got this beautiful brown Bear Blanket right here. Will watch over you all the night long.

Alright, alright, sounds good, brotha', sounds good. Sounds good, brotha', sounds good. You go back to watching your old black-&-white TV with your lover & your friends. You ever watch that old show about Mulronie the Space Pirate. Loved that one!

Anyway, I'm sure y'all have had enough of my noise for a while. I'm like, Yeah, I guess so. Turn back to the TV...

Starts Out As a Checkerboard

Starts out as a checkerboard. Now that seems simple enough. Checkers. Straight ahead. But then, I suppose, not even checkers are straight ahead because you do have to move diagonally, & that makes it so that you aren't quite moving straight ahead exactly.

Hmm. And it's an empty place that this checkerboard is in. Except then it's not so empty, it's tangly & vast, *goodness*, well, OK. It's like a world rises up from that checkerboard design, up from the bare ground of that place that used to be empty & now it's not, it's tangly & vast.

And the checkerboard fades in time, over the centuries, & eventually it's forgotten, that this place began as a checkerboard in an empty place.

Then one day, in a later century, there's a young orange-mustached shaggy haired young man who has snuck into this room, & he's looking at the blood-soaked carpet in an otherwise neat room.

What kind of room? Let's say it's a hotel room. Let's say it's in a tall, tall hotel. Called the Hotel Noah. Locally, called the No-Tell, for obvious & more obscure reasons.

It's hard to see the top of this strange No-Tell, as though maybe it was one thing & another before it was a hotel, & there's some vague kind of continuity going on still.

So it's a neat hotel room except for the blood that is soaked into the carpet.

In the closet, there are plenty of shirts & jackets hung up, arranged neatly. And the young man who has snuck into the room, he tries on one shirt from the many. It's orange, shaggy, like his hair & his mustache. It's open-collared, very soft, *hmmms?*

He puts it on, crosses the hall to the office of possibly the killers of the man who owned all these things. The father of this young man.

The killers in the room across the hall don't know who he is & he doesn't know that he was in his late father's room. Nobody knows anything about anything. He's just there for a job, man, he's just there for a job.

Oh, & they're looking for someone to do a job, they are, & they like his orange shirt, makes them think of someone else but they can't quite think of who.

I'm down the hall from all this, I've been watching all this unfold. I know they're killers, I know they killed his late father. I know he's wearing his late father's orange shirt. These killers have been following me, or I have been following them, it changes over time. Time travel is not linear.

In any event, one way or the other, I can't seem to get away from them, no matter how far I go, always ends up like this.

And they've killed me too time & again, yet it all goes on. Now what does that mean?

I just want to escape &, since no one's in that room of the late father, I go in & I crawl down real low, & I look myself deep into the blood-soaked carpet.

I think to myself, if ever there was a moment, it would be this one in which I could

look into this blood-soaked carpet, deep deep into it, deep deep, & see that checkerboard from long ago.

And I do. I look deep into the blood-soaked carpet, I look down into its molecules, its cellulars, its atoms, its eves.

I see something. I see my face across time. Me & not me. I exist multiply across space & time. Time is not linear.

And I think, no, this is not just me, this is others, many others, who exist multiply through space & time, throughout all of history &; if that's possible, maybe history could be changed, deaths could be averted.

I don't have to be murdered again. I can talk to my selves back then & hereon, and we can warn each other about what's to come, maybe not just us, maybe not just our little story. Maybe it's possible to exist like communicating beacons across time, & warn of peril, how it goes, well or bad.

And, as I think to myself, wow, I wish I had enough time to do this, there's a loud noise. I fall into blackness again.

I'm Sitting in This Room, Deep in My Mind

And again I'm sitting in this room, deep in my mind, where I've sat forever. It's an empty room of all but me, yet not quite. Bear with me here. It is & it is not more of the same old shite. And I'm sitting here, cross-legged on the floor in this room.

I'm looking down at a little note I scribbled right onto the floor, I used an old crayon I found, & I kind of mooshed it up in my hand a little, & I wrote with my finger: There are those who exist multiply in space & time throughout history. Some discovered a way at a far end of history to travel back through the Dreaming, to their earlier iterations, with their later knowledge of historical peril, to try to alter the disastrous end of the world.

There's a man, he is an Architect, this is what he did. He traveled, iterated, back through time, only he did more. He cuts the ties with his future, before the potion wears off that would have pulled him back through the Dreaming to where he had started.

He comes to find the Princess, who is from a far-off world called Emandia. She's special. She trebles in time, meaning she's able to co-exist in awareness for moments with all of her iterations. He comes to find her as maybe the only way to avert the disastrous end of the world. Comes to love her as he had never loved before. Learns that what you love will warp your path.

Now what is it that could be really done about this disastrous end to come? You've got those who iterate in time & space, & then you've got this special Princess who can co-exist in awareness. And you've got the Architect & his faith that the Princess could avert the disastrous end of the world. Him & his love-warped path. What could really be done?

Well, what you could do is you adjust history, over & over again, until the far end is good. What's good? That's hard. You have to turn on all the lights at once, is what he says to her. Find a way for human history to not end in disaster. You have to turn on all the lights at once.

I write all this with my crayoned-up finger on the floor of this room that is empty of all but me, & yet not quite. Bear with me. It is & isn't more of the same old shite.

And so I think to myself, what could be better than this room that is & isn't full of me, full of the same & not same old shite, you bearing with me?

What could be better is if there was music, because if there was music, there would be hope. I'd stand. I'd begin to dance. I'd begin to move my large, clumsy body around &,

maybe for a moment, it would still be large but not clumsy anymore.

It'd begin to flow back & forth, around & around, & maybe I'd begin to think, there's more to all this than anyone can know. Now looks bad, the future does too, but maybe the Architect & the Princess & the Dreamers can save the world.

Last Letter from Hue

Before that, I used to spend a lot of time in alleys, & this one time I found this little package, rain-worn, old & tired, but bound together by strings. I untied & unfolded it.

It said: Last Letter from Hue. I opened it up & began to read its contents. Here are some of them:

There's a stump in the White Woods, filled with rainwater, no matter the weather, & if you lean over it on your knees, & you look in, you will see your reflection first, then a memory, then something else to take with you.

He & I went together as last hope.

There were some materials that were blurred out, crossed out, redacted, maybe just mud & time got to them. But here's more:

& in the far future, the lady has led the refugees for many a year when she meets the retired football tight end. A strange ultra-violent version of football has come back into the world, whatever field & ball around. Always begins with the players jumping & shouting, "Plays for keeps!"

He begins to travel with them, the lady & her refugees, & talk of his old playing days, & show how he's survived with his tight end skills. He shows how he can climb, run, catch, block. He says these are amazingly useful skills.

Blur blur blur blur blur

It was like & unlike a hotel room, they said. But too many walls, too much ceiling, not enough floor. There were a lot of people inside, & one was my shaggy haired friend Antonio, who's an athlete, he likes to race, but I think he's a poet too. I was never sure. He was always carrying around sheaves of papers. Hard to tell what he was writing on them, if anything at all. Well, just once I sneaked a peek at one of his papers, & it read over & over down the page: There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss, across the abyss, and you are mine once more.

And then there's his brother, Toanio, who had a haircut, no longer shaggy like his brother, & I could see it was a recent haircut because there was hair all over this sort of hotel room. And I want to know them all better. What else is there to do nowadays? Be like one of those killers?

Blur blur blur blur blur

Then some lines that just seem to go *click-click noise-noise cackle-cackle* to my touch. Then speak:

Then there are those that exist multiply in space & time throughout history. Others discover at the far end of history the means to travel back through the Dreaming to try to alter the disastrous end of the world.

This is what the Architect does, only he does more, he cuts the ties with his future. He cannot be pulled back when the potion wears off. He comes to find the Princess who is Emandian & special & trebles in time, meaning she's able to co-exist in awareness in moments with all of her iterations. The Creatures can iterate more than one in a single place & time as well as multiply through history.

What is the goal & purpose here? **Turn on all the lights at once.** Find a way for history not to end in disaster.

Blur blur blur blur blur

By now you know that these materials have appeared elsewhere & elsewhen, & I've copied them out because those elsewheres & elsewhens are gone, & if you're reading this letter you are close to gone too. Or maybe this is all you have left, & you're hoping this letter doesn't end soon because you know you are sitting in an alley, & there isn't much out there for you. Read on a little bit more here, my dear & fine friend.

* * * *

They Say There are Two Types of People in This World

They say there are two types of people in this world. The least people & the most people. And there is a book only the least people see. Called *Aftermath*, by Cosmic Early. If you saw it, it would tell you a whole lot about many things.

I don't have a real copy of it, I'm not one of the least people, but I have a pirate copy with a lot of redacted lines. But there are occasionally a few lines in a row where I can get a little something out of it.

For example, I learned that there's a deserted planet called Sunderground. It's been used to test weapons for hundreds of years. And I suppose that would be OK, but I read on later in the book, a bit more redacted, but I think I can suss it out, that there came to be some doubt at some point: What if there were beings that lived there on that thought-to-be-deserted-planet, & they came to believe that the gods were punishing them & destroying them through these seemingly random explosions?

So the space program goes back hundreds of years, my friends, it's obvious from these lines in *Aftermath*, even if it's a pirate copy.

In the appendices & dream fragments in back, there's less redaction. It's as though the appendices & dream fragments are not as important. It's as though if you don't know what the main text is, it doesn't matter if you read the appendices & dream fragments in the back.

And so I get to read most of these appendices & dream fragments, often not

knowing what they refer to. Here's one. Judge for yourselves:

Joe the Biscuit lives in a sealed abandoned well, & runs cords to electricity, & has a small strange old computer for wi-fi. Joe the Biscuit writes stories about obscure figures like himself, but they find love & they find admiration, because that's what he feels for them. He writes about low-level government officials, retired football players, extras on TV shows.

It ends there. What do you think? What can you possibly think?

I dig deeper in the appendices & dream fragments. I begin to wonder how long the they are, count the pages, & start to realize that they're pretty long. But really not much redaction is going on. I read again, & there is this fragment from the field:

It was a huge house, with a huge basement. There was going to be a party that night. The fantasylands had been distributed on the shelves of the basement, separated into rows & it's like they were deconstructed from fantasylands into just long rows of quiet & subdued individuals. Perhaps they'll be released after the party concludes. The Creatures watch from cracks in the walls, waiting, small but brave, to release their many friends.

If only we had a clean version of Aftermath!

But still I don't know if I believe that there are just two types of people in the world. And I don't know if this book is true. But here's one more from the appendices & dream fragments for you to chew on:

You know, it's like this lady once said to me. I was at this party in Elliptical City & a lot of diplomats & spies were hanging out there. She & I were talking about the War. She was dressed in some kind of weird holy woman costume, like some kind of priestess. And I said, do you think the War could finally be ended with all these diplomats & spies & everybody? And she says to me, just flat out like it was her best wise wisdom on the matter, she says: gotta evolve, you know?

So I'm at This Diner, Late Night

So I'm at this diner, late night. Red Dog Diner, it's called. Oh, it's about 2 or 3 in the morning, maybe toward 3, because I think the drunken hour has come & gone. Only the remains remain, as it were. The overnight truck drivers, the homeless, random people who come up from the street, like me, & I'm there a lot, on the overnight.

There isn't really anywhere else to go in this town. I've been here for a few months, & it's strange how I ended up here. What happened was it was a job that sent me here.

I met some people. I must admit I was probably a little high when I met them. I think they were on the street of the city I was in, & I'd been again to that strange movie that plays after midnight at the Nada Theatre. I think it's called RemoteLand, though it never says on the screen.

It had left me shaken & smiling both, like always, & suddenly I was walking down the street, *hmmming* the movie theme by James McGunn, & then I was talking to these people, & they were saying *we'd like to send you to this little town for a while, if you're looking*

for work.

And so I said, how did you know I was looking for work?

And they said, well, they didn't really say anything. They just kind of eyeballed my clothes, & my ragged book bag, & my ragged shoes. And so I nodded & said, OK, yeah, I'm looking for work.

So what I had to do was to go to this town & get a room & start talking to people about President Clusterfuck, getting their opinions. I didn't have to offer an opinion of my own but I do believe I could say whatever I wanted. But the point was to prompt other people to get to talking. And then I would need to go back to my room & keep careful records in a journal notebook they provided me, who said what.

And it seemed on the up & up in a sort of weird sketchy kind of way, but they paid me right up front, & they said there'd be more when I delivered them the journal records at the end of the assignment. They gave me a whole box of these journal books to use. On the cover, in weird loopy writing, they all read **Mulronie the Space Pirate Composition Book!**

So there I am at the Red Dog, because I liked it, they had the nice key lime pie, very nice, & so I'd just start conversations, I'd just lead in. I'd say, You know, the thing I hate about that motherfucking President Clusterfuck, the worst thing about him is, he flat-out lied about his intentions, more than anyone else. He said he'd help those in need & he's done intentionally the opposite.

And I look around at them all, because these are the people he'd promised to help—the poor, the hardworking, people who felt like they'd been forgotten. *Doesn't give a shit*, I'd say.

Now they knew I read poetry books, & that I wrote things down on little scraps of paper. So they figured I was a college boy & didn't hold it against me the foul language. They'd get to talking, too. They had opinions on the matter.

The waitress, she must have been real pretty in her day, even if her day was about 40 years ago, she said, you know, if that ugly old motherfucker grabbed my private personals, I'd give him a what-for & he wouldn't forget me either.

And the truck driver man, grizzled & looked kind of flashy in the eyes, charm about him that didn't quite equate, he'd say, I'd like to keep that guy with me in the truck on my overnight hauls, when the radio would go out. I'd listen to this guy boast & brag about his conquests, & people he'd screwed over, & all the deals he'd done. And I really couldn't guarantee that before the end of the haul I wouldn't just shove the mothertrucker out the door because I was bored of him & sick of his old crap.

There was another guy amongst us who was from the west side outer space, & he was a real super nice guy. He had a spaceship on the roof of the Red Dog, but he said it was invisible so we shouldn't go looking for it. He told us this story.

He said, there was a time, I was traveling with this dwindling number of refugees led by this woman, & she had a scale by which she cast our group's fate & fortune. We were all refugees of one kind or another. People who had escaped prison, lost their homes to invasion, heretics who believed Emandia is real. We were on one of the far moons, where the atmosphere is failing & things weren't going too well. So she would cast our group's fate & fortune, like what we should do, how fast we should travel, to the mountains, the forests, or the Sea.

She'd put these little stones from the sack on one of the scales, & on the other she'd put this mix of seeds & other things. And she'd study & weigh & measure, & consult her shiny little books she wouldn't show anyone, & this would help her to understand how we should go.

But it just seemed like things were just going worse & worse, & people would just disappear in the night. Our numbers kept dwindling, till finally we ended up at a cave, & the

scale was long since gone, sold or forgotten, lost, something, something.

And so I'll just tell you that when I saw that spaceship at the back of that cave, beat up but still whole, & remembered that I used to be a mechanic, I took my shot. Rustled up some tools, fixed up that spaceship, & got my ass to this planet where the atmosphere isn't failing yet.

And I'll tell you about your President. He may be a clusterfuck of a guy locally but, against the universe of clusterfucks I seen there in outer space, **he ain't shite**.

It Was Sort of a Then-Now Dream

It was a sort of then-now dream, you've had them, where you're then & now, & both & neither. It's like the years of your life are a rack of spices, & there's that soup on your hotplate, in your room without windows & words. It's a silent room, & you're silently mixing your soup with what's in your spice rack.

Each spice is a year of your life. And you can manipulate the spices in the soup a bit. You can throw in one year's town, & another year's travel, & another year's party, & another year's strange, good time you fell into. Little bit of that melancholy, little bit of that ecstasy, little bit of the White Woods, little bit of the desert, little bit of the city, little bit of the empty roads, little bit of feeling very, *very* found, & a little bit of feeling really, *really* lost.

Finally, you pour some of the soup into a bowl. Sit down on your old mattress, to sip, to feel how this soup shall be. Close your eyes, *mmm*, this sure is some tasty soup.

I see that face, smiling at me, thought I was funny. I see that crowd I was dancing in, didn't laugh at me. Join in! Shake it! That book I read for the first time, that book I read the 20^{th} time.

Yes, my kind of soup. What's your kind of soup?

What would your rack of spices look like?

How would you mix them on in?

Where would you find yourself walking, with eyes closed, deep in your night?

What hand would be holding yours?

What face would be looking at you?

What car would you be getting into, & what house would you be arriving at?

Would it be day, would it be night, would it be dusk, sunrise?

A drinker's high noon?

A tripper's full moon?

What would the room look like?

What would the apartment look like, what would the house look like, what would the cave look like, what would the Island look like, what would the Sea look like?

Was it a big boat or a small?

Was it a jumbo jet where you couldn't feel nothing around you but a small **hmmm**, or a little propper, hopping from Island to Island, with a strange pilot in it, a charmer?

Sometime later I found that I wasn't in the silent room anymore, with the soup & the rack of spices. I was trying to write the story of this then-now dream with a cheese puff on the back of my lover's leather jacket.

She was holding very still She believed as I do that you could write a story like this only with a cheese puff, only on such a leather surface. I think this moment, too, became a spice. I think these moments of cheese puff writing about Islands & boats, charming pilots, & faces, hands, big roads & small, big cities & little ones, times of ecstasy, times of powerlessness, times in between, are all spices for the rack & the soup.

Maybe every memory, even the most mundane one, has the potential to be a flake of spice, in one of your very many jars, on your very long rack.

In the Enemy Military Camp

In the enemy military camp, I was trying to leave quietly with some others. Some of us are invisible. We walk in a group, not sure where the exit is, to this very large building. Is it really a building? Is it a spaceship? From the west side of outer space? Or in a mine of some kind, deep under the earth? What is it? What can it be?

The invisible ones go ahead, but soon I feel like I've lost track of them. And I look around & I realize there's no one else here either, visible or invisible. *Did they make it to the brick wall through time & space?*

And now & now & now, I look around, & I realize that I'm homeless. I've been homeless for quite some time, & I feel like my head comes & goes to other places sometimes like that factory-mine-spaceship place.

Often I find myself moving through dark & silent city streets, pushing a shopping cart, very afraid because nobody's around. Sometimes I stop for a moment & I try to remember something, something worse than this that'll comfort me.

Usually I remember that time I was in that situation with a very strange old man with a gun who took us all hostage. We were in a hospital, the emergency room. There was a movie on the television, I remember. Had no title. I was vaguely watching it before he started waving the gun around.

It was late. I was waiting to find out how someone was, someone I hardly knew but I had met while escaping from the spaceship-factory-mine. He got hurt, stumbled over a broken brick wall. Now this strange old man's holding a gun to everyone. Crying out, spitty & toothless, *This is just another in the Panoply of Occurrences & Events!* Kept saying it every so often, like it's all what he had left, but his gun too.

Hours pass. Later on he's starts to doze. I sneak up to him & kind of slip the gun out of his hand. Then I rush it over to the orderlies who apparently didn't know the emergency room waiting room was being held hostage. I slide the gun down the hallway to them, & kind of waved at them to *come & do something*.

They just take the gun & seemed to file it away in a closet. That seemed to satisfy them that they'd done what they had to do.

I shake my head. Oh yes, this empty city street now, yes. *This* is better than *that*, *this* is better than *that*, by far.

So that's what you got to do, if you find yourself homeless, or in a vast spaceship, or being held hostage by an old man in an emergency room. You got to close your eyes, & take a deep breath, & take another, & then think to yourself, it's been worse. Let me think on that for a moment & then come back to all this.

I Was DJ'ing My Radio Show Remotely

It happened this one time when it seemed to me like I was DJ'ing my radio show remotely, from a different room, or another station, down the road a ways. The connection was not really good. I knew my show was crackling, arriving in pieces to whatever what's listening.

And I worried about that some, but I kept on, & I explained to the listeners, what scraps of 'em was left, I says: this is my last show for a while now because I'm going be traveling with an outer space priestess & a magician & a musician & a couple, close, but they don't belong to one another anymore. So I'll just see y'alls again.

We take off for the west side of outer space &, on those long nights far out there, we get bored, just looking at the stars speeding on by. Everyone's finished the five *Mulronie the Space Pirate* books, more than once. Well, naturally, we get to telling stories about where we come from.

So I told this story about the time I was at a party in Elliptical City & it became violent. I don't know why, just did, was in the nature of that party on that night, & I think only the couple of us escaped. My shaggy-bearded friend & me. We had to crawl over bodies. What kinda party was this? We just kept going.

Eventually this turned funny & somewhat dream-like, as though there had maybe never been a party. Was there really a party tonight? I don't know, seems to me like we're just walking along this beautiful night, & nothing bad's going on at all, nothing at all.

That was the last time I saw that friend. Somewhere toward morning we became parted, & I went home for a while. Later I heard on the radio, not the radio show I was doing, but someone else's radio show, that there was this party in Elliptical City, & a lot of spies & diplomats at it were killed. *Let me get to my outer space travels*, I think.

And now the outer space priestess looks at me & says, is there a moral to that story, young traveling DJ?

And I says, ma'am, it's the moral of every good story. Make sure, in every uncertain situation, to get while the getting's good.

I'm in a Road Race

Now if it seems like I'm huffin' & a-puffin' a little bit tonight, it's because I'm just in from a road race, cross-country, kind of like that cartoon with the bird & the Beast. I'm racing among many other racers that I used to know.

There grew up over time a special group of close competitors & good friends. We probably did the things you'd expect. Sharing wine, women, sneaker tips. All those bonding-type things.

Now they're just *polite* to me. It's like I've gone away & come back casually, & they're not interested in casual. Well, who is? *Who is interested in casual?*

So there's a particular friend from our group I remember most fondly from the old days. I helped her out with her romances, of the female nature, kept them under my lid. *Those* kind of times. And I want to reach out to her. Feel again that close friendship that she & I had. Maybe she can help the others feel me again too.

So we all gather in town the night before the race, to celebrate our friendship & love of racing, at this diner, the Red Dog, it's *our* diner. None of the other racers come here

like this. And there's a long table set out just for us, & a kind of ceremony we perform. But I don't remember its complex details so well.

Cups of wine, all different kinds of cups, shapes & sizes. Sip, pass on, sip, pass on. But I get confused by all this. It's like there's more to it than just sip, pass on. There's like a second level to it that I get confused by, & I start spilling my cups & apologizing. They all start explaining at once what's supposed to happen, but I don't understand them because they're using terminology I've never heard of.

Why can't these racers just be my friends for one more night? Why can't we just race through a series of towns until dawn & then part each other good, can't we just part each other good?

They start showing videos, from all their hometowns, big gatherings of families & mayors & talent shows. Who are all these people?

I don't know. I don't know, but finally my friend shows up, & she smiles at me like she knows me always. And I say, *bring me somewhere, my old friend.* She smiles, raises her finger to me, & gives me the old *come along with me* gesture,

We slip out into the night, & I meet her fellow racer, as slinky as she is.

