

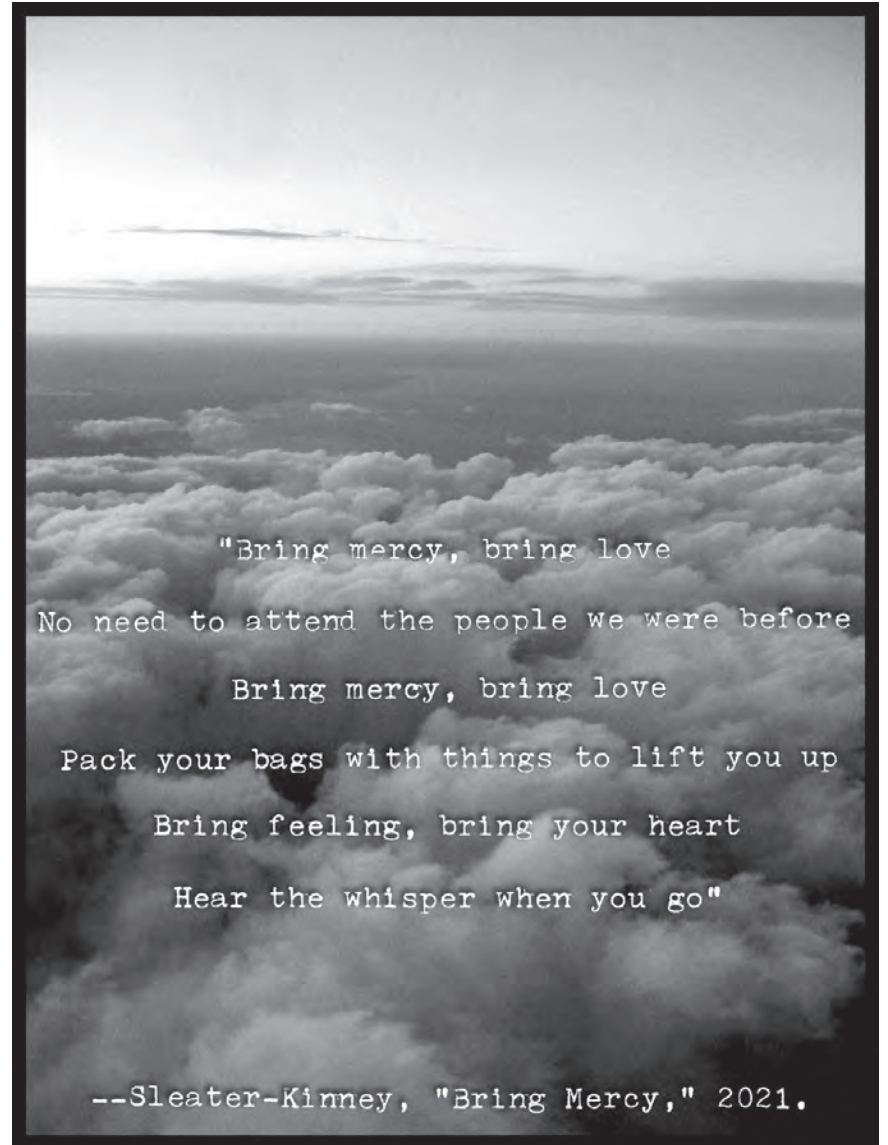


**MEDITATION**

Marble

David Randan

Wanyu, Maine



"Bring mercy, bring love

No need to attend the people we were before

Bring mercy, bring love

Pack your bags with things to lift you up

Bring feeling, bring your heart

Hear the whisper when you go"

--Sleater-Kinney, "Bring Mercy," 2021.