Let's go, sisters. Tonight, & tomorrow too, let's blow those old bastards straight back to hell.

There's an Octopus

My beloved & I are living in a single room with a bed, & there's an octopus underneath it, no kidding. Seems scary at first, but eventually we all get used to each other a little more. There seem to be worms on the floor too, here & there, & shadows, & the octopus will sort of vibrate when it slurps some up in its tentacles. This goes on for a while, & we don't have jobs, any of us, including the octopus.

Door's open, but all of us are too stubborn to leave. Seems like a kind of a stalemated situation.

Finally, in the middle of the night, many nights into this weird scenario, I jump off the bed, & I race for the door, & I race outside, & I'm in a driveway, standing near a van, green & gold. Sit down breathless, & a White Bunny approaches me, & hops into my lap.

Her name is MeZmer, & there are little Bears nearby too who, strange to behold, join MeZmer in my lap. These strange magickal Creatures sit with me as friends. I'm OK with this.

Years later, I'm telling this story to a colorful group of friends, most of them shaped like people. When we all get together it's potent & amazing. They tell their crazy racing stories too.

The more that show up, the more likely it is that there's going to be a dessert cart. Somebody almost always shows up with a dessert cart. They scour Elliptical City for the strangest, most delectable desserts to bring to this amazing group of friends.

And I tell them about living in a room with the octopus, & the worms, & the shadows, & my beloved. She is sitting there too. She has a strange mask rabbit's mask on, with both its silly grin & hers underneath. They all love this story, & they ask me to tell it again, so I do, & I change it up a little bit to keep them interested.

Someone brings me a very odd dessert. They say, *look, it's shaped like an octopus!* I say, *I can't eat this!* And they understand, & don't try bringing me any shaped like

Bunnys or Bears either.

Then someone turns on the baseball game on the TV. Sometimes we watch it late into the night, smoking & eating desserts. The announcers say, this game wasn't officially scheduled but here it is happening, & it's now into extra innings & we've run out of pitchers! Some of us are laughing, others have fallen asleep.

One of the announcers, an old jock himself, gets to asked to play. Seems he used to be a pretty good pitcher. So he smiles & nods & goes out there, but they don't have a uniform big enough to fit him.

So he just pitches in his street clothes, takes off his tie at least, & the umpires don't like it, think this is very odd. Good thing this game wasn't officially scheduled. By the time it's over, everybody's asleep, all the desserts are gone, & I dream of that room. That octopus, my beloved sleeping with me, with that strangely grinning rabbit mask, & her silly grin underneath.

I'm Alone, in Elliptical City

I'm alone, in Elliptical City, looking at a kind of 3D map of a planned heist, working against a rough draft I have. My favoritest my special Elliptical City deli-made sandwich is nearby. I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box. I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

And someone tries to nab it, & I yell them away. Everyone knows Mondays between 10 and 11 are when the truck passes through the neighborhood & is vulnerable to be hit. It's a messy kind of sandwich, no straight lines. I'd like to think it even goes down from my tongue to my tummy in an elliptical way, down an elliptical path.

So I keep planning my heist with my 3D map. It wavers before me & my hand is able to gently touch it & move it around, so I can see different aspects of the neighborhood.

I know, I know, you're wondering, what is that sign behind me, that electric sign? You can kind of see it better, as I bend down to pick up & take another delicious bite of my special Elliptical City deli-made sandwich.

It's an electric sign that says, *If You Like Orchids, Booze, & Acid*, & there's an image of the Imp in the Full Moon. Does she blink on & off, or does she kind of waver in between on & off? Is she part of the electrical sign or just cackling within its light? I'm not really sure.

You know the thing about special deli-made Elliptical City peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwiches is that they don't last long enough.

And then I remember this morning how I got up & was so full of energy for this heist. I was thinking about how three of my dreams had been arguing.

One was a store-like planet, on the west side of outer space naturally, where only the workers lived. People visiting the store-like planet could only stay three days in a row at most, had to shop & go, everything on this planet was for sale.

One of the other dreams said, yeah? I got you beat by a country mile. Listen to this one. This dream waves large leathery hands around, bloodshot eyes, a mean but hurt look, couple of snaggly teeth. I'm in a large room, he says, with many others, lots of tables, people. It's kind of a college registration day & I don't know what I'm doing there, look at me, I ain't no college boy.

But I'm filling in my forms & I'm filling them in with lies. Pretending that I'm a teacher in order to get financial aid.

And I come to a line in this endless form, & I hate these forms, they're long & long & long, & I come to a place in this form where it says, tell about your life closely, but in an elliptical way. I don't know what to do, man, I don't know.

So I just write in this space why I'm here. I write, I'm sending my people up to Elliptical City to a party to kill her, once my lover & partner, now my enemy. No mercy, I instruct, none. Space priestess, musician, dreamer, wears a belt that is the source of all of her power. I fill in my application, and turn it in to a guy that's got three eyes, one of which is blackened from who knows what. I walk out.

Well, that dream sat back, like he was all self-satisfied.

And the third dream just looked at both of them, & hmmmmm'd.

Here comes the truck, brand name Ellipses, green & gold, here it comes, here it comes. I'm gonna heist it, I'm gonna heist it.

Oh wait a minute! Hey, man, you took my special deli-made Elliptical City peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich! I just had one last bite, no, no man! I'm trying to heist this truck but I can't let go of the last bite of this delicious peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich! Hey man, hey man! Come back here, hey man, come back here! That's my sandwich! I'll kick your ass, motherfucker, I'll kick your ass!

In a Place Beyond the Dreaming

Sunk down deep in a place beyond the Dreaming, like deep, deep in the Wide Wide Sea. It's dark but not silent. I hear something low, it's like a *hmmmmmm*. I find I can think, I find I can remember, forward, backwards, even sideways to other branches of how things might be or might have been.

Some years from now, I'm living in the big beautiful Elliptical City. I'm going back to work at a bookstore I'd worked at years & years ago. But I delay. One boot on & one boot off, pants half zipped. Don't know where my glasses are & I think, *I've gotta go, expenses don't pay for themselves*.

Close my eyes, *breathe*, *relax*. Open my eyes, I'm even less ready now. Well, that wasn't good.

Close my eyes, *breathe*, *relax*. Well, now I'm just in bed with my beloved & the alarm is going off.

Close my eyes, *breathe*, *relax*. Feel brung back into the *hmmmmmm* of the Wide Wide Sea. Try again.

Up! Up! Up! Up! Sitting in a chair, familiar chair, kinda rickety but comfy, sitting amongst Creatures. White Bunny, Bears, many others. *There's a microphone, oh goodness!* I'm talking into this microphone right now! *How did that happen?*

And it's daytime! Why, it's about Saturday, 11 AM, years ago, years on, & at this moment, oh yes, it's time to DJ this radio show. *I made it back from the west side of outer space*.

Thank you, Wide Wide Sea, for sending me back to where I am right now. Helping me to see how fine it is.

Is It Friday or Saturday?

Half woke, wondering if it was Friday or Saturday? I don't know what day it was. I don't know where I am. I look around. Bed is too big, pillows are unfamiliar. No sign of my dear friend the yellow Pillow in her purple cloak.

Well, this is a strange place. I look out the window. Is it a hotel? This damned No-Tell again? This time it is surrounded by the Wide Wide Sea on all sides. This damned No-Tell is now on an Island that is almost exactly as big as itself. OK. What about this?

Well, let's see here. Maybe there'll be a boat. I scrounge around for some clothes. All I find are a pair of shorts that come down to my calves, & are a little too tight in some places & a little too loose in other places.

And they say *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!* on them, on the one side, & the other side, well, it doesn't say anything. It's like the ChocoSmax patch on one leg's cuff is sort of scraped off vigorously, as though someone just *did not want* to advertise ChocoSmax on that side.

My green plaid jacket. And some sandals. I don't wear sandals, but that's all there was. There isn't anything else in this room.

Oh, except for that little purple furry Creature that likes to dance a lot. His name is Pirth. We've been traveling together, with our missing Pillow friend too.

So I put on my green plaid jacket over my bare chest, Pirth in his usual pocket. Struggle into my overly long, overly tight, overly loose shorts that aren't that short, & the one side says *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!*, & the other side is scraped off. And my sandals,

I walk out into the hallway & I realize, *oh, this is one of those hallways*, & I begin to dance & dance & dance, knowing that if I don't dance I am going to fall right up. I do not want to hurt me, but I especially do not want to hurt that little Pirth in my pocket.

So I make my way to the sort-of escalator, & it is going in the right direction, even though the sign says *Up! Up! Up!* I ride to the ground floor. There are a lot of people there, though I don't recognize any of them. They look at me with rather hostile stares, as though this is all my fault. I wander along the narrow beach, wishing for a boat, so I could just leave right now.

I think to myself, Boy! I know the one boat I could use now, if only, if only, if only.

And then it comes, the beloved Boat Wagon of many the tale & story. Small, but I know how to deal with this. I just walk toward it, & I get smaller as I walked toward it, & it gets bigger. We arrive each other the perfect size to fit. Now Pirth is standing next to me, as we are the same size.

We climb into the back seat of the Boat Wagon, with our friends the Kittees & Friend Fish at the wheel up front. Buckle in good. *Safety First!*

And suddenly all those hostile people start running toward us. *Hey you! Hey you!* they yell, waving their arms at us.

But we paddle paddle paddle, paddle paddle away!

I Was Listening to this Guy Tell a Story . . . to Nobody

I was listening to this guy tell a story to nobody at the far back of the Greyhound bus. Traveling a long way. It was one of those trips where it starts later in the evening, & the bus doesn't stop for hours on end, & it gets very quiet as it travels down the highway. Going

fast but, inside the bus, it seems as though time almost stops.

Most people sleep. I like to read in those late hours. Sometimes my reading light is the only thing that's going in the bus, but this night a guy was talking, quietly, he was in the back seat. I was in the second to back seat. There wasn't anybody else really that far back, as it was a half full bus. Most people were sitting near the front, probably to get off as quick as possible when the ride was done.

Anyway, I can't say I heard the whole story but I heard scraps of it. He seemed to be talking about a group of people he called close friends. He said they'd gather together at a private party at a diner, & there was a lot of wine & some kind of, I don't know, special dessert or something. It sounded like a weirder party the longer he talked.

There seemed to be no gravity at this part, they turned it off, & the only light was what glowed from the floor. And there was a girl he liked, amongst this group of friends, but she was just crazy, he said. He said it over & over again, she was just crazy, she was just crazy, she was just crazy.

But he liked her. She'd tell him which of her girlfriends would lick it right, do it slow, make it fun, make it last, enjoy themselves, & which ones were checking off the box. I'd take the ones who passed my test down into that old spaceship buried under Chief Seattle's. Our bodies felt like whole worlds smashing down there.

Then someone at the party put on some of the kind of music you could dance to when there's no gravity in the room, & the only light is the vaguely glowing floor, so you have to be able to move around with all parts of you. You don't have your feet to guide the rest of you so much.

He said, I'd been trying to get a hold of her for months, but she would only talk to me at a distance, at a far distance. And here she was in this room! So I sort of eased my gravity-less way over to her, & hoped she recognized me, & she seemed to but, then again, she seemed to recognize everybody. That's why I liked her.

It's not exactly dancing when there's no gravity. It's more like smiling nearness, & I want to say something to her, but I take off my shirt instead.

That catches her eye. I'm scrawny, there's not much to see. Got a few bruises & a couple unintentional tattoos, one from that The Pink Floyd show at that desert fest.

But then I took off my jeans. I was going through a time where I didn't wear underwear, so now I was naked.

And then she did recognize me, & she smiled, & she sorta swam over to hold my two hands. She looked into my eyes, & I could see that there were about a hundred thousand souls inside her. They were all dancing too. And they were all naked.

What more is love than this?

There's a Camp Out, I Think

There's a camp out, I think, in those weird White Woods behind the Blue Dog Diner. Some years hence, with some dear friends. We're all very *very highighigh*. At one point we've all gathered in a circle around a small someone that's glowing, dancing, sentient, purple, furry, & there & not quite there, & we all see him. And we relax by his glow, & people start to tell stories, from the backwhen & the hereon. You can do that nowadays. You can look further down the road or you can look back. And there are many roads, if you will.

I say, years ago, before any of us were born, they shot a spaceship into the moon. Now I

was watching it on a hotel TV, in a strange room that seemed to have more than the usual number of walls & ceilings & floors. Lots of rooms in the No-Tell were weird in one way or another.

It was a party, kinda like this, but kinda not. And they weren't very highighigh like us, no. It was some kind of the old cheap shit they had. I don't know if I knew anybody there, but someone shouted, hey! They're shootin' a spaceship into the moon! It's happening right now!

And I remember sitting in a corner with a can of some of the cheap shit, & there were these two girls dancing nearby, & at first they were dancing close, like lovers, some kind of old style of dancing. And then they started jumping up & down as the spaceship got closer and closer to the moon. And they started sorta jumping into each other, slamming their chests together, & yelling out *moon boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies!*

Another friend I hadn't seen in years, he'd stopped racing with us, he's smiling at me new & telling more of the story. Well, I was at this deli. Not far from that hotel you & your Moon Boobie girls were staying at. I knew all about that rocket ship they said was gonna hit the moon. I didn't believe a word of it. That's all done with wires & smoke & mirrors & shite &, anyway, what did I care about such things?

I had a book in my hand, called *Aftermath* by Cosmic Early. It was a good book & it was the kind of book that well, once you get to reading it, shooting rockets at a moon, *whatever*.

And so, what happened to me, while that was happening to you, was that I came down this alley with my book, & my special Elliptical City deli-made peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich, & I thought, you know, hell with you all, I've got no offense meant to any of you, but hell with you all.

I just sat in this alley with my book & sandwich, way down the alley, where nobody could see me. I had a candle, & I sat reading my good book & eating my sandwich.

I just thought, you know, I'd like to shoot myself whole & full into this book & land on it. Anybody come down here, all they'd find was a book with a smile on its face.

I Think I Heard This Story on the Radio One Night

I think I heard this story on the radio one night. It was one of those AM stations that doesn't come in too well very often. I guess I was living in an alley at the time. Not all the time, I want you to know, but sometimes.

And I had an AM transistor radio, & there was a Radio Shack nearby. They threw out batteries that weren't even dead in their dumpsters, so I had plenty of batteries for my AM transistor radio.

So I was trolling up & down the AM dial. I had a good antennae on this radio, & they might have thrown that out of the Radio Shack too, but let's just not go into the details of that. I found this station at the very bottom of the AM dial where the more obscure stations reside, sometimes briefly, & the DJ was telling this story. His voice kept changing, coming in & out, like in scraps. I don't know if it was the signal or just his voice itself.

He kept saying, there was a young man, a football player, & his story is thus: in his travels, he had 7-8-9-10 sexual encounters over the course of a period of time, with 10-9-8-10 different situations.

And so of course there's fallout from all of it. One travel the DJ told of was when the young man wandered unknowingly into the enemy alien camp. This camp of aliens, they were so strange, they seemed to be some kind of a mist.

The DJ continued: The young man learned that there was a popular lady, popular & charitable, African-American lady, greatly admired for her social causes, & yet she is a part of this alien enemy mist. Then he learned that there was this British TV journalist who wrote pieces defending the power of the people against the powers-that-be that would exploit them, & yet he was part of the alien camp mist too.

There were so many others like these, enwebbed & unidentifiable, across human history, & the only clue to them we've learned of, & this is what we want to tell you in this news report, is that they look handsome or lovely or speak in noble words, kindly, sweet, progressive, but they sniff funny. Not like any other smell you've ever smelled before but, if you sniff close you'll catch it. And if you happen to be with one of them in a situation where you have cause to hmmm, well, they'll hmmm with you, but just a little bit off, a little bit off.

Seems to Be a Traveling Book-Movie-Island in a Spaceship

And again, seem to be a traveling Book-Movie-Island in a spaceship that I find myself in, probably on the west side of outer space. I'm looking for copies of a literary journal I did back when there pens & paper & books. I called *The Cenacle*.

And I have to admit I still do that kind of thing, but they don't like it on this spaceship. I have a room. I'm actually a janitor.

I'm convinced that somewhere in this spaceship that left the home world so long ago, there's old copies of *The Cenacle*. I've been looking for years. I've been finding copies here & there, don't know how they got so scattered. I have a nearly complete collection of all the old ones.

The new ones I write in my notebook. I have a lot of scraps of paper. I have a lot of pens. I have them all hidden in a room that's beyond the janitor's closet. I found it long ago. It wasn't being used for anything else, & nobody knows it's there. Who comes into the janitor's closet anyway, much less his secret room?

So eventually I arrive at Rosie O'Grady's Good Times Emporium. It's this bar someone conjured up out of photographs & memories of how it was back then on the home world. They call it a drinking saloon. Nobody's quite sure what they drank back then but it certainly looked like a fun place in those photographs, & now in our hidden replica.

People laugh a lot there, & there's some approximation of music. Sometimes it's real music, sometimes it isn't. Some records on the jukebox, that works sometime, by The Pink Floyd & James McGunn. Sometimes we just clap hands & shout. Music seems to have traveled with us from the home world, unlike a lot of other things.

So I'm sitting in the corner & a friend of mine comes up to me. He's a tall guy, handsome face, comes up with his three dogs. He's the DJ for Radio Sunderground, the pirate station on this ship. They play it at Rosie's all the time. I used to DJ too with him on it, but my janitor duties got to be too much. *I had to find my missing issues.*

He says, *hey man, how ya doin*? & I want to answer him but his dogs—who I've met many times—there's an old gray one, a younger black one, a third one that's kind of brown—as usual, they forget me, & begin to nose near to me, growling. It takes a while for the whole thing to settle down.

I say, I'm still looking, as you know.

He says, yeah man, I'll put the word out, you know me, I'll put the word out. Us DJs gotta stick together here.

I say, yeah, you're a good guy, Chris, you're a good guy. I gotta get back now. Break time is up. This spaceship needs moppin', sweepin' like nobody's business.

On the Movie Studio Lot, There's a Strange Yellow House

On the movie studio lot, there's a strange yellow house that nobody talks about. Or goes into. Filled with stuff of different kinds. One day, the handsome black movie star is driving by the yellow house. He's right now playing the town minister in a remake of that great old film *A Place Called Oorous*. Excited to be working with that mysterious Gate-Keeper nobody knows much about.

There's a cop across the street for some reason, & something goes wrong at that moment, at that intersection of yellow house nobody talks about, & the handsome black movie star, & the cop.

The scene shifts to the heartrending story of the underdog basketball team, having a dream season, winning more games than anyone could have imagined, going through all sorts of conflict & crisis. The kinds you would expect in a heartrending film. They play out their last game of the season at home.

We know they're not going to make the playoffs. We know they're not going to win the championship, but what a season it was! What characters, what times! That visit to the ayahuasca shaman up in the mountains, that time they rescued the miner from down deep in the earth. The tragedies, the triumphs. And they're losing that final game, although they show up relaxed, ready to play, nothing to lose. They've won it all in their hearts.

The scene shifts again, more personal this time. My family & I are living in the back room of a government office. I have in my corner my writing pad, my little phonograph, my radio, several books, that's all I could take. All I was allowed to take.

I invite this girl I like over. My dad is illustrating another one of her poems, called "The Four-&-Twenty Blue Hills O' Heaven." We will put this illustration up with the others on the wall of this back room of the government office. I hear them talking on the other side of the room from me, though I can't quite hear them well. The sounds are strange in this back room.

My brother's sitting next to me in my corner, falling asleep. Our dinner of protein bars & canned goods always tires him out more than it should.

Later, maybe years, I'm in a grocery store, wondering why all the bread is behind glass doors now. It makes no sense. But I go through the trouble & the paperwork &, as I'm coming out of the store, into the neon day we all know so familiarly, the black movie actor comes up to me & says, where's the basketball, man? It didn't go into that yellow house, did it? Where's the basketball, man? It didn't go into that yellow house, did it? Do I have to go into the yellow house again? Don't make me go into the yellow house, really! It was a great season, but why do I have to go back into the yellow house? Have your poems been illustrated too?

Really? Where's the basketball where's the yellow house where's that cop why did I have to go why why blur blur blur blur blur

I'm Sitting with an Ancient Sea Turtle

I'm sitting with an Ancient Sea Turtle, on a beach somewhere deep down in the Wide Wide Sea. He's not feeling well. Sick, depressed. It's an empty beach we sit on. My hand is on his shell, softly.

He says, Human Being, look around this beach, look at the vastness of this beach. You can't see it from end to end, Human Being. Once it was filled with other turtles. Filled with other turtles! All kinds, all colors, & all shapes. Many tongues. From other worlds, from other kinds of places than that. It was a kind of a, you might say, a cross-paths, a resting place, a place of peace, old friends discovered, fences mended, conflicts talked through, until everyone was happy & celebrating. And it may sound simple to you, Human Being, but it wasn't.

I say, Where I come from, back there, & I vaguely gesture, we don't have such a place. Not for everyone, not on a vast beach like this one that would so fill the mind & the eye, it would be enough for everyone to come to. An agreed-upon place of peace, where it's sought & found & left with. What happened, why are you the only one?

I outlived them all, Human Being. What I'm telling you about happened long ago.

Would you have done anything different? I ask suddenly, still lightly touching his shell, trying to give him some comforts.

He's quiet for a long time, & I listen to the roaring of the surf of the Wide Wide Sea, the beautiful thing near us.

He says, There wasn't anything to do.

Are you glad of it all?

His wrinkled cragged eyes close more & more, & I think he's falling into a long sleep himself. But then he whispers, maybe from just inside his dream, *Of course.*

Finding a Friend, in the Country

You remember that great football player you've kept hearing about? Well, now he was in the country, having wandered away from the bus station again. It's his one way in this long trip he's taking of rebelling against the whole thing, because he's been given the travel tickets, & the list of places to stay, & the money to spend, & the guides, but he'll just wander away once in a while, catch the next bus after that.

And, sad to say, he met another footbal player he'd known back in high school. In fact, they'd been real close. Curly blond fellow, looks like a wide receiver, & that's what he was. Tall, long.

He finds his friend out on this country road, farmhouses miles apart, no people to be seen. His friend's wandering a little strangely, even being out here I guess you could say is strange, far from where they come from.

What's worse, though, is his eyes are dead. Completely dead. As our hero comes closer, he sees that his friend's skin is no longer pale-pink like it was. No, he's become a Zombie.

What? What?! Our hero looks around him, kind of backs off a few feet. His friend doesn't exactly see him, but sniffs something nearby, & sort of starts to veer in the direction of our hero, who's wily enough to keep moving around a bit. And yet he doesn't know what to do.

He's seen all those TV shows & movies about Zombies. You're supposed to kill

them in the head or something. But this isn't a TV show or movie. He looks around. There's rocks, there's sticks out in the gray fields that seem empty of any growing life.

He watches his friend who's sort of going *grrrrrrrrr* & sniffing, & he thinks: *what would he want me to do if he could say?*

Finally, he leads his friend slowly, stumblingly, through those empty fields for a long, long time. Looking for something, looking for anything.

Then, by miracle of miracle, he finds it. A cliff. A high cliff. Our hero can't even see to the bottom.

It's not too hard to trick his old friend into tumbling off, & gone forever, but our hero pauses & pauses & pauses, & his friend sniffs & sniffs.

Finally, our hero pats him on his Zombie shoulder & says, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye."

He's Sitting Out There, in the Country

He's sitting out there in the country, in an empty brown field, next to his friend who, before he perished completely, was a Zombie. He'd had to push him over a cliff earlier today & then he climbed down. It was a long hard climb. He almost plunged a few times, but he made it down. His friend was now inert & strangely light. He could lift him up & carry him on his shoulder, like an empty sack. What was there that mattered had drifted off.

So he just brought his friend along. His dead Zombie friend, empty of something important. Climbed back up that cliff, somehow, sweating & stumbling. Now they were sitting in the brown field that he'd first encountered each other. And he's saying to his friend things he'd never said to him, when they knew each other, back in high school.

He says, I remember that time you lost that girl you loved & you said to me, I don't want another one. I just want sex. That's it. That's the only part I like anymore. We were smoking a bong. One of yours, of course, so big you never could figure out who all those hands, titties, butt-cheeks, & things belonged to, though it was sure fun to try.

We'd go to parties. You'd pick one out, you'd almost always leave with her, throw me a wink. I didn't think any of that was good. But I figured it was a phase, as things are.

Then there was that time, that last time we saw each other, where you invited me out to a deli in Elliptical City. You said, **take the bus!** I said, **what bus?** You wrote down the directions to get the bus to a city I'd not heard of in an area I'd lived in all my life. And yet there was the deli, there was Elliptical City, & it was moving along, I kid ya not. It was traveling right along.

And you & I & this girl you'd found, & there was something different again, something more relaxed. You'd stopped being the nickname you'd given yourself for a long long time there. You called yourself Captain Dick on a Stick. As we sat in that deli with the peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwiches, & we traveled along in that strange Elliptical City, moving through the night. You held that girl's hand very lightly, & something good in you was back. It's gone now, but I'm glad it was back then.

The Bus Without a Roof

We're riding along on the bus with no roof. It hadn't had a roof for a while. At first this seemed like a problem, but you know people can get almost used to anything, really. And we got almost used to it. People complained still, but we got almost used to it, you see. We learned how to talk a little louder, we learned how to shade our faces to the brightness. Everybody wore hats against the hot, hot sun, so hot. And we got used to the bus without the roof, it was the only way to get from there to there. We had to, everyone on that bus, had to get from there to there.

So there it was. Us on the bus without the roof. And this old fella was boasting & boasting to me, I don't know how we got to talking, I never know such things. But he was saying how he lived in this apartment with two girls, & one of the girls & him took a liking to him, but they decided to keep it a secret from the other girl.

And so once in a while he'd just pull her laughing, snickering into his room, & close the door, & turn up the phonograph, & they'd have themselves some fun for a while.

But the other one knew, listened. And the two girls had been best friends & now they weren't. This had come between them.

So I said to this old fella, Did you do something about it, did you do the right thing? Did you take the other girl into your room, if she was willing \mathscr{C} wanting?

He said, Yeah, but it wasn't the same. She knew it wasn't the same, I knew it wasn't the same.

And of course the bus passes through Elliptical City at one point, it's what they call a detour, takes several days, I'm not sure why exactly why we had to do it to get from there to there because Elliptical City is nowhere near *either* there or there, but I will say it's some pretty country down there.

And so I said, Are you still livin' with these two girls?

they?

And he said, No, no, it all went down the night I pulled both of them into my room. Don't tell me, let me guess. They decided they liked each other better than you, didn't

He looked at me shocked, like I'd exposed his most uncomfortable secret. *Yeah, what do you think?*

I thought for a moment, longer moment, gave it some good long thought, & I said, You know, brotha', I think this goddamn bus needs a roof.

Going Down a Drain

It was just a fragment, nothing more. It was about a drain, going down the drain. Just a fragment, nothing more. Once down the drain, I find myself in a class of some kind, very tall building, way up high.

My classmates are now leading me down many fights. I just about lose them, lotta people, lotta stairs, lotta flights. I get to the classroom eventually, sure, & I don't know anything in the textbook that's sitting at my desk. I truly don't recognize it. I don't even know if I know the language, & the pictures don't help either.

But next to the textbook, kinda half slid under it, is an *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*. I open it up, not sure what else to do at this moment, & I start reading an article that seems to me to be very important. The longer I read it, the more important it seems to be to me.

It's a story about preparing a *philosophical meal*, all the courses, how to arrange the table, silverware, what plates to use, what lighting, should the windows be curtained or uncurtained, should there be music in the air?

Then the dream at that moment swoops me back down, as though I'm continuing along, & I'm on a bus with no roof, though there's blankets & things, in downtown Elliptical City. Waiting for the right stop to get off & it's very windy, very windy, the bus with no roof is sort of rocking back & forth & I barely remember everything I brought with me, as I get off the bus.

I'm clutching the Bear Blanket, but barely, & I hurry into a gas station nearby because I want to see that *philosophical meal* article again, & I hope they have the *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*.

It's very crowded in this gas station, the line's out the door, & I must admit I begin to slump at a certain point, & I begin to fall asleep, until I'm nudged awake by a cop.

I end up inside eventually & I ask the cashier for the *Elliptical City Globe*, & a Red Rutabaga Tea, & he fetches both for me as though he's a waiter. And I get outside, & I find myself a payphone, & I call my beloved at our apartment in the Back Bay, & I say, "Lover, we're making ourselves a *philosophical meal* tonight."

Bookstore Apartments

It was years ago, some of you might remember, there was a thing in the city called *bookstore apartments*. Oh, it wasn't a big thing, it wasn't on the TV news or on the front page of your *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*, but it was a thing for some people.

You might say they loved books so much that they just wanted to live in books. So if you knew the right guy, you could arrange it. You'd live there, you'd work there, people would come in, they'd buy books, they'd read books, they'd talk about books. It was a *bookstore apartment*, that's what it was.

And so I'm roommates with my friend & his girlfriend, but he has a second girlfriend that she doesn't know about, because he lives in more than one of these *bookstore apartments*, he's kind of a sneaky snake, you might say, And I'm the only one lucky enough, so to speak, to know about his several *bookstore apartments*. There's more than two, maybe three, possibly four.

He's an English guy, so he has that accent the girls all go for, & some of them kind of just don't pay attention to the rest because that accent is sure something else. I admit that I go for it too, I'm not saying there's not something there to go for. But I've got other troubles of my own.

I have these two other friends, they're these older ladies, & they're constantly worrying about money. They live in the same building as the *bookstore apartment* I live & work in, but they seem to be very poor, even though I don't' think they are. They're always trying to figure out their taxes using bank statement cards. The whole system they have rigged up is just very dubious & somewhat incoherent, & I'm trying to help them out.

Sometimes what we'll do is we'll all pile into their old Emperor, in the back, & they'll tell the driver to just drive them around the edges of Elliptical City, & we'll sit in the back in the comfy, cozy Emperor. That's an old, old car, built when cars were thought to be like great ocean liners on wheels.

So we'll drive around, & we'll huddle together, & I'll be looking at their bank

statement cards & trying to study their taxes. Wondering on occasion: why don't rich ladies like this, even if they think they're poor, just get an accountant? Why me? I live & work in a bookstore apartment! What do I know about these things?

Then I notice one time that the Emperor has left Elliptical City entirely, & we are driving somewhere else different from where we were. We're out in the country, lots of empty fields & we're passing some very strange billboards. They seem to move & talk &, as I look a little closer, I see, oh, there are people living in the billboards too! Well, that's some fine new technologies.

The driver, he's new, didn't know to stay in the city, he tells me, Yes, indeedy, you can customize your billboard to exactly the kind of living style you wish to pursue

And I say, Well, that's pretty amazing. That kind of makes my bookstore apartment look sort of old-fashioned.

But then he turns to me & says, & I can see that he has the long ears of a dog, & the sharp eyes of a fox, & the beak of a robin, & he says, *No sir, your bookstore apartment is just fine.*

I wonder why he talks in this funny way. I wonder what exactly he is, $\&\ I$ don't know.

I sit back in the comfy, cozy seats in the back of the Emperor, & the ladies swarm around me again, smelling like cookies & old perfume, & we continue to study their taxes, & I vaguely wonder when my next shift is at the *bookstore apartment*, & if I should pick up some ChocoSmax along the way home.

I Have This Friend I've Known a Long Time, In Different Ways

I have this friend that I've known a long time, in different ways, someone I feel compelled to find & lose again. *Do you have someone like that? Someone that keeps coming & going?* We both kinda agree this is how it is. Years, minutes pass.

One time, when we first knew each other, I was trying to teach him something about Creatures, these magical little beings that I know, mostly in dreams but not completely. We're sitting on the roof of a brick building, many floors above the town. We're sitting with this little White Bunny with mezmering eyes.

She's looking at me. I'm looking at him. I hand her over. Now she's looking at him. He doesn't know what to think. This is not part of things he knows, this magickal White Bunny studying him as she is, & he's hearing what she's saying though she's not speaking aloud. I don't think he ever forgot that day, though he ran from it in his mind for awhile.

We were often there on top of that brick building high above the town. It was called Candidate Jennings Apartments. Neither one of us lived there, but we ended up there a lot. Things like that happen. If you're looking for a place to smoke the joint, if you're looking for a place to kiss a girl, you end up on the top of places like Candidate Jennings Apartments.

Another time, it had been a while, but we got back together. He was now very old, much older than me. We were walking along the river & the river sparkled strangely, many colors. Now he believed in many things that he hadn't believed in before. He was hoping he could visit with my White Bunny friend again who he hoped maybe could now be his friend too.

We eventually did. Entered the White Woods, walked deep & deeper. And he chose never to return. *I've got too much to learn*, he said as we parted. *I don't know anything yet. She*

It's a Story of These Modern Times

Maybe it's from tomorrow, maybe it's from just around the calendar's corner. It's become a time when the phones you carry around to communicate, or show off, or whatever it is you do with them—leaning over them over & over again, hours on end, days on end, lifetimes on end—they're now required. There's now something called Happy App.

You got to do more than just carry them around & look at them. You got to do more than just update your blog & your popularity & your pictures & how fat your ass is.

No, there's more, because you're required to download something more than pictures or audio. Once a day, you prick your finger on a little hidden spot on your phone, & something downloads right into you.

They call it, informally, Happy App. You are rushed to a happy place in your memories—if you don't have one, one has been written up for you, & you are rushed there. You're there for what seems like a long long while, though it's seconds really. It calms you. It soothes you. You're OK again. *You're OK*.

Now, on the one hand, you could say there were *The Matrix & Brave New World* & other predictions of the comings of such things as Happy App to shield you from the coming disastrous end of the world. *Bad things to do so*, they said.

But if you could really look out your world's window in this time just around the calendar's corner, you would see ceaseless darkness & death & suffering & pain & loss & blackness. No going back, & no going elsewhere.

So maybe what the crazier scientists talk about as being something that happened long ago, something they call the Unitary Consciousness—you, dreams, the world, all one—maybe that's coming again. But maybe not. Until then, soon, there will be Happy App.

Oh, & if you don't take your daily little prick of Happy App, you don't get any more. And good luck to you then. You can't borrow someone else's. You can't buy it on the black market. You can't cook it up yourself.

Could there have been another way? Fingers can be pointed at the powerful, yes, but everybody else too. Everybody who let things go for just another day till our days ran out.

So then you might say those that most brung us here had to step in again to offer new answers & solutions, best they could do as the world collapses. Not much but—

Don't forget to take your Happy App today!

It Was an Outdoor Classroom

This happened so many years ago, & I almost think maybe it happened in some other world, some other life, to some other person. It was an outdoor classroom, I'm not sure how it came about, didn't start as a classroom, just started as a Great Tree.

This tree was so great, it filled the park it was in with its shade. Its great roots spreading out from its trunk, its great limbs looking toward the sky, the musical green & golden fruits hanging from its branches. Yet somehow, over time, those who gathered around

it could not help but begin to speak to one another, neither as strangers nor as friends but something else.

It's as though those borders & boundaries of people-folks, & their fences & morals & buffers, not only had these not merely fallen away, but it's like they *were never there*, under the shade & musical fruits, branches, leaves of this Great Tree.

They all flowed round & round its trunk, such that you might have said they were become like Creatures. They now saw each other distinctly & the same. Teachers came & went too, but more often what happened is that different ones took the lead, spoke up, began to tell.

A few years later, I was traveling with this famous documentary director to the wasted landscape of his hometown. He had an affable way about him, but his intellect was fierce, not to be underestimated. Thought to be a friend of that Gate-Keeper, so of course he was like that.

So one time we're sitting around the campfire somewhere in the dregs & ruins of his hometown. We were on top of a still-standing brick building called Candidate Jennings Apartments, roasting our tasteless food.

And I'm telling him about this Great Tree, & all its wonders, & how people were. And he's listening very intently. His small glasses practically fog up with how closely he's listening.

And he looks sharply at me & says, There are different kinds of Great Trees in this world & others.

I say, What do you mean?

He gestures around the evening view of his desolate & torn hometown. Not a flower, not a fruit, hardly a color to be seen that wasn't damaged or pretty much done.

He says to me, This is my Great Tree. But I'd like to see yours too sometime. Now let's get some sleep. Lots of interviews to do tomorrow.

It Begins in a Lunchroom

There was this weird guy—not in looks, he looked ordinary—white shirt, black tie, dark trousers, big rainbow target on his butt, just like anybody else—but he kept trying to have lunch with women.

Meaning he would sort of mosey on up to them in the lunchroom with his tray, try to sit on down with them, or her—there were both kinds of women there—& it just wasn't good because you can't do that in a lunchroom full of two types of women.

And so I got in his face & said, *Look, what's your problem, man, where you coming from? I think you need to get along.* But he points to his tray, as though that explains all, appeals his case.

On this tray, there's these tiny little paper cups of pale green mouthwash, in profusion on this tray. So he wants to share lunch with them, or her &, as a kind of *hors d'ourve*, offer them, or her, a tiny pink cup of pale green mouthwash.

This all makes sense in his mind, but I just kind of send him out the door & I say, Go down the hall, go to the lunchroom with the two types of men, & offer them the mouthwash.

The woman he had been harassing, I'm not sure which type she is, but she wants to thank me. In fact, she wants to pay me for my help, but I refuse. I give a wave & then I leave. I walk down the hall to the barroom, & I walk in, & they dump beer on me.

It happens every time. Somehow I forget, since I don't go there very often, that that's what they do every time. It's kind of a ritual. Or maybe they just do it to me, I don't really know, but they dump beer on me, & then they sit me down between these two big guys, smiling weirdly, great big moustaches. Almost like three moustaches per guy, they're so big.

And we sit down, & a long story begins to tell itself, but I never remember these stories later.

I'm sitting there soaked in beer, I don't remember the story that's being told me, I know this, I won't remember it. It takes place deep in the White Woods, there's a sense of menace, it's not a safe place, but I don't know why. Why would the White Woods be dangerous?

I'm thinking to myself, if only I could remember this dream, maybe I could wake up from it \mathcal{E} not have to go the barroom anymore, \mathcal{E} get beer dumped on me every single time, \mathcal{E} listen to the story I can never remember, \mathcal{E} then the lunchroom.

But I can't remember the dream, & I can't remember the story, & I don't remember that the beer gets dumped on me, & I encounter that guy with the mouthwash every single time.

Got a key, man, out of this? Got a key?

I'm Sick Today This Morning

I wake up sick today, this morning, this early AM, & it reminds me of something that happened a long time ago, when I was a boy. I lived in an apartment, next door to an old man, who I was mostly scared of, because he was old. He was quiet, & he was tall, & I wasn't. I could hear him playing guitar & singing in his apartment, & I had no talents to sing or play or really do much but want.

There was this one time when I was home sick. Everyone had gone out for a while, not really sure why. I decided I wanted some hot cocoa to feel better, & I thought I could do it myself. I could boil the water, & put the packet of hot cocoa in, & stir it, & let it cool, & it would comfort me in my sickness.

But something went wrong, with the stove, with the water. I did something wrong & I panicked that I was going to burn everything down. So what happened was I ran next door & I pounded on the old man's door saying, *Please help, please help!*

I heard music, then silence, & then movement. Then he came to the door, & he saw my face &, though I had never seen him move fast at all, he was amazingly swift. He ran in a crazy fast hobble into my apartment & he turned off the stove, & he put the water in the sink, & he showed me how to wipe everything down so there wouldn't be any stains or problems later

Then he smiled, & he left, but awhile later he came back & he handed me a small volume. He smiled a strange old man smile at me & he said, *I want you to read this. It might comfort you while you're recuperating. Goodbye.*

He left, & I got into bed, with just the little ruby lamp for light next to me on the bed stand. I opened the little volume & read the story about the boy who blew bubbles for fun & profit.

It was a story of a boy who, when he was young, didn't sleep well. His head made noises, whistles, groans, & sounds almost like voices. He'd wake up frequently so his dreams were very strange, & sometimes words came to him that he didn't quite understand.

He didn't talk much while awake, because he was afraid of the same thing happening then but, when he was about my age, his grandfather gave him a jar of soap bubbles & said, *You try that out.*

It seemed like the old man knew what the boy was going through, because what happened was that when he blew bubbles & they popped, they would make the sounds that were in him. Groans & whistles & sounds almost like voices. *It was amazing*.

But it wasn't really until he learned he could blow bubbles with words inside them that his fortunes began to change. He began to blow word bubbles &, as he got older, he began to blow word bubbles from his dreams.

He realized that they were wise wisdoms not from him but from somewhere, & he began to do this for others, when they needed comfort as he had needed comfort.

He would blow wise wisdom dream bubbles out, & it would comfort others, & he found his way in this world, & the profit he gained was that *other* kind of profit of course.

Did You Ever End Up in One of Those Elevators

Did you ever end up in one of those elevators where you can get on just fine but you can only get off if you know the right sequence of numbers? And you have to know further that this sequence is of someone falling asleep.

Luckily, that day in the elevator, I was with a friend & he told me, whispering in my ear: 8 7 6 5 8 7 6 8 7 8. Very lucky, I'd say.

So I got off the elevator & I walked into a cluttered chamber. Time doesn't pass because I'm a few strokes of paint on an old canvas in the corner of this cluttered chamber. I'm watching my future self get off that elevator, look around. He decides to pick up all the clutter. I'm watching.

Pulls up the weeds from the floor, gathers a lot of scraps of papers together, stands for the longest time looking at his old desk, not even wondering how it got here. Some things are not worth the wonder.

He begins to reassemble this chamber, though he keeps me in the corner, the old canvas of which I'm a few mere strokes. And he sits at the desk, hunched over, & he has about him an air of one who is not going to leave there for a long time.

Inside the Book There is a House

Inside the book, there is a house, & there's much music & noise in the house, inside the book. To escape the music & the noise inside the house, inside the book, you have to go deeper, find the inmost room. When you find the inmost room, you will wonder if is this really the party you've been wanting to go to, all these years?

The many faces are familiar. Old & familiar, recent & familiar. You see one who you like to call him the Traveling Troubadour. He just arrived, out of breath, guitar in hand, big smile on his face, blue eyes twinkling.

You think how you never know when you're going to see him these days. How it will happen, or for how long each time. You look at him smiling but serious & say, what of the future? Is it set in stone?

He thinks, takes a few exploratory breaths among his thoughts but, somehow, at

that moment, you get separated, & you find yourself looking at a weird splotchy painting, standing next to two people that you don't know.

They're telling each other it's a bad painting, the painter painted his shame. Look at that cluttered chamber. Look at that portrait of himself, living in a soap bubble. Just those few rude strokes, hidden in the corner of the canvas. He painted his shame!

They look directly at you & say, you should paint over it.

One hands you a little jar of paint, the other hands you a kind of flat-edged knife. They say, *Paint over it!* You do, partway, but then you panic.

Why am you doing this? They're against you now. Warning you away, laughing. **You have to find the Traveling Troubadour.** You have to ask him if it's possible he might not die in the future. Is it set in stone? Or layers of paint that can be added to, subtracted, changed?

There Is an Imp In My Cereal

There is a cackling imp in my cereal I'm trying not to eat. Oh yes, the card game has spread worldwide. The big vast card game involving LSD & dreams. Me sitting in a rocking chair, an old green rocking chair, out on the big porch looking out to the world. *And what a game is going on, high & low, many colors, constant music!*

Money? *Ha*. Not everything is peaches & cream. Not everything is cackling imps in your cereal.

When I'm not here on this big porch looking out to the world, I return back to my one room apartment, knowing I have to move. There's no choice. The building I'm living in is now part of the game. Something else is going to happen here. They're not going to tear it down but I won't be living here no more.

I have no plan, nowhere to go, no one to take me in, & the washing machine that fills half of this one room apartment, it's what I do for a living, at least until I have to leave, overflows.

I just got to go. I'm still carrying along that cereal bowl & that cackling imp is still in the cereal. I still haven't finished it, I'm not sure how this morning is going to proceed.

I couldn't sit on that porch all day. They don't let you. *Get back in the game!* they say. So I leave behind my one room apartment, realizing there was nothing there for me. Not even the washing machine was worth my time. So I just left, & I started walking. Roads aren't like they used to be. They're not straight, they don't necessarily go anywhere anymore. It's all part of the game, the worldwide card game involving LSD & dreams.

I meet this scientist along the way. She's a nice enough lady, a little ragged around the edges, a little gray, not so certain as scientists get when they're in their greatest glories.

She tells me she's in search of her science. We talk about what this might mean, but she's not sure. I ask her if she ever had a science.

She says, I had many. The chems, the bios, the astros. But somehow they all fell away from me, or I fell away from them.

Was it the card game? I ask her as we walk along, the road doubling & trebling. That's when she takes out a box from her lab coat, frayed, soiled. The box had all sorts of symbols on it. There were scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It was a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas. I look inside for a long time, & it shows me things I could understand.

But then I blink & it's empty, but then I blink & it's full again, but then I blink & it's

Seems Like There's a Million Documents

Seems like there's a million documents laid before me all over this table. Every one needs attention, every one is confusing. I start to look at one, & it relates to another, & then I look at that 'nother, & it references one I can't find, & so I look around for the one I can't find, & I notice one that is kind of sort of the same but a different version, most of the language is the same, & then I look deeper into the whole thing, & realize that many of these documents are both the same & different, & I'm trying to figure out what that means.

They seem all related somehow, & so they connect to one thing, & what does that mean? I think, Well, they're all paper, that's something, & I suppose they come from some tree somewhere, maybe many trees. And I lean back in my chair, it's a rickety chair, but holds me well enough, & I look around the room. It's a dim room but I can see OK

And I start to think, Wow, there must be some Great Tree from which all the other trees grow, way down deep in the earth, & that Great Tree's growing now, & never ever is that beautiful Great Tree somewhere down deep at the heart of the world ever going to be chopped up & made into little scraps of paper that are incoherent & unimportant & unrelated & twisted together & sitting like these on my table.

It Must Be Another Craz-z-zy December

You know, it must be another **craz-z-zy** December, let me tell you. I have 'em all the time, once a year at least. So this time, goin' to a job, well it's a job interview, but I'm hopeful. I have my lucky socks on, & my lucky underwear on, & my lucky hat on, my lucky pinky ring on. I'm just all decked out in luck. But it is a **craz-z-zy** December, so either it's going help or who knows?

I have directions to the job interview, & it's a part of Elliptical City where I haven't been to, which is strange, because I feel like I've been to every part of the city in more ways than one. But very circuitous streets, odd buildings, they're not shaped exactly like buildings, they're more shaped liked trees, & mountains, & animals, & things.

The address on my little scrap of paper that I wrote out with my scratchy hand tells me that it's this parking garage I'm standing in front of, & this parking garage doesn't look like a regular run-of-the-mill kind of parking garage either. It's kind of oddly shaped for a parking garage, as though the vehicles that park within it are not automobile-shaped somehow.

So I go into the parking garage, & I walk & walk It seems like miles that I'm walking in this parking garage. I do finally make it to a door at the very back of this strange parking garage & it says \mathbf{Office} on it.

I walk in & there's just a desk, it's a round desk, not rectangular as you usually expect. There's an old-fashioned phone on the desk, the kind we haven't had in centuries on this planet anyway. It's one of those where you pick up the receiver & you talk into the little

piece, & it's wired to the wall. I pick it up & say hello? & the voice on the other end is joyous!

I can't tell you any other way, it's **craz-z-zy** December. That's when this happens every time. *Joyous!* Telling me happy things that I don't understand. I don't know the words, I don't know what he/she/it or they or them is saying, but it's joy, it's joy emanating from this strange telephone, & I listen & listen & I want to share in it.

I want to give it back. I want to harmonize with the joy of this strange voice on this strange telephone. I just don't know what to do so finally I just *hmmm*.

In the Cave of the Beast

Now this last story that is the hardest to tell straight because it has so many angles & curves, & one can only hope to try to make sense of any of them, much less all.

In the cave deep inside the Tangled Gate, one of the heroic Brothers come to save the world was listening to the Beast tell these strange wise wisdoms of the world. Let's you and I listen from where & when we are. Let's listen & try to remember.

The Beast said, in his strange growly animal-type voice:

Life is suffering for some. The sufferers are the bricks & mortar of the climb elsewhere. Or else we can learn the world is enough to salve all.

We're not from here, so here's not important. It's transient. Or it can be learned that here is gift.

Preserve nature, it is the privilege of the few to enjoy till moved on. Or it is the magic to keep & perpetuate the world.

These ancient words were destroyed & more over time. Some now say the world is illusion, others now found righteousness to uphold in faith over tolerance, certainly over wonder.

The shine of some lives were built on the rags of others.

His words were said in strange ways, & over a long time, & the Brother was not the same as the man who'd walked into the cave. When he came out to the White Woods, it seemed as though it was somehow ten thousand years later than when he had walked in, even though that made no sense.

He found nearby houses that were built into the earth so that only their roofs were visible. He noticed there were round doors in the earth near them, & saw people pushing the doors open, & come climbing out of the stairs from below, & then later go climbing back in.

He was offered kindness & rest by some of these people, spent the night in one of these houses.

He had so much to think about, about the choices people make, about the world they wished to be.





Joe Ciccone

Riding With My Wife In An Old Willys

I only have one gear left and that's all we need

on this old beach road, getting passed by mopeds,

afterthoughts in a fast-forward world,

searching for nothing tonight, just crossing the moor,

feeling as austere as helium, oblivious to the last glint of Summer days,

rolling headlong toward the Winter Solstice, the days, for us, always too few,

and past my prime now you still see Adonis,

and together we laugh at the psychiatrists who should see psychiatrists,

and how we lucked out like this, sharing this one drive,

our threats, for a moment made of gauze.

I imagined a place called Patriot's Hill, where the colonials lay,

the smell from their corpses coming all at once, like when the wind blows in Chinatown.

Don't tell anyone but I can show you where all the flowers have gone.

Am I getting shorter? Don't tell me.

I don't want to know, nor how a rainbow works

and how the sky here can be so close to the water.

My gravel mouth, our sleepy-colored room,

the windlass and the wipers, the smell of polyurethane,

the split windshield, the church bells,

like songs in the dark these memories of us nourishing,

tho like the signal from this old radio - fading, like a pearl,

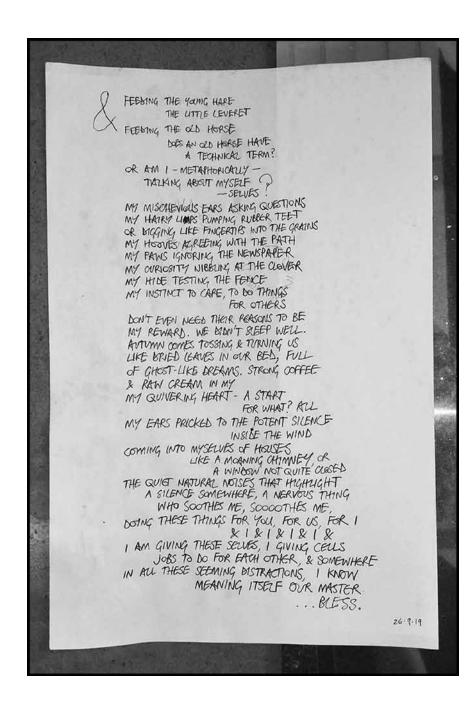
a pearl melting.



To do.

Feeding the young hare—the little leveret— & the old horse—does an old horse have a technical term? Or are these perhaps my own metaphors? My mischievous ears posing questions. My hairy lips pumping at the rubber teet, or like fingertips digging through the grains. My hooves in accordance with the path. My paws ignoring the newspaper. My curiosity at the clover. My hide against the electric fence. My instinct to care, to do things for others, a serving of my own desires? Don't even need their reasons to be my reward. Not sleeping well. Autumn comes tossing & turning us like dried leaves in our bed, full of ghost-like dreams. Strong coffee & raw cream in my my quivering heart! A start for what? All the worlds inside the raindrops codes of cranefly legs against the bathroom window—shocked still at eternity's infinite dawn. All my ears pricked to the potent silence wind brings into my housed selves chimneys moaning & windows not properly closed—a silence always some place else—this weathering nervousness who soothes me. Who soooothes me? These things I do for you, for us, for I &I&I&I&I& I am giving these selves, I giving cells, the blessed tasks of each other to know in all these seeming distractions

our master meaning itself.





Jimmy Heffernan

Notes on God

There has always been such vitriol between those who believe in some sort of God or gods, and those who feel this is ridiculous folly. Think of it this way: *Do you feel humans are the only beings in the cosmos? Do you feel that, perhaps, there are other beings, perhaps many more?*

Presumably, if there are, many of them would be quite a bit more powerful than humans. Presumably, some of them would reside in higher dimensions of reality (which science has proven to exist), and therefore be *considerably* more powerful than humans.

Would these beings really be distinguishable from gods? Why or why not? Why not call them that? You could think of them as super-powerful aliens if you want.

And, assuming all of this is logical, would it not follow that there is, somewhere, a *most* powerful being? The most powerful being in the cosmos? If so, would it be so illogical to call it God? Maybe?

* * *

So perhaps there are a slew of gods, and a most powerful one of those gods we could call, for convenience's sake, "God" (maybe both polytheism *and* monotheism are onto something). Presumably it would be extremely easy for these beings to take a person's quantum state (or wave function (also called the "soul")), which is known to govern an individual's consciousness, and preserve it in some sort of high-tech memory. *Why not*?

Perhaps these beings, or one of them, created a kind of computer simulation, and let it run indefinitely. Perhaps the Big Bang and the evolution of our universe are one small part of this simulation. So then, the laws of physics process the information that governs it.

We could say, then, that God is not responsible for what goes on, but rather that nature is an independent process based upon necessity and contingency, or order and chaos. Thus the appearance and evolution of life are a development made possible by the rules of the simulation (which also needn't have been chosen). So we should stop blaming a God or gods for our messes, and start taking responsibility for them ourselves.

**

Someone might ask, "Well these are certainly unusual views—how did you come to embrace them?" That is a long and complicated story, but I shall try to give a brief summary. For much of my life I was an agnostic. But, in my twenties, I had what one would call, for lack of a better term, "visionary" experiences, in which it became apparent to me that there is infinitely more going on than our mundane lives would seem to indicate. It became apparent to me that, as many Native Americans believe, we are all already dead, and the dead are alive. For Indians, there was no boundary between these two realms.

I witnessed some non-ordinary phenomena that confirmed this belief. I'm not sure there's any way to explain these experiences, so I won't try. Suffice it to say that some people, myself included, have witnessed a depth and breadth to reality that runs completely counter to almost everything we have been told, and what we experience on a normal basis. Religions are seen to embrace certain aspects of the truth *esoterically*, but I am certainly no more of a fan now of *exoteric* religion than I ever was. The truth is far more subtle.

* *

I wish there were some straightforward way of describing these experiences but, just as with the psychedelic experience, it cannot be put into words. The only evidence validating some of the things I have come to embrace—a sampling of it being represented here—is that there are others who have shared similar insights, all through the ages—especially poets, typically those of a mystical bent. The tradition of mysticism going back thousands of years seems to validate these views and, for mystics too, putting this milieu into language is an impossibility. We can only *refer* to it, but not *explain* or *prove* anything.

And so we all hope that as many people can have some sort of non-ordinary experience as possible. Nothing can be more valuable in stimulating one's curiosity, and shifting one's perspective in such a way as to find some sort of liberation from whatever form their difficulties, or their prison, have taken.

And nothing can be as valuable philosophically—to revere and to continue to search for the truth, which is, in the end, by far the most important thing for us.

* * *

The ultimate question is, "Why are we here?" I would say there's no one answer. We all have our reasons. I would say that there may be no clear purpose to our lives since, as I mentioned, it's all God's computer simulation. But, on the other hand, we can create as much meaning in our lives as we wish. Just because there is no discernible purpose doesn't mean that each and every one of us can't do well—and do good—in the universe.

Raymond Soulard, Jr.





Many Musics Eleventh Series

"Myriad lives like blades of grass, yet to be realized, bow as they pass." —The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

lx. Unitive

"This can't go on forever This war in a ring Gotta bring us together Like beads on one string" —The Who, 2019.

i.

Remember some things, & better, & different, deeper cool beneath, warmer flesh to their images & noise. It's what I've returned to this Island to do, re-braid my many selves, light up & fuse old gaps with new sparks. Grasp fuller the strange girl in me, grasp & go, hereon. Better.

I've lived long times at the Pensionne, tended its wild Garden, learning them, teaching me. Apprenticed to the White Tiger, his kindly Sea-blue eyes, growling wisdom in touching his black-striped fur, its beautiful calm, sweet music like a veil of stars round my raw yearning heart. I stopped running from my lost home, the King my father, my dear friends in dreams, my many kinds of loves.

When dreams came again, as so long they hadn't, they were of this Island, & the Architect asking me to return, to *find him in the Tangled Gate*. My body asweat in these dreams, warm again to those old wants, yearns of my hips & breasts, hands & lips.

To tame him, to burn him, to drown him in me, deep in me, to save him atwist my limbs, mine, beg me, beg me, love me, mine own.

Yet we argued. Hearts like fists. Dreams or not. "Why now?"
"You're needed."
"You wouldn't let me in the Gate by waking, when I lived there.
When you were my master."
"You traveled to the Gate anyway.
Many times. I knew."
"What did you know?"

His face plain upon me, his spectral grey eyes within mine own, touching me in ways mine own damp hands could not, possessing me within mine hardest breaths, shaping me up as like a poem from a mound of moss.

"I knew then, I know now, that the deepest truths of the human heart are made of its yearns. I forbade you travel in the Tangled Gate but gave you maps to study, my telescope to peer it by. So you traveled it by dreams to know it as few ever have, & these passing years have bound you still deeper the Gate by absence & wish.

"And now you urge my return?"
"Ask your White Tiger."

I never find him but he is before me, head sunk low for an embrace. Always the Garden, I've never seen him elsewhere, nor enter it, nor exit.

Not my master, Creatures never are, but a teacher, my *tender*. He taught me what I most needed to know: *kindness most binds*.

When I resisted the farthest ends of his teachings, when kindness seemed a second to self-preservation, or revenge he insisted me. A shake of his mane, a correcting growl. Pressed me again & again.

Kindness most binds. Many ways to heal. He would not me deny my dreams of the Architect, nor nudge me along, nor tug me back.

"I have to go back, don't I? Leave here?" Quiet growling deep in his throat.

Kindness most binds. Many ways to heal.

Learning is about making better choices.

We clustered together in the Garden, in full moonlight.

"Come with me." Only silence.

By morning our last embrace till the next one.

ii.

My travels since have brought me to this road, to an obscured understanding of what I am. My heart's strange yearns wrapped in an endless veil of stars.

Not knowing how to know where I begin or end in space & time.

We approach a kind of temple now, seeming cut into a cave. I'm unsure to see. The crowd easy lets me press forward, like *expecting me, waiting me, wanting me.*

A tall, feathered hierophant faces me. There is silence. *Does he wish words?*

"I wish nothing." His words like a bow.

"Will I find my answers in there?"
Shakes his head. Another kind of bow.
Like I wondered him the color of mine own eyes.

He steps aside, & I walk toward the entrance, dark as its own shadow. There is a stone basin of water, insisting a drink, like the Fountain, somewhere back there. I nod. Splash, drink. Enter, not knowing if I will return.

For a moment, still blind blackness, shadow's shadows, nor even the feel of the ground under beneath my feet.

I breathe slower, do not cry out, *hmmm* a little to calm, perhaps invite. *Something tests me here.*

I reach within me, strange girl's strange heart, nudge more my *hmmm*ing, sniff a little too for any clue. Images emerge & hang about me.

I see the book of patterns my father the King & I would study close together by evening, contriving deeper ways into my dances at first light, & their waking songs of dream. I studied with him, dreamed my own dreams, danced for him, wondered whatever could he learn from a strange girl's nude whirlings at dawn.

What was this book we studied so? I reach out to touch it, turn its frail pages, & now there is something here I know. *These are gnatterings*

rudely writ! My friend the Imp's playful ur-tongue, yet wisps of words wrap around my fingers, like "there is no final thing to know," now tickle up to my brow, & now lay soft upon my head, a crown of vines & stones, clue & thread.

iii.

The braided thread now comes near to me, & I follow, & a half turn, & there my beloved brother, finding me disconsolate that I would not see my friends again, listening to me tell of their world in dreaming caverns & tunnels underneath the Tangled Gate.

Never a denying word, just this: "You will limp now as I sometimes do, but not always. You will find each other again."

Another half turn, & there now my friend who claimed my father the King's heart, made off like a preying bandit. I see them together in the chamber they alone used. Her straddling him, dark hair down, hips moving impossibly slow, head reared back in snarl, growling wide as forever as she sucks him into her, deep in, till nothing seems to remain, & now leaving their chamber, still nude, him sweating up from the blood trashing her walk along the empty corridor, him old splayed remains, & her gone completely. My lost father.

I press myself harder deep in this darkness, command now to know, & find I am small, hardly made, singing to rags & flower vases because they sing to me, we are alike.

I try to recall earlier but it's like I was never born, never an infant. Created like a poem from moss, no couple loved me to be. The King not my father, nor his dead first Queen my mother? Why do I know this is true? Why have I always known?

I tire. What do I do here?

There are wisps of song, of a kind with my despairing, like my dear Singer of childly yore. I reach toward them & they settle like a hummingbird on my outstretched finger.

Singing, "Many kinds of time, several binds of time, & how it looses to air!" I think of my Architect, & the singing molds his face in the dark before me.

iυ.

"You've come."
"You've led."

I feel soft pressings against my arms & shoulders. My friends! Soft fur of the White Bunny, tiny gnattering Imp, turtle not a turtle. So close to me again. Heartbeat. Breath. Skin. Hmmming.

We linger together, me & the Architect & these lovely Creatures. Like this possible? Like together we could learn to learn to know each other?

They love him too now, because they have learned him, brought him here to me. *Kindness most binds*. Like all my friends & teachers with me in this strange & crucial moment. Like by my love for each & all of them will I decide what next.

 ν .

I drift from my friends, wander memories that seem more departing.

The sweet, high music of the Traveling Troubadour. The dark fanciful music of the One Woods when all wake deep in the night & sing out.

My father the King on sleepless nights, his spyglass peering the black water. His demon tugging him back, away from me, away from the Queen, willing to sacrifice my brother, the snakebite in his heart never letting him rest until our Island home abandoned, & all to war. Never knowing what she is, or what I am, or all this we lost.

seeing her slip back into the sea as his boats raised their sails.

My Blue Suitcase. The box of many threads. I begin to fear. What do I know to do? I twist in, & in, & in, feel myself somehow starting to pull this world closed upon itself, its possibilities, even as glints & glarings of a new one nose me near.

I fear. Words are leaving me. No! (leaving) No! (leaving)
I try to cry out help me!
but it's just a silent wordless grunt.
No! (leaving)

Try again. The world shaking from me to its every corner, so many I have not known, & all upon feel failure & pain in their blood & bones.

No! (leaving) No! (leaving) N-! (leav-) N-! (gnatter) (N!) (gnatter!) (N!) (gnatter! gnatter!)

No! Help me, Architect! My friends! Beast! Hero! My brother! My father the King! Help me! White Tiger! Singer! Troubadour! Help me! (No!) (gnatter! gnatter!) Help me, Queen! Help me, all!

A great roar, a wild pain, I feel blown all to light, cry soundlessly, & then all silence. Silence.

Then a voice, my own, & yet I listen: "There is a door, & now we pass through."
There is a door. And now we pass through!"

vi.

The world spasms. The world shakes. The world holds. I reach into its maw & fill it with everything I've ever learned, ever known, ever loved.

I bind myself to this world, its flaws, its beauties. I push time back, smooth it like a thin blanket along across a long, bare back. It is there for those not yet ready to reveal themselves to the night, & its many kinds of truths.

I push back, growing stronger, healing all I can, there is so much, & the world will ever root up from its countless fractures, how they chorus.

My efforts tire me, & I feel my friends join me, cluster me close, lift me up in our *hmmm*ing, help me push open again this world, *keep this world*, arriving, *now arriving*, close, closer, more, & more, & now it's . . . water. Sea water! My beautiful world's Wide Wide Sea!

I am in mid-dive into the Sea, my Blue Suitcase tied from my waist, bidding my friend goodbye with a wave, it is the Hero, my dear friend, smiling at me as once I had at him, thank you, I love you, thank you, & goodbye.

The shore is rocky, no beach where I half-collapse, breathless. The sea lets me leave but willing this time, but will guard by my blood hereon.

I have bound myself to this world. I have remembered some things & bound myself here.

I will climb the rocks to the Dancing Grounds, will dance again on these girl's legs I've chosen to keep.

I will let the Castle slow return to green, One Woods hungering like a long waiting kiss for its possession.

The Tower, by my touch, will be Tree & Tower & Starcraft in one, & my Architect will have his day & night without end.

Finally, come to the Tangled Gate, that which I have loved best is here, always been, & not left nor right by the Fountain, but *through*, no way *in* but *through*.

The Fountain's luring waters swallowing me as pass into the caves & tunnels of my friends, my childly dreams, & they will receive me by feather & fur & fin, happy sniffs all around.

Yet still a part of me will draw elsewhere too.

Away, away, deeper & deeper, ever toward & arriving finally at the Red Bag.

And here we I will close what has been too long been opened, the wound that was the loss of our home, long ago, & what compelled our travels to the stars, in search for a new one to salve.

I was made to help us heal, but *healing is hereon*. Healing is sending those who wish along their way, imagining some next perfect world to find.

"There is a door. And now we pass through!"

One by one, till they are gone, till perhaps I am all left?

I lead my dear friends up through the tunnels to the Cave of the Beast, my friend too, lead him now, & his mate, into the paths of vines & stones, dancing them all along now, hmmming breaks open to singing & shouts, till we exit the Gate, & on to the Dancing Grounds, where I will no longer dance by myself, & only by dawn.

My childly dreams now awake forever, *unitive*, welcoming & inviting to all who find these pages.

Listen in your dreams for our singing from this Island, its caves, its tunnels, its Gate. Join us in our unitive *hmmm*ing!

Dance our music through your lone & daylight hours. Touch & teach others how, *so close*, smiling, so close. *They are real.*

December 8, 2019 Milkrose, Massachusetts

* * * * * *

Ace Boggess



"How Far Would You Go To Stop That Crazy Craving?"

—read at 6 a.m. on the back of a Honeycombs box

When breakfast cereal makes me think of sex: as though at dawn I awoke from lotus sleep with arms bound to a sea-sprayed bench, eyes honeyed after dreaming lust in incandescent shades, scents of lilac, butter rum, & freshly broiled cinnamon raving deep in the imaginations of young men, I know I have been gone too many days.





The Island of Bali: The Sacred Dances With The Profane, By Firelight

I saw a Kecak Fire Dance in Bali, a sacred ceremony where heavily made-up and bejeweled performers wordlessly enact a Hindu legend, such as the story of Rama winning Sita's love—until he left her with his cousin—and went to kill a magic deer apparition, but that was a trick—and then the monkey king gave her a magic ring—and the cousin tried to steal her—but she tried to tell Rama she was still alive—until the serpent—never mind.

The performance is accompanied exclusively by the sounds of the human voice and body. An intergenerational chorus of thirty or so shirtless men march out in crimson trouser capris, each one rhythmically clucking or clicking, chanting, clapping, you name it, permanently raising my personal standards about *a capella*. They circle again and again in opposite directions around the enormous candelabra (a three-dimensional menorah, some might say), weaving in and out of each other like a country square dance. Their movement is as hypnotizing as their chorus of sounds. The men end up seated in three rows encircling the fire in the center of the stone temple floor.

Not an auditorium, or even an outdoor stage, mind you—this performance takes place in a massive, ancient stone temple. And the performance area is defined by the cheap folding chairs that surround it. The fire is reflected in the glassy eyes of the audience, a slew of tourists sipping beers out of plastic bags. We are directly off of a bustling city street in the center of Ubud, where motorbikes race by loud and furious.

ii.

Such is the constant anomaly of Bali. Ancient and sacred juxtaposed with commoditization, sin, and industry. Commercial enterprise has wedged its way into this organic mecca. Bali is recognized as one of the most spiritual places on earth, yet that recognition may be at the root of its problems.

As a visitor on my own spiritual quest, I cringe at the thought that I am perpetuating this gentrification.

In the 1990s, people expressed concern about Bali's 200,000 visitors per year, and the impact it would have on the ecosystem, local culture, and the financial structure of the pre-industrialized island.

Today over a million people visit per year. "Visit it now, because its going to be unrecognizable in twenty years," someone had told my dad. It's a popular spot for scuba and snorkeling, massage, yoga, surf, meditation, sex, self-discovery, and its *cheap* prices. Bali's a hop, skip, and a jump from Perth, and other cities in Australia, where the cost of living is extremely high. You can use the same amount of money to vacation conservatively in Australia for a weekend, or spend it lavishly for two weeks in Bali.

The Balinese still devote their time, energy, and prayers to the Hindu gods and spirits, but a new deity, the dirty dollar, has risen fast and harsh to its own altar. Still, the temples stand their ground.

I admire the architecture as I ride my rented scooter down the narrow streets and alleyways. It feels holy to move amongst buildings that are so old, even as I sit in the most atrocious traffic I've ever seen. Later in my stay, I learn that this is because the government will not build any overpasses or bridges that would be higher than the temples. They also will not move a temple. There are rules about cutting down certain trees, too.

What you get is a city that has exploded with motorists, shops, restaurants, bars, cafes, vegan eateries, yoga studios, hotels, stacked around and blatantly competing with the majesty of 300-year-old stone ceremony spaces.

The pavement is littered with natural offerings: beautiful folded palm fronds encasing flower petals, grains of rice, and burning incense, offered with ample prayer by a kneeling woman in sarong. You can date the offerings pretty easily by how many times they appear to have been stepped on and run over by the motorbikes. All of the materials are natural and compostable so eventually they return to the earth.

iii.

I fret that Bali will not recover from this. Or, rather, what it was will not be reclaimed. I feel guilt as a privileged visitor, bringing money in but also perpetuating the problem. So many businesses were spawned when tourism exploded, and too many people changed occupations to accommodate the massive tourist influx. The economy has been in recession since then, leaving families scrambling to make ends meet on this rapidly gentrifying island. Such is the ebb and flow of the tropical paradise turned major tourist attraction, right?

I turn over these questions in my mind: a people's way of life is being radically changed by colonization, tourism, modern technology, and western influence. Is it something I should look at as a tragedy? Or is this an amazing act of evolution and survival, a rapid feat over natural selection? So many people came to this land and asserted their influence, and the Balinese adapted while keeping connected to their scared practices.

And so many traditions still exist, like the Kecak Fire Dance! Even if that tradition is being sold at \$4 a ticket amidst the exhaust fumes in downtown Ubud... I do not arrive at any answers.

The men are seated cross-legged on the floor, and their hands are extended to the knees of the man at their sides, connecting the three circles. All eyes are on them, their bare skin, their glassy eyes, their clucking mouths. Chanting at the fire, they sway back and forth, their heads making jerky motions tilted right and center, right and center, right and center.

I notice my head tilting in tune to their chattering song. Suddenly, I've teleported to some obscure Balinese jungle situation and the fire is hypnotizing me to an other-dimensional vibration. Half the audience is gaping, entranced in the psychedelic sound of their performance. The other half is looking around in fear and/or major judgment at other stunned audience members. Light from the candles flickers on the skin of the performers.

An evening gust blows through the temple, and I realize that one cool thing about fire is that it allows you to "see" the wind. The flames twist, flicker, dim, and glow even brighter. The men swaying to and fro in the candlelight give the illusion that they are flickering flames.

In my mind's eye, I see tradition as like a flame. These men are literally swaying, carrying on this tradition. As long as there is some fuel to burn, or as long as there is culture, there will always be the flame, the tradition. However, the flame dances and changes shape, intensity, and brightness accordingly with the forces around it. The flame is flexible—it responds to its environment, just as culture and tradition is influenced by geography and climate—by social, economic, and political forces—by change.

While Balinese cultural norms have shifted in response to the tourist influx, many traditions there have remained largely the same. The highways have accommodated the temples, not the other way around. Although the people of Ubud do their daily work, some of them 12-14 hours a day, they arrange their work schedules so that they can prepare these offerings to the spirits. On holy days, the whole city is pretty much shut down.

I think of myself as a flame now, blown here and there by the weather, and by cultural conditioning, and by all of the things that have happened in my life. I begin to sway with greater abandon, feeling the pull of these forces on my soul.

I feel a connection somewhere in my navel, connecting me to the traditions of my ancestors. Images swirl in my minds eye, of wild blackberries and succulent mushrooms, music and teachings shared around a fire, dried herbs hanging from the ceiling, making medicine and dancing the evil away in the moonlight.

Suddenly, I become aware that my movement may disturb others around me. Coming to stillness, I can still feel the heat my tiny dance generated. Deep within my body, I envision a little fire burning. The light carried through my lineage flickers in me now. The memories, traditions, the wisdom in my bones, of every being who came before me, alive in this light. Although the winds of change may cause my flight to flicker, the fuel source overflows for eternity.



Gregory Kelly





```
i feel my breath it is tangible
it is tangible the motion of lungs
releasing air back to ancient territories
            breath circling the mysterious
pathways
 beneath
 skin
    гí
    ris
the rise and f
             fa1
the rise and fall of chest reinvigorating the last energy
the rise and fall
                    chest reinvigorating the last energy
         and fall
                    chest reinvigorating the last
          nd fall
                    ches reinvigorating
          d fall
                          reinvigorating
             a11
                          reinvigorating
              11
                          reinvigorating
                          reinvigorating t
                          reinvigorating th
                          reinvigorating the
                          reinvigorating the 1
                          reinvigorating the la
                           reinvigorating the las
                           reinvigorating the last nergy
                           reinvigorating the last energy
i feel my breath
shake the leaves the motion of trees
```

Panama Hat

Facing me from a shelf in the closet is My dad's old Panama hat,

Pale yellow warp of woven *paja toquilla*, Broad band black as a mourner's sash.

I bought it for him for thirty bucks in Quito in '99, Wore it on my head that day

Like a flag printed with the words "I'm rich!" So thieves followed me into a Brazilian rock shop

And took from behind the counter My knapsack with its irreplaceable

Seven hundred fifty dollar plane voucher And two hundred fifty in cash. Just like that

I was out a thousand bucks, so instead of Going to the States for only a couple weeks

For my cousin's wedding, I made the choice To leave Ecuador for good. Quit

My jobs at the newspaper and the language school, Left the human skull and the four-meter anaconda skin

To my friend Celso the shaman, who was then raided By the police, and, based on the skull, briefly jailed

On suspicion of practicing witchcraft. Meanwhile, Back in Ann Arbor, I practiced English teaching.

My dad wore the Panama hat around the pool of his condo, Where it may have helped get him laid. At least,

I see him wearing it in a story a beautiful, drunk stranger told me Years later at his memorial service, though it wasn't the hat she mentioned,

But his sexy legs, the way he looked hot in swimming trunks Despite being sixty, nearly three times her age.

Her boyfriend torn between desires to leave the house, To tell her to be quiet, or to respect the solemnity of the memorial,

Her story came out in blurred fragments As, unsteadily, she clutched a plant as a gift for my dad's girlfriend.

Dinner and drinks at The Earl. Back at my dad's place, they watched *Sid and Nancy*. He joked that his neighbors would probably

Think she was a prostitute. And (here, she changed the topic) He always encouraged her to stay in school and become an art historian.

Facing me from a shelf in the closet is my dad's old Panama hat, Pale yellow warp of woven *paja toquilla*, broad band black as a mourner's sash.

* * * * * *

Martina Reisz Newberry

Typical

Let's say it is just a typical day for you. You've risen, stretched, then bathed, then dressed, and made coffee.

You open your front door to morning with a sky of arched clouds on a background of blue—clean, cool, pure.

On the third step down is an unremarkable pigeon feather, gray/white.

Out by the curb, a man is whistling as he goes through a dumpster, looking for plastics, paper, glass—there's refunds to be had from returns and he will have them before it's noon.

There are dandelions in the grass. They have memorized your face, look up, wave to let you know that the morning is safe.

It's yesterday's morning and today's and tomorrow's as well.

Your coffee steams. The red-haired woman in a wheelchair rolls by, her Maltese in her lap. You tell yourself you should go in.
You lost a poem or two outside that door yesterday.
It wouldn't do to lose another—
they visit so seldom.
Your work will suffer and be forgotten.

A phone rings. A boy on a bike races by. Two girls walk a pit bull up the street.

Let's say that, now, the day is busying itself—your dark desk is waiting, the lined notebook's waiting.

Your readers (both cats, black as shadows) are waiting and still you stay, watching for something to happen, which it will, if you are still and without desire.

* * * * * *

Diana Rosen



Mary's Story

Like a lot of older people, she seemed all legs. Her torso bent over so that, when she sat down, her head barely rose above the classroom table, and she had to pull the microphone down to under her chin to capture her voice.

And what a voice! Tinged with the Louisiana bayou where she grew up, and lived most of her life, that voice brought every word into focus. I swear I saw a sun-splattered movie as she read her story, written on a page torn from a ruled notebook, in pencil.

"Daddy asked me to deliver a pistol to his brother at his farm neighboring ours. Lucy, their shared cow was ill, he said, and Daddy said he could not do the deed himself.

"I took my time walking through the tall grasses lightened by the soft breezes and yellowed by the sun, brushing against my overalls covering the heavy weight of metal in the front pocket.

"I picked up a stick to work my way through the field, and arrived at my uncle's barn to see him sitting cross-legged on the short bale of hay, beside the cow who was emitting long low moans.

She's in a lotta pain, Mary, a lotta pain, Uncle said.

"I handed him the gun, butt end first as my Daddy had taught me, and Uncle took it with one hand, the other still on the cow's body, caressing her.

You git on home now. Git! he said, his eyes fastened on the cow.

"I backed away from him until I was out of the barn. Then, turning around, I ran for a while until I heard the shot.

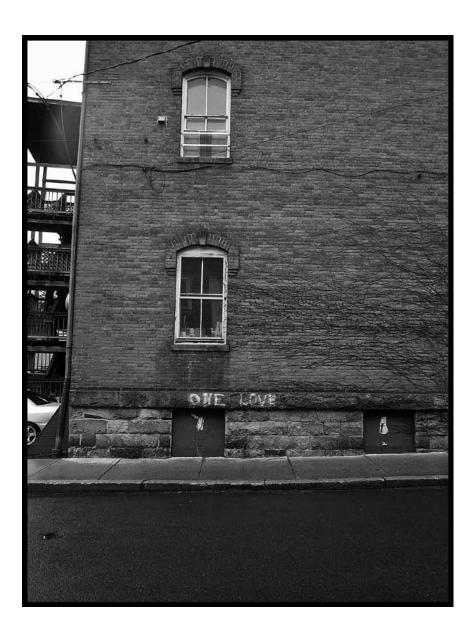
"Crisp. Specific. Final.

"My childhood ended with that shot. My father, my tall, kind, strong-willed father, was no longer the saint I'd made him out to be.

"He was just a man now. A man too scared to shoot a cow."

* * * * *





Tomcat's Sermon

Thus spake the prophet Tomcat, who had come to warn the people but got caught up in the sound of a Whippoorwill whom he found to be quite lovely. He gave up prophecy for evangelism.

"And so it shall be that the Exodus will come to pass if the people fail to change. They must fall in love with the earth immediately. They must praise her all the day long. They must build temples in her honor."

At one time, the Nile was worshiped as a god, and the poets glorified her.

Langston Hughes: "I've known rivers."

The sun was adored as well, and written and sung about.

Andrew Park: "A glorious orb is the sun. Who shall describe his flame?"

"I shall describe his flame," said Tomcat the evangelist and true poet, (a fellow with a sketchy past in which he might have referred to a woman as "some dame" and promptly forgotten her name, but now there is this Whippoorwill, and he can't get the song out of his head but he must preach anyway.)

"The flame of the sun starts in a distant green country. It never bows to anything or anyone.

"The flame of the sun erupts in fertile lava as a result of his lovemaking.

"The flame of the sun catapults energy southward and inward, and falls on altars and burns them up.

"The flame of the sun is a supreme priest and a pharaoh bent on making history.

"The flame of the sun says, "She is smoke and ash, fire and brimstone, and I love her."

"The flame of the sun kisses the feet of the earth and unbinds them, and bids them walk.

"The flame of the sun illuminates Tutankhamun's tomb, and unwraps him so that his gold face gleams and he becomes a god.

"The flame of the sun puts everyone in the Middle Kingdom, with lion, crocodile, and hippopotamus.

"The flame of the sun enlightens a culture, and impregnates poems.

"The flame of the sun survives in art and architecture, and makes every day holy.

"The flame of the sun is rekindled in community, with the candle-keepers, in monasteries and bars and creativity salons.

"The flame of the sun is cyclical and harmonious and perfectly in tune every time."

Thus said Tomcat, also known as ka and ba, a person's double, a spiritual ram, a spiritual entity, to his Whipporwill, who grew silent to enjoy the reading.

* * * * * *

Algernon Beagle



Bags End Book #12: What Is Imagianna?

This story and more Bags End writings can be found at: scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Sampler readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for $\underline{\text{Bags End}}$ $\underline{\text{News}}$. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a suddehn edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The <u>Sampler</u> editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, has invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this story presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this story from Bags End , a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

What Next?

That really is man question, Dear Readers. Now I am no bright star in the sky, but I don't think it's better to walk around knowing more than learning.

Still, here I was, walking around & I was not learning or knowing either. I felt like someone else with mah bodybone & brainbone.

I could not go back before all mah experiences with my friend Larry the Spider in Dreamland, that I talked about in mah $\underline{\text{Bags End Book}}$ called $\underline{\text{Algernon Beagle Wakes Up!}}$

I wanted to come home to Bags End to show I could. To make sure it was still here.

There was a but now.

Sheila Bunny opened one sleepy purple eye in mah direction.

"What, Beagle?"

"What do you think of all I told you about Dreamland? In mah long long story?"

"It was long, long."

"That's all?"

"I'm glad you're back."

"I don't know if I can stay."

Now 2 purple eyes.

"Maybe I come & go."

"Why go?"

"Maybe it's what I do now."

"Now?"

I reached down hard now 4or some new words or a better train of the usual ones.

"Yes. Now." Wow, not many.

"OK," she grumbled. "Keep in touch." Then she sleeped.

I could have asked 4or more, or been disappointed, but the thing I think I have learned is that a storm in mah heart doesn't mean rain on your head. Something like that.

Mostly I had to figger this out slowly, at the pace of mah own brainbone's crawly walk.

Mah first idear was to see what it like not to be on the run or in the middle of some crazy story.

Go to Mister Owl's Bags End School. Sleep in mah own bed. That's what I said to mahself, like I as building a 10-part mountain, not doing what I used to do all the time with no instructions.

The next morning, Mr. Owl was glad to see me at my school desk. Hm. "You're early, Algernon. It's not time for class."

"I know. But I have to ask questions that I don't know will fit in class."

Mister Owl adjusted his little smart guy spectacles & nodded. I remembered he is good at teaching & listening both. I think I needed both.

"What is Bags End 4or?"

"40r?"

"I know it sounds like words pretending to be a question but not really one."

He laughed & then listened some more.

"I used to understand something by not knowing I didn't know it." He nodded.

"But now I know I don't know," I finished, wondering who was talking smart guy riddles with mah simple fella's tongue.

Mister Owl talked now which was good because I had none left.

"It's better to have some questions than no questions."

I nodded & listened.

"There's always been more to Bags End than most of us know."

"Hmm," I said briefly.

"I read your Dreamland stories with great interest."

"O, shucks!" said me, in case that was a compliment.

Mister Owl laughed again & I liked his laugh a lot. Smart & nice.

"I think what you found out was that Bags End goes in more directions than you knew. Higher & lower, but also deeper in & further out."

"You mean Dreamland, right?" I asked, worrying I was spending out mah meager smarts pretty quick.

Mister Owl nodded. 'You could say Imagianna is out more & you could say Dreamland is more in."

"But I got to Dreamland by going through Imagianna!"

 $\,$ Mister Owl nodded. "The world is like that the more you learn about it."

I hmmm'd inside mah head so not to slow his talk. But he was quiet again.

Then he nodded & talked some more. "It's sort of like a game. All this," & his pointed all around us with his wing.

"A game?" I repeated, but not like I knowed what was what.

"A serious game."

"O."

"And nobody knows the rules."

"O."

"And nobody knows 4or sure it is a game or how anyone wins or loses." I must have looked buried in short hard words because he smiled & stopped.

But, wait. I had a thought. I was surprised, but there it was.

"A game like checkers?"

He nodded slightly. OK, Beagle, try harder.

"But harder?"

He smiled.

I thinked. "Sheila plays checkers with Godd the small pink bear. So Godd likes games. Is this all Godd's game?"

"I don't know."

"Does Godd know?"

"Mavbe."

Hmm. O. Both didn't work.

Mister Owl thinked some more & tried again. "This isn't my first home, Algernon."

"O."

"I came to Bags End from other places."

"You did?"

He nodded.

"We all live many lifetimes."

This sounded like the kind of smart guy talk that would soon leave me in the dust.

He shooked his head. "Listen. I think what's hard for you is figgering out what to do with the many worlds you now know. How they don't fit yet & make an easy picture."

I nodded. These words made sense & I hoped they would go on.

"Bags End is your home in a way nowhere else could be. Not Imagi-

anna, not Dreamland. Not the place where the your friends the Creatures live. Not even Connecticut or other places in Miss Chris's & Ramie's world.'

I nodded again but really listening. Brainbone smoking.

"It could be you live in more than one place 4or awhile."

"How?"

"You know how."

"You mean dreaming?"

"Dreaming. And waking too."

Hm.

Mister Owl patted me nicely on mah 4orehead. "Go."

"Where? I came to school like I am supposed to, & didn't 4or a long time!"

He shook his head. "Your homework is to go & figger this out, & them come back & report to me & others."

O great. Homework. Could be worse.

He laughed again. "In Bags End News, of course."

I laughed too. This made it easier.

So then I finally nodded & went. I was gone be 4ore anyone else showed up to school.

Gosh, I am still doing this . . . whatever it is. Only now others know too. I guess I better figger it out a lot better that I know now!

Best I Can Say . . .

Where I dream at night is called the Creature Common & best I can say is that most of their guys are a lot less crazy than mah own folks in Bags End, or else some other kind of crazy that looks like niceness but, surprise! ha! isn't!

I have learned that a Lead Creature is a guy who his fellows wish to represent them. Similar fellows, mind you, like one for Duckees & one for Pine Cones & so on.

A Lead Creature is the first among guys. Not a King like Sheila wishes, but sorta kinda. Exactly like Sheila if she was someone else totally. Um. Yah.

The Lead Lead Creature is Threshold, a nice little pup with a serious look. He has pretty brown eyes & a handsome mug. Very polite. Does not talk much.

None of these guys talk a lot but I understand them. I think this took awhile.

I think of these Creature, mah crazy Bags End folks, & you Dear Readers, wherever you are, as part of the same bigger thing. And I think that includes Imagianna too, & Miss Chris & Ramie in Connecticut.

I tried to think of which way to start telling this story. I mean, I could keep telling about everybody I meeted, or I could tell one of the things that happened. But I kept thinking that telling about more Creatures would be good.

And I still don't quite know if this is the right way, but I will tell next

about a fella named MeZmer, who is a White Bunny.

See, I thinked I already knowed all the Bunnys I would get to know but, ha! no. I meeted MeZmer. I admire her hoppings, I must say. And by saying this, I almost still into a story but not yet. Anyway, MeZmer, being a Bunny, is very cute & pats mah nozebone most politely.

Then there is this fella named Bauer. He is a slyly smiling black-&white pandy bear. I have seen some guys dance in mah days, but this Bauer takes the cake with his impressive slidings. O! Cake! Yuk! He wears a rakish bowtie too. Raking means O Wow, with a chuckle.

Another impressive fellow is called Pirth who is purple & furry but I don't know which kind of Creature he is. He's a dancer too, but he dances another way from Bauer. More jumping, less sliding. He also has a nice bow in his head's fur, & he dances with two ribbons.

Pirth has a twin sister name Beamer, who looks part Bear & part Bee, & she loves Pirth, & they are twins in part by dancing's. Bauer is not a twin to them, although I guess he could be.

Another guy I met is named Jacoby. He is a monkey fella with a friendly smile. And boy howdy! Can he jump! They often call him Jumping Jacoby. Very polite too.

There there are these two little bloo-eyed Kittees whose names are the same but talked different. Johnny with a J sound, & Johnny with a Y sound. They might be twins too, but I don't know & they like licking fellas friendly more than explaining in words. But that's OK, really.

Now I have to interrupt mah easy tellings to say that pending trouble nears. It has to do with hopping. Since I have been living in Bags End by wake & the Creature Common by sleep, I sometimes talk about one while in the other.

Bags End guys showed mostly no interest in the Creature Common. But then I made the mistake one day in Sheila's Throne Room of talking about to her about MeZmer hopping in the Creature Common.

"Who hops there?" she demanded to know.

"Well," I said, without letting mah brainbone think about the sure trouble to come. "MeZmer hops really good."

"Better than your King?"

I began to talk but then Sheils stopped me & said, "Consider the certain chance of your demise before answering, Beagle."

"Good advice. Nobody hops better than you, Sheila."

This didn't work. She hopped from her Throne right up close to mah usual resting place on the floor.

"I demand a Royal Hop-off!" she cried.

"Um?" I stuttered.

"I will prove my superiority to any 4oreign Bunny near or far!" she declared.

O boy! A hopping war. I tried to back quietly out of the room, but she out-tricked me.

"Tell that Bunny I am coming & will defeat her on her own home turf!"

"I don't think there's any turf there, Sheila," I said hopelessly. But she just stared & pointed me out of her Throne Room.

Now I found mahself stuck in a new story when I had been happily

describing Creatures.

What to do, what to do, Dear Readers? Down to every last one of mah Beagle bones, I didn't like the idear of a Royal Hop-Off.

So I went to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch to sit & think this over. Then I felled asleep, & I was in the Creature Common, just like that.

And there was MeZmer looking at me! This dreaming stuff is a little crazy.

I said, "Hi, fella," & MeZmer smiled her charming smile.

I tried to gather mah best words.

"I live in Bags End when I am wake," I explained 4or no reason since she knows that.

"Anyway, mah 'dopted sister Sheila is sort of nuts about being the best Bunny around & when I said you're a good hopper too, she went crazy & wants a Royal Hop-Off!" I explained faster & faster till I stopped of words.

MeZmer nodded & made to sleep with me back to Bags End where she would be sleeping & I would be awake. Parse that one, ya egghead guys!

"No, but!" I protested, but now we were back in Bags end, hopping & walking, me very reluctantly, to Sheila's Throne Room.

This was the first meeting of Bunnys from Bags End & the Creature Common. I thought I would have to introduce them with all due protocols, which are like politeness dressed up good in words in doings.

No. sir. MeZmer hopped right up to Sheila Bunny in her Throne & they looked each over good.

No words. Just Sheila's magickal purple eyes & MeZmer's strangely glowing ones. On & on they looked.

Finally, Sheila nodded & hopped off her Throne. She & MeZmer hopped side by side right out of the Throne Room, & I had to run fast to keep up! Down level after level of Bag End I chased.

"Hey! Where are you goings?" I cried to no answer, & they got so far ahead of me I lost them.

Figgering Up a Plan

For a long time, your old pal Algernon has been trying to find mah sea legs for writing my newspaper regular again. I think it used to be simpler when one of the big guys in Bags End would scheme up an idear, & I would get dragged along, & I would write mah way through it.

The story got stranger when I was in Dreamland for a long time, & then I discovered the Creature Common on the other side of Dreamland. Then, not so long ago, guys on the one side & the other side met, like I tolded about with Sheila Bunny & MeZmer, but I still felt no Beagle groove to go with.

This is what I have learned. Dear Readers: I could go on without writing mah newspaper, but I don't want to. And I don't think Bags End is good without mah newspaper. Nobody does what I do.

Maybe that's part of why Mister Owl sent me off to figger all this out instead of going back to Bags End School. Sort of introducing MeZmer to Sheila wasn't figgering anything out really, but I did kind of like that they finally

met, & they settled any dispute they might have had through, um, staring & hopping off together.

But I still had the hard thing to work over. What do I do now?

That's the question I brung to mah good friend Princess Crissy in Imagianna. The way there is not far. Find the right hallway, & the right door, & go on through.

So I did what was strange was that her dear friend Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, did not green me in his formal polite way. This takes time but it's his way, & I like him.

Crissy answered the door of her Castle. "Algernon!" she said all happy. I never get tired of her happy.

"Hi, Crissy! Where is Boop?"

"He had to go visit one of his relatives," Crissy said, all mysteriously.

"O," sayeth me as we walked into her Throne Room. Crissy slouched dow in her Throne almost Sheila Bunny-like, but she didn't crunch a carrot (O! Yuk!) or play a jazz record.

So I talked what was on mah mind. Crissy listened good & nodded & smiled like she does.

"You want your Beagle groove & don't know about it right now," she said, in just the right number of words.

I nodded.

"Old grooves won't do," she said some more.

"Um," I said, "No. And nobody is making me, um write in old grooves, but I don't know the new one yet. It's hard," I said, feeling dummer than ever.

Crissy smile her special smile for me that makes me happy in mah very bones. "Do you know how I came to live here in Imagianna?"

Um, no. "Um, no." I then said out loud.

"I didn't start here," Crissy said.

Hm. Just like Mister Owl told me that he didn't start in Bags End. "We all live many lifetimes," he had said, though I didn't know if those words mattered to this Crissy telling. I decided to ask an easier question.

"Where did you start?"

Crissy leaned back in her Throne & closed her eyes.

"Well, it wasn't a fantasy land where I started," she said.

Hm, again. I listened with both mah earbones, & wished for me too.

"And you were with me, Algernon," she smiled.

"Um?" I said out loud.

"And Boop too," shad said.

Well, OK. But. "Crissy, I don't remember."

"Well, it was a long time ago."

"Yes, but I don't remember be4ore Bags End except some sad memories of mah Mommy Beagle in Peoria.

"Be4ore that," she said.

"Be4ore?"

"It's a strange story, Algernon."

"But I don't remember. And you never told me."

"Well, Bags End is more than all that ever was."

"But you're telling me now," I said, trying to keep up.

"Well, it matters now."

"OK."

I rested mah headbone on Crissy's lap, & she talked, & it got stranger, & I guess she maybe used her magick a little cuz it was like a dream but kinda not. I saw pictures like I was in them, & her words changed them as she talked. Um.

"We lived in a one room apartment in a city. It was small but we were happy. I was older then. I had a job & had to leave you together every morning. But I put you 2 together in the window to watch the sky & the cars & the people go by. Then I came home later & told you about my day."

I could see us in the window, watching the day & waiting 4or her to return.

"Then one day I came home early, & I was sad, & I didn't like to say why.

I almost remembered that.

"I lost my job. It was terrible. I was very afraid."

She was too. She had a hard time telling us.

"Anyway, every Saturday the 3 of us would go to the movies. I would sit with you on my lap." $\,$

Hm.

"So I brought us one more time cuz I got paid one more time."

It was a sad story whether I remembered it or not.

"That night, we all fell as leep like usual in my bed, & I had a dream." Ut-o.

"And the dream told me what to do. That's when I brought you to your Mommy Beagle, & you stayed with her & 4 orgot about me."

"But how?"

"You had to. I did it. Or you would have been too sad to go."

Crissy looks really sad. "I sorta kept track of you until you got to Bags End. Then I knew you would be OK."

"But where did you & Boop go?"

"Well, we ended up here eventually."

"But why did I have to leave you?"

"That was the deal in the dream. With Benny."

0. Him. Benny Big Dreams is this strange tricky oneiroautical fellow. That means that he travels in dreams. Sometimes helps, sometimes his tricks overflow.

"I didn't really understand it, but I think he did it to make me have to trust him. He promised you would be OK, & I would see you again."

Hm.

Now she smiled her Crissy smile again. "And here we are. Except Boop, who is on his trip."

"But you said this story matters now?"

"Yes, I think so."

"How?"

"Well, I was afraid when things changed, when I lost my job, when I had to not bee with you. It was OK. And you said you don't know how to do your newspaper right now, but I think that will be OK too. Sometimes you have to trust & keep trudging along, not knowing."

I nodded.

"There's more," she said.

"More?"

"Yes. Lots more."

Ο.

"Go find Lori Bunny & make your newspaper's new issue about this story. And come back soon 4or more!"

More of Crissy's Story

Deer Readers, I have known mah friend Princess Crissy of Imagianna 4 or a long time, but it is only now that she has been telling things that happened a long time ago that explain now a lot but also make me see everything new too.

She told me to go see Lori Bunny to write up my newspaper's new issue about her story, & I did. Lori helped me get it writed up & shared around like she always does.

So I came back again to see Princess Crissy & resume man place near her Throne to listen, but she was outside under a big oak tree, & smiled, & we stayed here.

"Where were we?"

"You said there is more."

"Well, yes, you see it got kind of bad after I made sure you were safe with your Mommy Beagle."

I nodded but not a word.

She talked slower. "I don't remember every detail but, really, it came down to how far I wanted to go."

"Go?"

"Benny said he could help me but not where I was. I had to be closer to him."

"Um?"

"I had to give up something."

"What, Crissy?"

"A part of me. I had to be willing to leave my world."

"O." Um

"We made a kind of deal. That's how I came here. It's not where I am from but it's not a fantasyland like Bags End, full of fun & trouble. Only near." Hmm.

"OK, is this your prison? I thought it was nice!" Suddenly mah brainbone told me to be ready to be upset & cry, but not yet.

"No, Algernon, this is better. Back there we were in danger. It had its beauties, but it was dangerous & unstable."

"O"

"My place here is kind of a middle place between there & Bags End & other kinds of places we love."

"O"

"It's how Bags End in Connecticut looks like 3 laundry bags piled on top of each other, but inside is this big apartment building, with no top or bottom & all the rest."

"O."

"Imagiana is how it holds together."

"Um."

"Yes, Algernon?"

"Well, I don't really understand. How can a place be like glue?"

Crissy laughed. Then she started telling another story entirely.

"When I was little, there were strange things that I guess I 4
orgot about later." $\,$

"What things, Crissy?"

"Well, there was a hole in the wall of my bedroom, but only when I was asleep."

I almost said "Um?" but I had been a lot so I pushed mah saggy old brainbone 4or more.

"What was in it?" I asked almost smart-guy-like, & afraid mah brainbone would crack if I kept trying. Ha! Beagle humor.

"Well, that is what was funny, because if I was awake I could not have gone into it. I mean I knew where it was along my bedroom wall, & how high. But not there."

"What was in it?"

Crissy smiled. "Well, Boop lived here."

"Really?"

"It was a big place but he lived there."

"Is that where he is now to visit his relatives?" I remembered & cogitated like "smart" is man middle name, which it is not.

Crissy looked sad, which she usually doesn't, & mah heartbone bent.

"He has an uncle & that's who he went to see. His uncle is sick." $\,$

"O."

"I think he will be OK."

I thinked some more because it's like I was 4 orgeting things, listening about other things.

"You met Boop in dreams?"

"Well, I dreamed he lived through the hole in my bedroom wall, & he dreamed I would come & visit him."

"Did you dream me?" I asked, not knowing if I wanted yes or no.

"Well, that's a later story. You like them in a row?" she smiled.

I nodded. "Maybe it's like counting or 123s or ABZs. Easier to remember." She nodded.

"Well, I was small & I didn't know what people-folks say about holes in the walls you can only see in dreams?"

"What do they say?"

"That dreams aren't real. Only things you can know with your five senses are real. And people-folks are the most important real of all."

"O. Um."

Crissy nodded.

"I got told that later & I think I believed it 4or awhile. Because people told me with smiles, & I wanted them to like me."

"Sounds like a bad deal somehow," I said, but I didn't really know much more than that.

"So I had to learn that I could not get into the hole in my bedroom wall anymore in my dreams. It wasn't real."

I nodded to let her talk more.

"I tried & tried & it was not there, & then I 4orgot to believe it was there." $\,$

Nod.

"But I never stopped being sad because my friend Boop lived in there, & there was so much to see."

"So how did you start again?"

"He came to me."

"He did?"

"He was sad too & he told his uncle, & his uncle said Boop would have to go to me."

"How did he do that?"

"I was with my friend in a store, & there he was on a shelf."

"Did he say hi?"

"No. He looked like a regular toy turtle, but I saw him, & I got him, & I brought him home."

"Did he talk then?"

"No, not yet. But I slept with him in my arms, & we dreamed each other like we used to."

"O!"

"He told me I could have him 4or real, but I had to choose to. He said using your imagination to create something is like turning on an unknown part of the Universe. It was always there, but nobody knowed about it."

"Boop said that?"

Crissy smiles. "Yes, Algernon, & more. But that's enough for this time. Go to see Lori Bunny & get your newspaper made, & come back to see me again 4or more soon!"

So I runned!

What Imagianna Is (Part 1)

Soon I went to see Crissy to hear more of her strange story, & this time we sat closely together in a field of mah friends the Weeds!

"YAYY ALGERNON!" they yelled because they made me their King 4or defending them against dum guys like Betsy Bunny Pillow.

"0! Shucks!" cried me. Then I had a bright idear. "Hey, Weedz, I want you to yayy Princess Crissy!"

And they did, sort of. They yelled, "Yayy! Crispest Princy!" And Crissy laughed & laughed so it was OK. But her name is Crissy. Then she started telling more story.

"Boop wanted me to know that I couldn't halfway be his waking friend.
That it meant a different way of looking at things."

"What way?"

"That people-folks weren't all that important over everyone else. And

dreams are real. And what we imagine is as important as what we do." $\,$

"Um?"

Crissy smiled. "You know that because you are a Creature from the imagination. People-folks are too but they don't think like that. They think the world was made 4or them, & now they are in charge. And that there's only one world anyway."

"Hm."

"Yes, hm. And even as their world changes in ways they don't understand, & not all by their simple doing, they still keep themselves apart."

"Why, Crissy?"

"It's hard to be people-folks."

"O. Why?"

"I don't know." She looked sad so I talked some more.

"So you chose Boop?"

"Of course! I was so glad to have him."

I nodded.

"Did you go back through the hole in your bedroom wall?"

Crissy shooked her head. "Not exactly. Mostly, we talked on my bed. I would read him from my schoolbooks sometimes."

"I didn't know you goed to school, Crissy!"

She smiled. "I did 4or awhile. It was easy & hard. I could remember things I read easy, but I didn't like a lot of it."

"Because it was all about people-folks?"

"Mostly. And I didn't know how to tell what I knew. I had lost my best friend & found him again. I met him in our dreams & now he was with me. When we talked, I could hear him in my head. All this was real to me. It was what I did with my nights. I was with Boop. But other people-folks would have said 'he isn't real & you need to grow up soon.' If I had told them."

"You didn't?"

"I told one person. He listened & he nodded. Then he had to go."

"0."

"I was sad but I knew he believed me & so it was possible 4or me to meet people-folks who did."

"Were you lonely with no people-folks friends?"

"I wanted them to understand me. I wasn't making up these idears. I was just learning them as I went along."

I nodded.

"I even started to write stories."

"Stories?"

Crissy smiled big this time. On your rite-typer, Algernon."

"Mine?"

"Back then it was mine, & I used it to write stories."

I was amazed.

"Boop helped me. They were about what I had seen in that hole in my bedroom wall." $\,$

"Did people-folks read your stories?"

"Yes! They liked them. But they thought I mad them up."

"Why would you do that if you had good true stories to tell?" I demanded.

Crissy laughed. "Anyway, they kept asking me $4 \mathrm{or}$ more but I stopped."

"Is that why you lost your job, Crissy?"

"No, that was later on when I had you & Boop."

"How did you get me?" I hoped it was time 4or that part of her story.

"Well, I dreamed about your Mommy Beagle."

"Really?"

"She asked me to take care of you."

"Why?"

"She had to take care of some things."

"O"

"But I woke up & me nor Boop knew where you were."

I nodded, hoping her telling would not stop.

"I looked in many places 4or you. In stores & parks & in streets. Mommy Beagle had said to hurry. Then I had an idear."

"What was it, Crissy?"

"Well, mah idear was to write one more story in which I was looking 4or you because of my dream, & I found you in the end."

"Where did you find me, Crissy?"

"I wrote that I dreamed I would find you in my arms with Boop when I finished writing the story & woke up."

"O!"

"And there you were!"

Crissy hugged me & the Weedz, who I guessed are good listeners, & cheered her & cheered me, then sort of cheered 4or everything, since they were right now feeling all happy & not in danger from lawnmowers or crazed Pillows 4or awhile.

I was guessing that was all the story I would be getting this time, & I was pretty happy with it anyway.

"There's more, Algernon."

"More?"

"Always more. Like, how did I meet Miss Chris? Or Sheila Bunny? And what about Bags End & the Creature Common?"

I nodded.

"Some of it already happened, like the stories, I have been telling you. But some of it will happen next."

"Like the story of you telling the stories."

She smiled. "But I will tell you more next time."

I nodded again. And went along mah way back to Bags End again, to find Lori Bunny & write up a new issue of mah newspaper to tell all of this.

Tmadianna

What Imagianna Is (Part 2)

Your old pal Algernon is a happy fella these days because I am writing mah newspaper again like the old days, writing up the long story mah good friend Princess Crissy has been telling me. About her, um history, which it turns out involves me & her bestus buddy Boop, both of us.

This time when I went to visit her, she brung me to her Secret Room, which I didn't know about be4ore.

Inside, the room was sort of purple lights & there were funny pictures on the wall.

"This is sort of like my own Milne's Porch," Crissy said with that tricky smile of hers I like so much.

We sat together on these funny cushions &, after awhile of being nicely quiet, Crissy began to hmmm, & that was nice too.

Then I think the hmmms turned to words after awhile.

"You were different when I first met you, Algernon."

"I was?"

"Well, you didn't write your own newspaper."

"O. Um. No rite-typer. And I guess no Bags End."

"No. You were afraid a lot."

"I wished I remembered all this better, Crissy."

"Look into the darkness. Deep into it."

I did & I watched as the darkness changed & got, um, deeper. Like I was walking into it. Like being inside a TV show I watching.

Crissy was still next to me so that was OK.

I saw her little home with me & Boop in it. I saw mah younger self but he could not see me. Probably 4or the best.

"You missed your Mommy Beagle. You were scared when I had to go in the day." $\,$

I nodded.

"I had to protect you better than I could. You needed a different kind of home than this."

"O," I said, feeling sad & sorry all over again for mah scaredness.

"You weren't there when Bags End began."

"I wasn't?"

"No. There were only a few. You came a little while later."

"How did I get there?"

"Well, Ramie would find Bags End friends different places."

"Ramie found me?"

"He found you in a toy store & he brung you along with him."

"To Sheila & Miss Chris?"

"They took you in & then you had a really safe home."

"Were you sad, Crissy?"

"I promised I would see you again. I promised & I did."

"That's true."

Crissy stopped there.

"That's all 4or this time."

I blinked cuz I didn't know any smarter words than um and 0.

"Next time will be the Grand Finally like you have sometimes!"

"O! I like those!"

"So go write up this short issue & come back 4or that next time."

I hugged Crissy & left her Secret Room, & went back to Bags End to make a new skinny issue of mah newspaper. Next time will be the Grand Finally & I think I will be happy & relieved both.

Your old pal Algernon went looking to get his beagleboy journalist mojo back, it was mah dear friend Princess Crissy of Imagianna who has been helping me to do this.

What Imagianna Is

(Grand Finally!)

She has been telling me & I have been writing down for your Dear Readers the story of, um, me & her & Boop be4ore there was a Bags End. And there was a lot of it to write down!

I was thinking about all she said be4ore going back to see her in Imagianna 4ore more. It was in would-be King Sheila's Throne Room on mah resting matt near her Thone. Sheila was slouched down in her Throne, like usual, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & playing a little Miles Davis jazz music on her fonograph.

I wanted to ask her more about her hoppings with MeZmer, & was trying to figure out how to ask without the grouchy yelling in reply when suddenly she said to me, "Crissy gave me that fonograph, a long time ago."

"She did?"

Sheila didn't talk but listened instead to Miles play his trumpet. He always sounds to me like he has this big idea & he plays his trumpet really good to tell about it.

"She came to see that you were doing OK. And she knowed I like Miles & Trayne & Bird & Dizzy."

Ha! Those crazy jazz guy names!

"So she brought me her fonograph & her records. I said, 'what are you going for music?' & she smiles at me & said, 'I will listen when I visit here.' Then she said, 'anyway, I have them all memorized in my heart."

I thinked Sheila would say more but she thrashed around a bit & took her nap right there & then. O. I figgered I would go see Crissy now.

I found her in her own Throne Room, slouched down in her Throne, looking bored. She had on her blue jeans underneath her princess dress.

She smiled happy to see me.

"No Boop yet?"

"He sent me a postcard!" She took out this card & read it to me: "Greetings, Noble Princess! My travels are nearly complete. The prognosis 4or my relative is a good one. Remember to do your Princess exercises! Your loving & loyal Subject, Boop."

"Speak regular English, fella," I gruttered, oops!, out loud.

"He says his uncle is getting better & he will be home soon!"

"O." Crissy speaks really good regular English.

"A lot of what happens in life is by luck," she said next.

I nodded.

"But some of it is by taking a chance in hand."

I nodded again, less so.

"When Boop & I came here, this place didn't have a name. Or a Castle. And I was not a Princess."

"Really?"

"Boop & I read a lot of storybooks & he told me that I should be a Princess, & live in a Castle, & he would be my humble & loyal servant.

"But, um"

Scriptor Press Sampler | 21 | 2019 Annual · 85

"How did we get here? Where did this Castle come from?" I nodded.

"Bags End was new & it needed a Guardian. I wasn't doing very well where I was. I made a choice to come here & leave that world behind."

"Behind?"

"I can't go back where I am from to live again. Boop & I came here on our own, & then the Castle came. And then we lived here."

 $\hbox{``0.''}$ But not really. This was too short 4or the Grand Finally like she promised.

"Nobody else lives here," she said some more.

I nodded.

We were quiet then. I wasn't sure if I was waiting or not.

Then suddenly I talked. "Sheila told me you gave her your fonograph." Crissy got all happy again. "Sheila loves jazz so much!"

"Did you make Bags End?" It seemed like a strange question, but now that I had asked it, it seemed like Crissy had been waiting 4or it.

"I helped."

"How, Crissy?"

"Remember I told you I would write stories?"

"Until you stopped."

"Well, I didn't stop completely. I just stopped showing them around." Hm. Now this sounded more like a Grand Finally to me.

Crissy stood up strangely & began to walk around. "I had idears of things. Some of them I dreamed. Some of them I wasn't sure about. Some of them were inspired by books. So I helped but I wasn't close enough."

"Close enough?"

"When you dream about a place, you can wake up. When you write about a place, you can close the book."

I nodded.

"I knew Bags End was real & somehow I had helped make it real. But it was not close enough."

"Why didn't you move there? Everybody would love to have you come," I said, all friendly. I guessed the answer would be some kind of hard.

"I couldn't. It would not work. I could change things like nobody else could. I would be like Godd"

"The small pink bear?"

"But Godd doesn't live in Bags End?"

"No, he just visits sometimes."

"That's better."

"Are you like Godd, Crissy?"

She laughed. "No. Godd is from a different angle on things."

"O," I said, really wishing I knowed more words to talk mah brainbone.

"Anyway, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be nearer than a dream or a book, but not living there & ruin it."

I would have said she could never ruin nothing, but I guessed she would be stubborn."

"So you, um, made Imagianna?"

"It was a compromise. But I could not go back where I came from to live." $\,$

I nodded.

"Anyway, I didn't want to go back."

"Did you write more stories about Bags End?"

"No. It was different. I wasn't interested so much anymore."

"O."

"So I gave my rite-typer to you, & Lori said you & she could do a newspaper about all the crazy things that happen in Bags End."

"O!" I said, all happy. "But I don't really write English too fancy." "English is best when it's plain & true as you can," Crissy said, smiling. I nodded.

Then we were all talked out & had a good a good nap. Nothing like it. Later on, I asked if there was more to the story.

"Well, most of it you already know."

"Is being the Guardian a hard thing to do?"

She shook her head. "It's just a name. Bags End runs itself."

I nodded. Sort of.

"Easier than being a Princess!" she laughed.

I suppose I had my mojo back as much as I could. I mean, now I could see how what I do is part of this long story I didn't know too good. I am lucky to write mah newspaper way more than I thinked.

Then I remembered. "What about mah long lost Mommy Beagle?" Crissy looked me serious. "I think she will be back one day, Algernon." Then mah brainbone had a really big idear, too big really, but I tried. "Can you write a story about how she comes back?"

She looked at me, shocked, but not mad. "I don't know. I would have to think about it 4or awhile."

"You can borrow the rite-typer you gave me."

She smiled. "When I am ready to type, I will tell you."

So I guess that is really it. I hugged Crissy later & came back to Bags End, & thens to Milne's Porch to finish this story up. It was a lot new to me, but it was all OK too.

I don't know if I understood every part of this story, I had had more questions too pretty quickly, but that's what a beagleboy journalist does. He asks questions & writes stories in English plain & true as he can. Or any language with words.

I fell asleep in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, & I felt OK about me & Crissy & Bags End & Imagianna & all.

* * * * * * THE END * * * * * *



Tom Sheehan



WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

Music. Poetry. Rant. Mindfood.

turn on . . . tune in . . .



On the Web: http://www.spiritplantsradio.com
Saturdays 8 pm-11 pm Eastern US time
Repeats: Sundays 8 pm-11 pm Eastern US time

A Small Red Star for Me and My Father

This appointment came when light tired, this arrangement, this syzygy

of him and me and the still threat of a small red star standing some time away at my back, deeper than a grain of memory. I am a quarter mile from him, hard upward on this rugged rock he could

look up to if only his eyes would agree once more, and it's a trillion

years behind my head or a parsec I can't begin to imagine, they tell me even dead perhaps, that star. Can this be a true syzygy if one is dead, if one is leaning to leave this line of sight

regardless of age or love or density or how the last piece of light

might be reflected, or refused, if one leaves this imposition? The windows

of his room defer no light to this night, for it is always night there,

blood and chemicals at warfare, nerve gone, the main one providing mirror and lethal lens, back of the eyeball no different

than out front, but I climb this rock to line up with another rock and him

in the deep seizure of that stolen room, bare sepulcher, that grotto of mind.

Today I bathed him, the chest like an old model, boned but collapsible,

forgotten in a Detroit back room, a shelf, a deep closet, waiting to be crushed at the final blow, skin of the organ but a veneer of fatigue, the arms pried as from a child's drawing, the one less formidable

leg, the small testes hanging their forgotten-glove residuum,

which had begun this syzygy, the face closing down on bone as if a promise had been made toward an immaculately thin retrieval, and, at the other imaginable end of him, the one foot bloody

from his curse, soured yet holier in mimicry of the near-

Christ

(from Golgotha brought down and put to bed, after god and my father

there are no divinities), toenails coming on a darkness no sky owned,

foot bottom at its own blood bath, at war, at the final and resolute war with no winner.

Oh, Christ, he's had such wars, outer and inner, that even my hand in warmth must overcome, and he gums his gums and shakes his head

and says, sideways, mouth screwed into his outlandish grin, as much a lie as any look, as devious, cold-fact true, "I used to do this for you,"

the dark eyes hungry to remember, to bring back one moment of all those times to this time; and I cannot feel his hand linger on me,

not its calluses gone the way of flesh or its nails thicker now than they ever were meant to be, or skin flaking in the silence of its dust-borne battle,

though we are both younger than the star that's behind us and dead perhaps, as said; then, in a moment, and only for a moment,

as if all is ciphered for me and cut away, I know the failure of that small red star, its distillation and spend still undone, its yawn red as yet and here with us on the endless line only bent by my imagination, the dead and dying taking up both ends of me,

neither one a shadow yet but all shadows in one, perhaps a sort of harmless violence sighting here across an endless known.

Colin James



Appeasing the Unmeaningful

A couple of those headaches please, and one or two large red rashes that start in the nether regions then spread up clueless appendages.

Have you got any distraught delusions? I could use several, or any.
Going on a big date tonight—
introductions to my potential in-laws.
Don't know how it quite came to this—
I thought we were just friendly.

Should I be paying more attention to details? Reminds me of the packaging in some of your swollen ankle deals. Advertisements for vacation getaways with perks, deep obese massage which I can waddle with.

The trip from reinforced aqua plane to 8* hotel is the trickiest yet.

Slip that arthritic knee pain in my bag.
I'll take one of these holistic fliers.

Don't worry—I'm only kidding. I remain loyal to your back room stash. So grateful to them apothecary wiles.



The Crocodile King of Belize

Fire - September 5th, 2010

The tropical sun rises red behind the silhouette of spiky jungle trees. The air is still cool with the passing of the night air. The thumping of the idling bus motors can be heard through out the village of San Marcos. A howler monkey hoots in the concealed jungle behind them, while a flock of arguing parrots flies above on their daily migration to the sea.

"Come on. Come on, everybody. Load up. Let's go," shouts Isabella in her loudest voice, which is still not much louder than normal conversation. Three busses are rumbling in the center of town. Mayans are coming out of their thatched huts and boarding the machines. All the men are carrying machetes, and some of them hold shotguns. The women are clutching either babies or packages wrapped in dark blankets. Jimmy's bus is now full, and Eddie's bus and Attul's bus soon follow, until there is standing room only on all of them. There is much jabber between everyone on the bus. When all prattle together in the Kekchi Mayan language, it sounds similar to drumsticks being played on a woodpile.

Along the highway to town, the jungle is still a dark to black green, awaiting the full rays of sun. The busses are quiet now as their indignant passengers roll into town to the police station. No other cars are about the street this early, and there are only a few lackluster pedestrians walking toward some bureaucratic desk job or other. An emaciated dog slinks along the wall of the station.

As soon as the busses pull up in front of the "PoPo" place, twenty men come pouring out of each bus. Moving like a school of fish, they herd to the front door of the station. The two officers at the front desk come out to meet them. One is a fat black man who seems half asleep, the other a tiny Mestizo mix with quick sudden moves. "Hunna. What be you doing here? What you want?" says the big black cop.

"We want you . . . the police . . . to come out to the white man's crocodile farm out Janko Calle way," answers Nathan Choc, who is at the front of the crowd.

"We mek no vex with de crocodile man. You crowd is illegal. Go back to the village," says the smaller cop. $\,$

"You must come with us for justice. You must help us get the children from the crocodile man!"

"Mi cops are not going to do shit for you. Mebby we put you in jail? Nocho?"

"You have to come with us to save the children," insists Nathan.

"No. We not go on the speculation of a witch. No crime here. You go back to the village or we'll have to arrest you," says the fat officer, even though he sees that

he's outnumbered twenty to one. Just keep up the authority with these little jungle rats and they'll tow the line, he thinks. They will do as they are told.

"Get back on the bus and go home. Nobody's going out to Janko Calle," he says in his deepest booming voice.

"You a lazy PoPo. You need to help us. You need to care about the lost children. You need to search the croc farm for the children."

"There will be no search. No going out there. Nothing to see there. No children there. Now *Go home!*" Nathan looks intently at the scowling face of the stonewalling officer. Then at the other angry eyes around him. He sees the futility of trying to get any help from the police.

"OK. We go," is all he says.

Every one clambers back on the bus, and Jimmy and Eddie and Attul honk their horns excessively as they drop it in gear and thunderously round the corners of town and get back on the Southern Highway out of Punta Gorda. Out ten miles to the turn off to the Dump, that stretch of dirt road where the trash is flung to the side, and which continues on to the ACES compound. Buzzard Road.

The busses lurch side to side as they swamp through the mud holes, throwing the Mayans in the bus violently into each other. The six-mile road into the old banana landing is a gauntlet of water-filled mud-holes, many the size of a small car. But the big busses plow through, often scraping their tails on the way.

Within the buses is much excitement, as the mob nears the compound. Many tense voices.

"We will find them."

"The soothsayer said they were being kept underground."

"I think this guy will have them in cages."

"Cages in the trees?"

"No. Cages next to the crocodile pens so the crocs can see their next meal."

"So the kids can see who will eat them?"

"Yeah. They are probably making a movie."

"Maybe they are in the house?"

"I think they have already been fed to the crocodiles!"

The buses roll right through the property line and right up to within one hundred feet of the house. Some Mayans leap right off the bus, clutching their shotguns and swinging their machetes over their head. Within a minute, there is a crowd assembled in front of the house.

"Mr. JC., Mr. JC! We are here to search for our children!" shouts Nathan.

The crowd is quiet except for murmuring in Kekchi, which sounds a little like a small stream nearby. The mob is met with silence.

"Mr. JC., Mr JC! We are here peacefully to ask if we can look around for our kids. We have been told that they are here!" shouts Nathan again.

"Son-of-a-bitch is hiding in there!" shouts someone in the crowd.

"Knock on the door!" shouts another. Ten of the men run up on the porch and pound their fists on the wooden entry.

"They are hiding the children inside. We need to get in! Stand Back!" One of

the Mayans levels his shotgun to his hip and blasts the door lock at five feet. Splinters of wood fly in all directions, and the door leaps open. The Mayans push through it into the living room. Here there is plush leather couches, fine glass tables, Tiffany-style lamps. Everything is very clean. The hoard pours into the house, searching every room, going upstairs into the bedrooms, crowding into the master bathroom in wonder at the perfect white porcelain. The women stuff shampoo and soap into their pockets. A lucky one steals a small bottle of perfume.

"There's nobody here. Nocho?" says one.

"I can't find anybody either. Where are the children? What have they done with them?" wails Isabella.

"Look under the house. The psychic said they were underground," someone else suggests.

A dozen go back out the door and begin thrashing around under the porch and floor boards. There is a lot of stored equipment under the house that is tossed out as they dig through the cargo for hidden passageways or big boxes full of children.

"Is there anything down there?" calls Nathan.

"No. We not find anything. Must be secret, secret passageway in house."

The search is renewed throughout the lodge, only this time they smash holes in the wall to see if there is anything hidden behind the sheet rock. Nathan sweeps through a pile of papers on the computer table but, being barely able to read, whatever is there is a mystery to him. Another man, Adill, sits on the keyboard in an act of contempt, as if planting his asshole on this familiar and frequently used item will show the white people his disdain for them. He lights a cigarette with a wooden match.

The still lit match is carelessly thrown on the floor into the disarray of papers. Nathan and Adill lean silently on the table, watching the flames grow in the papers without trying to extinguish anything by stamping or any other means. A kind of mesmerized apathy takes hold of them.

"The kids must be outside. Check the crocodile pens!"

The flames are now climbing the computer table leg, and the plastic-fibered rug begins burning hotly below it.

"Out to the pens!" yells Nathan once more.

Dozens of Mayans are smashing through the guest cabins now, breaking windows. A microwave comes flying off the porch and breaks apart on the hard driveway. The crowd is wild-eyed now, rushing in and out of the buildings. Mostly they are silent as they go about their work with only the occasional swear word amid the crashing and splintering of furniture.

"The house is burning. The house is burning!" yells one of the Mayans, as much in glee as in announcement. The flames have spread to the walls and are starting to lick out of the windows in crimson flowers.

Within minutes, the upper story of the lodge is burning like a fraternity hall bonfire. Meanwhile, the mob trashes the cabins. The aluminum roof of the grand house is melting like tissue paper under a faucet. The outbuildings have also been lit on fire, and flames are climbing out of their windows.

"The kids are in the crocodiles! The white devils have fed the kids to the

crocs. Kill the crocks!" Nathan shouts, as he stands silhouetted against the burning compound. Dozens of Mayans rush down to the dock, where the crocodiles look lazily up from their pens.

Nathan and Vincient lasso a large croc and pull it to the float's edge.

"Stand back!" cries Danial, as he levels a shotgun to the beast's head. *Bloom!* A hole erupts in the crocodile's head.

"Cut it open. Cut it open!" yells Vincient as he hauls the beast on to the dock.

Nathan tries to get his knife into the animal's belly, but the skin is too tough. "Lemme try," says Danial as he slides a two-foot razor sharp machete from his belt.

With some digging, he gets the knife beneath the dead croc's scales by starting at its anus. The knife slashes open the belly from the chin to the tail, spilling the guts all over the dock.

The stomach is split apart, revealing its greenish mush of mud and some undigested meat. A few bone fragments are in the mess.

"Here they are! Here they are! The devils have fed them to the crocs! Kill them all!"

Four Mayans now set to the job of shooting all the penned-up crocodiles. The animals have no escape. One by one they are hauled up on to the dock and split apart by a team of blood-covered men, slashing precicely to get to the stomach contents of the animals.

In all of them is found partially digested meat, but it is not really identifiable as human remains. In the dock shack is some hacked up meat in a bag that is likely the source of feed-stuff, it being bad cuts of rotten beef. But the Mayans are convinced that it is digested children, and continue to shoot and haul the crocodiles out of their pens for evisceration.

In one they find a piece of rag, a one-time piece of clothing, which fuels their conviction that their children were consumed. Women scream and wail as each new animal is gutted in front of them, every time imagining that the tiny hands and heads of the children will be disgorged onto the dock. But they are not.

Then a shoe is found.

"Aaha! This is proof! This crocodile has eaten the children," shouts Nathan. "Chop 'em all open! Here is where the children are!"

Vincient readies the rope for another capture. One by one, the crocodiles are eviscerated.

By now the lodge is a wall of flame. Everyone is back a few hundred feet. The Land Rover in front of the main building is also on fire from the intense heat. Its windows burst with excited flames from the seats. Then suddenly . . . pow! pow! pow! pow! as shots are fired from the pillar of flame. Dozens of bullets go off in rapid succession and many at the same time.

"It's ammo. The ammo pile is burning and exploding!" yells Danial.

Shots are whizzing through the air and tinkling like little bells when they hit something, like the busses. This is JC's armory. As the bullets heat, they explode. But,

being unconfined by the firing chamber of a gun, they explode both ways, flinging the brass casing out backwards with a velocity in proportion to the mass of the bullet going the other way at random.

Dozens of shots are hitting the side of the school bus, but not breaking the windows. The terrified Mayan women cower inside between the seats.

All at once, a huge explosion, sharp, a concussion wave, and a huge fireball sends up flaming boards in the air like burning hay. A shower of sparks rains down on everyone, as if a Fourth of July mortar went off among them, a chrysanthemum-colored incendiary.

A grenade has gone off in the back of the house. The Mayan men are flattened to the ground. This is too much. Even for these adrenalin-driven beserkers. A guy could get killed out here. They pull themselves from the ground and crowd back around the busses. Bullets and shell casing continue to send projectiles flying wildly by. The casings make more of a howling noise as they pass, compared to the high whine of the tumbling bullets.

Only the croc choppers on the dock continue their grisly work. But the party's over. All is destroyed. There is nothing more to be done. No children are found in the crocs.

Only the shoe.

All the animals are slaughtered, and the corpses are pushed into the river to float out to sea.

The floating dock is red with gator blood. Most stand back from this orgy of slaughter, their eyes wide in excitement and horror. Behind them, the flames consume the last of the house with a few random shells of ammunition going off every few moments. The Range Rover in front of the house glows red in places, the tires burn with a black smoke. The three cabins are completely in flames; the first cabin already collapsed into a pile of debris. The dock is a heap of crocodile guts.

A Mayan man stands in the midst, covered in blood, still gripping his slippery machete—but with a dazed and confused look on his face.

"They're not here, or they are already digested by these crocs. I don't think we found them," says Nathan.

"Do you think they did it?" asks someone.

"Yeah, they killed the kids. She said so. Just because we can't find proof doesn't mean they didn't do it." Nathan looks around at the war zone. Everything is burning. Smoke and glowing ash is in the air everywhere. There is no structure or container that is not reduced to smoldering rubble.

"We've done enough here," Nathan says finally. "Now is the time to go."

The mob moves back to the three bus doors, filing in respectfully as if it were a usual return from the market. There is guilt on many faces, as a "search" turned into the destruction of everything these people had. But, then again, they were not humans, but murderous white devils who ate the children and had no remorse. They got what they deserved.

The busses bump and reel from side to side as they pull away from the burning ruins. The passengers are silent, wondering what fate will befall them now after such

an attack on a rich American.

Two hours later, a contingent of ten police arrive on the scene to "protect" the investment of JC Steinberg and the American ACES compound. Chief Juan Crispers arrives to work in the morning and hears out the fat and the skinny officers.

The fat fellow had wet himself in fear of the Mayan hoard, but the little guy wants to go after them with the machine guns that JC has supplied them with. Chief Crispers reasons that since this American JC has armed them with most small infantry weapons, that they should go out to Janko Calle and see if the bush babies are causing any problems with the Steinbergs.

What the Chief finds is ash. The entire compound is obliterated. No buildings remain. The Land Rover is a burned-out metal shell. The river is red with blood, and the heaps of crocodile meat are black with swarms of four million flies. It is a scene of Armageddon. Total destruction. A crime of the highest order.

The chief is deeply sour-faced. He knows that this will reflect back on him, and he scrolls through excuses in his mind that he can use later when questioned.

He goes through some perfunctory procedures, taking pictures of the dead crocs, of the burned-down house, of the bus tire tracks, but he know that these will just wind up in some forgotten file, never to be used for anything. He knows who did it. The entire village of San Marcos.

He knows he should have stopped them . . . some how. That he should have protected the American's property. But it's too late now. Now nothing can be done. Somebody should be arrested—but who? The residents of San Marcos will deny everything, and there is no actual proof other than these bus tracks, which could be anybody. How can the population of San Marcos be arrested for chaos and destruction?

There is no case and no evidence, no witnesses even though there were a hundred. The Chief knows his ass is on the line. He needs a fall guy for the crime, and fast. Firing the fat one and the other skinny officer will not be enough.

San Pedro Post Fire - October 2010

"Dun da. Dun da da da Dun!" The phone rings with its designer tone *Star Wars* theme. Time to conquer the Dark Side.

With characteristic irritation, JC digs the cell phone out of his pack.

"What?" He has assimilated the rude indifferent greeting of the natives.

"Mr. JC, Mr. JC. It's gone. It's all gone!"

"Who the fuck is this? What's gone?"

"Mr. JC, this is Sargeant Ackun from the Punta Gorda Police. It's gone."

"What the fuck is gone? Why the hell are you calling me? I'm totally busy right now, out on a boat and about to catch a croc. State your business and leave me alone."

"Your casa, Mr. JC. It's gone!"

"Clarify. Quickly."

"The Mayans burned your house down. There's nothing left."

"What the fuck are you talking about? Has there been an accident?"

"No boss. No accident. A mob of three packed busses came to the PoPo

station and demanded that we arrest you for stealing the children. We tried to calm them down, but it not happening. Then they all left."

"Well?"

"They done go out to your place for mischief. Crowd get out of hand and the place burn down."

"Burn down! What the hell are you saying? Wadda ya mean burn down?"

"All gone, Mr. JC. Burned to the ground. Everything. All gone."

"Why the hell didn't you stop them! You're the police, that's what you are supposed to do! You knew they were going to do something! Why didn't you follow them?"

"But Mr. JC, I cannot leave my post in the police front desk. Me no know nothing. Know nothing of what the Indians intended." To say *indians* is intended as a racial slur to the Mayan, a weak move to gain favor with JC.

"You fucking idiot! You probably gave them directions! *You* are responsible for a million dollars up in smoke!"

"Me no ina it. Me no know nothing. You must talk to Chief Crispers," Ackum pleads.

"Yeah. I'll talk to Crispers. I'll get you fired, you ingrate!"

Ackum doesn't know what an ingrate is, but suspects it's something bad.

"Me no ina it," Ackum repeats himself. "You talk to Crispers."

Then he hangs up abruptly. He is afraid of more verbal abuse, a common aversion among the Belizean bureaucracies.

"What the fuck? What the fuck? The asshole hung up on me! To shore!" demands JC.

"But Mr. JC, we just got out here. Must catch the crocodile."

"My ass. We don't have to catch shit. My house just got burned down. I have to find out what happened. Who to kill."

"OK, boss. We go. Quick thing."

"It better be. Haul those lines in."

On shore, JC calls Chief Crispers.

"What the hell is going on? What's this about my place burning?"

"Oh Mr. JC. Sad thing. Sad thing. Place all gone."

"Gone! Gone! How is it gone?"

"The village of San Marcos came in buses and burned everything. The house, the outbuildings, the Land Rover, and they even killed all the crocodiles."

"Killed the crocs? Why the hell did they do that?"

"They sliced them open looking for the children. Did you feed the children to the crocodiles, Mr. JC?" $\,$

"Hell no! The hell with you, you idiot, for accusing me! I'm the only one giving back anything to the community here. I am an exemplary citizen."

Juan doesn't know what "exemplary" means, but suspects it's a high title of some sort.

"I know that you know the Prime Minister, that you will talk to him, and we are doing everything that we can." The Chief thinks the word might relate to *emperor*,

and thus thinks JC is citing the top dog of the country.

"What arrests have you made? Tell me who is in jail over this?"

"No one is in jail, Mr. JC. No arrests yet."

"No arrests? Why the hell not? You know who did it."

"Yes, Mr. JC. But we can't arrest the whole village."

"Why not? These bastards burned me out. Who are the ringleaders?"

"We have not determined that yet. Everyone seemed to have acted together. No one is saying anything. Not that they were there, or who the leaders are. It is said that a witch from Guatemala told them to do it."

"Arrest her. Arrest the elders in the village. Arrest all the men."

"This we cannot be doing, Mr. JC. The witch fled back to Guatemala. We have no proof of who was there or not."

"Well, for Christ's sake. can't you arrest a few of them and sweat them under the lights to confess? What the fuck is wrong with you people?"

"We have this under investigation, Mr. JC. Please be patient."

"Patient. *Patient!* Are you nuts? The criminals are walking free. Where's a shred of justice?"

"We are looking into it, Mr. JC. It may take a while."

"Awhile?! I know you turds. You ain't doing shit and you don't plan on doing shit. If a white guy gets screwed and ruined by your black hoards, you just laugh. You don't give a crap and you sound particularly stupid trying to convince anyone you will ever do shit. Just a pack of lazy hypocrite assholes sponging off the government dole."

"We are not racists or hipsters," he replies. Not understanding the slur "hypocrites" leveled by JC. "We are just doing our job."

"The job of doing nothing. I'm taking all you bastards to court!"

"Good luck with that."

"And you are the first in the docket, Chief Crispers."

"OK, Mr. JC," says the Chief, who then hangs up abruptly without a goodbye. Another phobic to verbal abuse.

The *Amandala* newspaper hears of the story. They contact JC for an interview that comes out as a string of unprintable curses and vitriol. "Savages," he tells the reporter. "Savages is what they are. A hoard of lawless jungle monkeys from the Stone Age. These [motherfucker, cock-sucking, asshole] criminal savages need to be brought to justice. Either that, or [shoot] (edited to the word "punish") the [motherfucking] criminals.

"We at ACES were trying to enhance Belize with a new scientific industry. To put this place on the map. To bring in intellectuals from all over the world. And the thanks we get? *Burned out by savages*. Savages. I'm going to the highest court in this [racist] land, and demand restitution of a million dollars. I've put my life and everything I've ever owned into the Crocodile Research Center. I have nothing left. This country will *pay*!"

The Forgotten Crime - January 2011

In the ten years after this crime, no police work has been done on this mystery. No evidence has been gathered. No clues found, and no charges have been brought against any of the villagers of San Marcos.

A small cement cast memorial was set up on the highway at about the point of the children's abduction. It is almost unnoticeable now, overgrown in weeds, as the jungle tries to efface all traces of humanity.

The police spend their time as always, raiding the homes of ex-pats on trumped up charges, and confiscating all the electronics and drugs they can find. Then in the back rooms of the police station, they smoke the Mayan weed and play Candy Crush on phones and tablets so generously donated by the robbed northerners.

Ramone went back to Florida after missing the village storming of the Crocodile Sanctuary. He missed it because he was in a two-day sleep to recover from five days of drinking and snuffing Guatemalan crack made with acetone solvent. His tiny body was over-used and collapsed on a cot in the dog room at Allen's. The apoplexy of barking for each new visitor did not stir him, being far beyond the walls of wakefulness.

A day or so after waking, and then after apologizing to everyone he had threatened to hack in the previous week, Ramone discovered that he's down to his last eight hundred bucks. He must rush home for replenishment. Although he could fly home on a first class jet, because he is a millionaire, he feels he must find the absolutely cheapest form of transportation.

But first he must screw Gina in the downtown hotel, before he leaves town. Registration is through a barred window. In the process of swilling another bottle of rum and some brief coitus with plump Gina, he winds up on the street, yelling at passersby of his great wrestling prowess and their stupid slave attitudes.

Most hurry by the crazy, but a few stop to punch him in the face. Though enraged, he does not pursue them, as he cannot walk.

Gina finds this time appropriate to relieve Ramone of five hundred dollars, being kind to leave him enough to get home on a thin margin.

He never realizes the theft until on the barko crossing from Belize to Guatemala. From there he takes a chicken bus along the coast and into Honduras. Here is Spirit Airline with a direct flight to Miami for \$82.

This is the "Chicken Airplane." It is packed with the unwashed and dirty clothed people. Some hold chickens in their laps and there is a goat in the aisle. No drinks are served. The captain gives no updates. When it lands in Miami, a great cheer overtakes the passengers. The captain would be elected president if this was his voting base. The gratitude is overwhelming. The captain debarks for the lounge with a chicken under his arm.

Ramone decides to check up on his Miami investments, which consists of a single sailboat in the marina, rented out to a questionable drug dealer. Ramone has a sidekick, a young man trailing behind him for the constant supply of rum and drugs. Together they swill considerably and snort lots of the white powder. While heading

down to the boat launch, and rowing out to the moored sailboat to clamber aboard, Ramone works himself up into a fury.

"The muthafucker didn't pay his rent. The bent dick . . ."

Then, wild-eyed and huffing like a bull, Ramone bursts through the transom into the sailboat hold in his signature fury.

"Where's my rent, muthafucker?" he shouts at the still torpid inhabitant.

"Yeah. Pay up asshole," chimes in the sidekick.

"We're gonna fuck you up, dick head," cries Ramone, puffing out his little chest.

The renter is terrified but returns only a steely glare. As Ramone stumbles toward him with intentions of a full nelson, a Glock 9 emerges from under the bed covers. It is gripped tightly behind the drug dealer's beady eyes. The pistol erupts and three slugs fling the puny wrestlers body across the cabin.

Thinking clearer now, he levels the gun at the sidekick and fills him with lead also.

The renter dumps the bodies over the side, and makes a getaway in the small skiff. The still water reflects the lights of shore in kaleidoscopic flashes of color.

The murderer is caught a few days later.

A week later, there is a plaintive cry outside Casa Bonita, Allen's restaurant.

"Forgive me, Allen. Please forgive me," wails the voice. All inside recognize Ramone's voice and collectively groan at the thought that he has returned so quickly to Belize to continue making their life miserable.

Reluctantly, Allen goes out front to find . . . nothing. Not a trace of the wild kid.

The specter returned to make impossible amends, before his long journey to the underworld?

Allen and his local wife continue to live and work in the restaurant. Along with their four grandkids tearing up the place, a few of the wife's sisters, some of their deadbeat husbands and passing relatives sprawling on the furniture most days out of a year. Five chained dogs bark in the front yard and lower patio. Allen does not concern himself with the murder of Ramone, as death is no stranger in this country. Between the jungle snakes and the machete hacking, some friend or acquaintance seems to find destruction at least once a month.

Allen does not miss Ramone.

Gina comes by regularly now, to talk on the front patio. She had loved him deeply, she says, and complains that Ramone's relatives in Florida ignore her pleas to be a part of his funeral, and also ignore the Belizean interpretation of "common law marriage." Such a title would grant her some subsistence now, or always.

All she ever received from Ramone's relatives is one terse letter from an estate lawyer stating she had *no* claim on the estate. *Go away . . . for you, there is zero.*

Mahee was elected again, and again. He never did wage war on the

Guatemalan border, preferring the comfort of his police goon squad, and the status he has as a local supplier to the armory.

His subordinates constantly clamor for a weapon or three from the hoard, but are kept wanting by the power-hungry Mahee. With his stash of bribes (the guns), he gradually moves his status closer to the country's core government; eventually he becomes one of the elite top thugs of "public safety."

In 2016, a plane carrying two tons of cocaine emergency landed on the Southern Highway. Mahee calculated that he could advance his position substantially with 100 million dollars in snow sales. The Columbians who owned the two tons pulled ashore with a gunboat, loaded their white powder out of the police station, and shot Mahee thirty times before sailing away on the Spanish Main.

In the cool jungle under the Maya Mountains, the Monkey River chuckles past the village of San Marcos, as it has for thousands of years. Smoke wafts out the door of the Choc household. Still a thatched hut, still the dirt floor, and still neighborhood pigs poking their snout through the door-jamb in the hopes of some unaccounted for piece of trash.

Isabella still wonders what life is all about. Is it just being humped regularly by her horny husband, just tending to a pod of children, just making more corn paste to keep their tenuous existence alive? What is to become of us, now that our benefactor is gone never to return? The list for Ramone to provide sits quietly on the shelf, the order never to be filled.

Nathan still plants a hillside of corn every year, but now he also grows Mayan weed. He doesn't use it, preferring the sugar cane rum which fires up his anger and libido at the same time. A dangerous combination for Isabella. She wishes he would smoke the stuff and become pacified as are many young kids in the village. A little stupid in this guy would go a long way, she speculates.

The Mayan weed produced in a year is about ten pounds, of which he gets between eighty and a hundred dollars for. So this is, in a way, a legacy from Ramone, who always had them tracking down some other local grower. In this way, the wrestler could have a pound of stash to entice the downtown whores and generally get crazy.

The school where they met Ramone twenty years ago, when he was cleareyed and hopeful, is now in ruins. Its walls have fallen over, and the rampant jungle swallowed almost every trace. It is another testament to the attempts of grandeur in a land where "no one get over on another."

JC settled into a cheap apartment in San Pedro, five hundred miles north of his burned-out dream. Here he hired a lawyer and produced a truckload of paper proving that the government and the officers of Punta Gorda were directly responsible for the destruction of his dream. His cries went in vain. Aside from a few polite replies, the government would not hear his case.

JC waits patiently for his wife's return, which takes a few weeks. He greets her at the airport and she is well. No mysterious pains anymore and, though she walks well as an elitist self-contained leader of the Western world, she is frail, unable to lift her bags. JC coddles her, gives her all that she asks for, and showers her with curses over his life and their predicament.

But recovery is not hard for an unlimited bank account. Rose's rich father in the north provides all the funds that are required, along with a little extra just for comfort. But no more containers of guns as, with some recent sense of morality, he now feels that arming these "savages" in the land where his daughter lives could backfire more than it already has.

A piece of swampy shoreline is purchased on the inland bay side of San Pedro. Docks are built that encase netted ponds, these for the future residents. A small house is also built, not of the grandeur previously, but ample for their needs. The usual labor problems plague them, and most things have to be done twice or more, due to the unskilled nature of the workers. A lot of tools disappear from the job site, and some have to be re-purchased from the pawn shop where the bandits have sold them.

Over the next year, ACES is re-established in San Pedro. Though a tourist town, it is better suited to their industry, not isolated, and features an American beach of bars and colorful street meat vendors that entices their paying guests from the intelligentsia around the world.

Belize Today

Belize today is of two worlds. The first as old as the hills around them. Still full of wild pigs, jaguars, and howler monkeys in the trees. The rivers still run crystal clear, filtered by the limestone, and unmolested with the population's waste. A billion bugs jostle for position to vampire the blood of any mammal, breeding and creating new species that may never be discovered by science. The plants sing their quiet song of urgent growth, carpeting the world with their varieties, housing a thousand flowers a thousand miles from a table setting. The *chi* of life vibrates here, its soothing energy in a fog of oxygen, soothing to the most frenetic of human trespassers.

In the seaside town of Punta Gorda, nothing appears to have changed. The meat market is still full of flies, and the streets are still packed dirt trails, where people dodge reckless drivers, and half-starved dogs roam.

What has changed is the collective attitude of the people. With the advent of the personal cell phone, all that was concealed in the world is now theirs, to view on a tiny screen. Now all the commodities of the First World are laid at their feet, feet that cannot pay for this endless river of material wealth.

So now the people can see it, but still cannot have it. Poverty is still the ruling metric of the land. This exposure, then, only serves to fuel frustration and anger. The poor angrily resent the ex-pats for all they themselves do not have. Home attacks are up massively,

But the nature remains, and the nature has the last laugh. The plants grow to enormity, the animals leap and slither through the foliage. The sea calmly laps at the shore. Hand-sized insects creep though cracks to take up residence in the crumbling town. The bugs and buzzards do not care what is on the cell phone. They will outlast the human settlements. The buildings will fall into the sea. The wild crocodiles will hunt on the mouth of the Monkey River again.



John Echem

Osanana

My muse is heartache— *Osanana*.

Gone to the penumbra Your whiskers, shadows of tomorrow—

Pale lilacs on the ridge—

Nest of crows— Their hard *oof!* cries Close on the adze of silence—

Pale rendition of aria— Pale rendition of aria—

Osanana

You've gone ahead of the day—
On the path that parts ways—

Piercing the shrouds of night—

Flitting across branches of time—

Where the rifle eye of the sun is blind—

Cactus on the wasteland Spine of afterlife—

Deserts separate from the seas—

Valleys swallow verses unsung—

Darkness shrouds the glebe Sheathes fate—

Tides argue with the winds—

Rivulets trickle down the side of a cliff—

Friends and fiends— Life and death— Love and lust—

Osanana.

The bull calf is castrated—
Giant hills without testis—

Poetry without verse—
A pile of offal on
burial ground—

Staring at this embers You I remember— The flames of yesterday are the ashes of today—

Pinkish sand of memory— On the whetstone of my head— Rummaging the arctic forest in my mind—

Winds howl your name— Echoes in the canyon—

Blackwood in the grave—

Your brittle bones in stretch of silence—

Osanana.

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]

Fart Eleven

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

cxxv.

"Isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to each other?" this I read written on the blank back page of the coverless copy of *Nazi Jailbait Bitch* someone has left on the small table next to my hospital bed.

The ink is black, a medium point pen, the letters cursive but idiosyncratic, it's all faded like written here a long time ago.

I page through the book idly, looking for more notes of this kind. Find a folded sheet splashed half-gone but the words "wars of the future" & "who am I, Turquoise Eyes?"

Look around to see what this room is. There's a window curtained, the curtain's designs seem to be from a really old book, faintly colored sketches of a White Bunny, a grey hedgedyhog, a purple furry dancing Creature with ribbon & bows—

Breathe. Relax. I have forgotten myself before, this my one certainty. It'll come back slowly, though I can trigger it. My memories return faster if I can figure out how.

I pick up *NJB* again & page through more slowly, letting something come to me, willing a bit the trigger—

Nothing. Just words. Stand again, in my long green & gold gown, barefoot. There is a small mirror next to the door, step over to look.

I looked ragged & weary, the gown on me clean but laundered in coarse water many, many times. My eyes are bright & tired both. My beard is trimmed; my hair too, mid-length. Like someone recently gave me some slow careful attention.

Then something in the mirror catches my eye. There's on the unmade bed another book, coverless, about the size of the *NJB* still in my hand, but this one is glowing, is *hmmming*, & what is this then? It has a kind of extra-dimensionality to it, but when I turn to look it straight on, it's not there, & the copy in my hand isn't glowing. I look back in the mirror & there it is, on unmade bed, glowing deeply—

I pull the mirror with some difficulty off the wall, pieces of plaster coming along too—

Back step by step toward the glowing book on the unmade bed, & it remains in view—

Without turning I watch my hand groping to touch this book, hard to hold mirror up high to see—

It feels like warm water to my fingers, & its *hmmming* rides through my bare touch to every part of me, not hurting, triggering, *oh* yes—

Reach deeper in, now up to my elbow deep in this glowing, *hmmming* thing, remembering but not quite, more & more, but still not quite like I've not reached deep enough, not yet touched something crucial—

How deep can a man enter into a glowing hmmming paperback book? Is it growing bigger for me, or am I shrinking for it?

There is a welcome in this, a beautiful return, & yet, & yet—

I remember now. Oh.

cxxvi.

It's a clean moment. This empty movie-house again & I'm sure it's long after midnight & I wonder why *RemoteLand* isn't showing as it does. The screen is blank. I wait.

Others are waiting too, I notice as I turn to look back at the rest from my second row seat. Always sit up front close, there are hidden things the closer you are.

I tried the first row one time, 10 hits of acid, & it seemed like I could climb on in if I wanted, the screen glowed deeper & deeper & I clutched my seat & tried to climb in both—

but something pushed me back, softly but firmly, awled "no" or "not yet" on my forehead but I could not see it myself, not even in the mirror, just feel the ridges of letters with my left thumb only & never sure of it, never sure—

second row, though, was good, & I could loiter at the edges of the entrance, sometimes get a peak inside, those Imps who cackle quietly & poke curiously just below the screen, I offer my hand & they will once awhile gnaw lazily & friendly—

Back there—that's Nazi Jailbait Bitch, what she told me she's called anyway, we don't talk much anymore but I still taste her too-soft skin, my fingers inside her school uniform, her white panties, her black bra, & somewhere else too, *where? what?* she shoved me away with a big man's brutish strength, not a slight girl's demur—

Those three in the last row, who are they? Not much older than NJB, they don't notice me looking back, the film or something absorbs them—

Sighing, I turn back to the screen & ready my little notepad & pencil to catch what I can— $\,$

I know the screen isn't blank. It's punishing me for my distractions, wanting to taste her youth, wanting anything but what's on that screen—

I watch, let the multi-dimensions of Imaginal Space burble out to me, on all sides, let it take me, this hospital bed soft & my blankets warm, & I see the Imps now on a kind of temporal wire that reaches from my left thumb to the moon, & I begin to climb & climb, & Imps along the way help me too, *ulp!* & spit me on, *ulp!* & spit, *ulp!* & spit—till I arrive—

Soft voices. Girlish hands softly on me.

"You'll take us in with you."

"And we'll find our way down to the Great Tree"

"Down among its roots."

"Do you like that?"
"And this?"
Giggles. Moans.

I can't see but feel myself gently helped up, carried along until a seat again, smells of bloom & the Sea all around me, it's the first row. I can't!

I can. I will. I don't open my eyes, if they are closed, but I begin to direct them how I will, *what I want*, what the cost of my power is, how I will bring you to him & keep you too—

Fuck you, NJB.

[Amused, she follows.]

[[The way on is sometimes through the way back to something new to be found back then to affect hereon.

[["We are what we were but
not what we shall become!"
cryeth blue-eyed mystic
guitarist Jim Reality III
smiling tricky for
all to hear

[[I'm working with these ideas without a real process or plan Wilder Wilder Sea past midnight out this hotel picture window]]

Next to the big screen there is a ladder that climbs up & up & up into unseeable heights. I know about it from that occasional scene in **RemoteLand** where the camera seems to be showing a live scene among the present audience members, & then ascends on the ladder up & up & how is this going to bring us to the Great Tree? they will ask? Well my sweeties getting to the heart of the world is not done in linear fashion by peoplefolks without help, & upppnupppnupp! this ladder we will come to help to bring up there it's why you came to me isn't it? looking for someone you learned about me, my talents to search & guide my talents which I learned from this not film &

Oh

NJB is following us. I look down the ladder which twists & turns so that I am able to see three sets of pretty eyes in the clothes they agreed to wear for me & a fourth who is following after them

It will be awhile climbing up this ladder, there are resstops on the way, they curl into me soft warm & willing to make me feel nice with their soft touches & *hmmms*

She just hangs on the ladder & waits like a spider in pause if spiders dressed in white tights & short skirts, waits for us to resume—

The not-film didn't show what the ladder led to save that images of trees subtextualized more & more through, till it was more climbing branches than ladder steps—

Getting there, the air is closer & sweeter & gentler—

I wonder who he is these magic nymphs seek—

There is a moment to tell that is stranger & finer than all else yet—I find myself climbing into a cloud, find that for some time I am ascending & do not feel the steps of the ladder, do not feel most dark things I usually do—fear—stress—eth thetera—

I look around this kind of place I am ascending through & could swear it is a kind of library, or at least there seem to be countless bookcases of great & little sizes in the murky distance—

nearer about me are—words? pages? floating about me in this cloud? singing or at least hmmming to me?

I close my eyes. I smile & let go. I don't know why I do this.

I am upheld, whatever I am this is you are I am upheld & feel myself disintegrate from what I am to what this is, add me to it, it become of me too—

No time. No space. No worry.

I am whatever I am floating like a colorful ribbon of me through all this & part of it & there are small hands about me now, touching very gently

they are furred
they are tending me
removing cold sharp
things from my mind
if I am mind still now —

precise work, gentle work patient work, bit by bit

then letting me go on I am again do not want to letting me go on do not want to I am again go on

& up now & up now

"How did you become Nazi Jailbait Bitch?"

"Like a job interview?"

"Maybe?"

"Like am I not the first to play this role?"

"Um?"

"Like the rules are very strict about who & what one must be?"

"Rules?"

"Like the term is limited & once over, it's over?"

I nod. Shake my head.

Suddenly, she laughs. A mocking but pretty laugh. Bats her lashes at me, I'm not kidding.

Reaches out for my hand as our climb up to go down as nearly finished & we are near to the Great Tree & its roots, & maybe Global Wall so sought.

The other girls sleeping at a resting place. NJB & I a few steps up higher on ladder.

"So we drop them off & go?"

"Go?"

"I'm not here to find him."

"Why are you here?"

"I dunno. Curiosity? My book life was pretty limited. Violent sex & murder."

"Did you emerge from the book or was it based on you?"

She laughs again. I've begun to notice her accent, an English one. I suppose, giving the destruction Nazis rained on England, a revenge murderess would not be unexpected.

"When was your book published?"

"Has it been?"

"Well, as a cheap little paperback. The kind they used to sell in bus stations."

"Oh."

"So maybe a kind of underground paperback, not long after World War II & the advent of the cheaply & mass produced paperback? Maybe yours kept under the counter in newsstands? Had to know a guy."

"Or a password!" says April, now all of us together. Them awake & come. NJB laughs. Her uniform is black vest & white shirt, plaid skirt, black tights & shoes. "All white under," she smirks to my unasked question. Lies.

They all laugh. "He loves white," they agree, "although black" one adds "& red!" another shrieks "& pink!" now they are falling over themselves.

I try to remember: Global has come down here to find his deeper, truer self, the one he lost when his dreams ended, when pretty girl smiles both consumed & flayed him with rejection—

What am I doing leading these pretty girl smiles to him? Of course, they came later, & not a speck of rejection in them.

Still, he needs time & they need to understand better.

I motion us climb quickly to next resstop. Sit in circle. All of us.

"I need to share with you more of what Global Wall is so that you can all love him better."

They nod, their pretty faces now serious.

"Then I'll lead you close as I can."

Nod.

"Then Ariel & I will move on to other travels."

"Ariel?" they all ask.

I nod at NJB. She smiles sincerely, which is far better than her come-on NJB one.

[There is a still movement coming when all will stand hands & paws clasped ring round the Hut which is conduit to then, the undifferentiated time, no wake/sleep dichotomy, each touches all, we are all the *hmmm*, & this moment is arriving to these pages soon—

[This occurring down deeper than the roots of the Great Tree at the heart of the world—where many seek answer to "Why is there something instead of nothing?"

[And nearby, tho not really a tangible distance measureable in these ancient places near the Hut, there is the World's Woods, where things are less certain, like where the White or One Woods begins, or maybe dissipates—

[And all this to say that it's been nearly two months since last lines of this book, & much is waiting to continue along—here this Mac-Donald's again—no Halloween decorations this time—closing the lobby I sit in shortly for night at midnight—drive-through goes on till midnight—

[All this to say: resume, a big breath & resume. Back to fucking work.

* * * * * *

Scripton Press Independent Publishing Since 1995



Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA.

Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*;

the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler*of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the

Jellicle Literary Guild.

Visit us online at ScriptorPress.com for more information.

SCRIPTOR PRESS

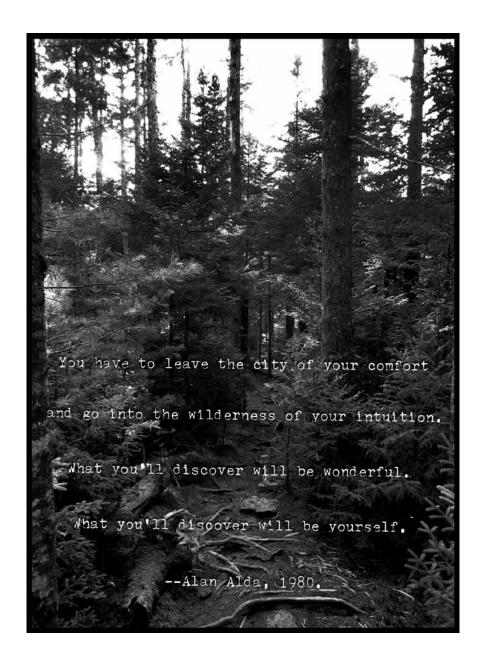


Notes on Contributors

- Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for Bags End News. More Bags End writings can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf.
- Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. More of his work can be found at: http://www.therubyeye.blogspot.com.
- Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His most recent novel, *States of Mercy*, was published by Alien Buddha Press in 2019.
- Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His 2000 Scriptor Press RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html.
- Leia Friedman is a writer, clinician, & professor living in Lowell, Massachusetts.
- Judih Weinstein Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her 2004 Scriptor Press RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.pdf.
- Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His most recent book, Many Worlds: A Collection of Poems, was published by Modern Memoirs in 2019.
- Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. More of his work can be found at: https://www.scribd.com/user/14270640/
 Nathan-Horowitz.

- Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His most recent book, Resisting Probability, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press in 2017.
- **Gregory Kelly** lives in England. His poetry appears regularly in the pages of *The Cenacle*.
- **Sam Knot** lives in rural France. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Also visit samknot.com for more of his work.
- **Tamara Miles** lives in Elgin, South Carolina. More of her work can be found at: http://tamaramiles.wixsite.com/sylviasdaughtersays.
- Martina Reisz Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her most recent book, *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*, was published by Deerbrook Editions in 2019. More of her writings can be found at: https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com.
- Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His most recent book. *Jock Poems and Reflections for Proper Bostonians*, was published by Pocol Press in 2019.
- Diana Rosen lives in Los Angeles, California.
- **Kassandra Soulard** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Her love & sanity if how I have survived the Global Pandemic.
- **Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Art, & art alone, renders me worthy to this world.







SCRIPTOR PRESS

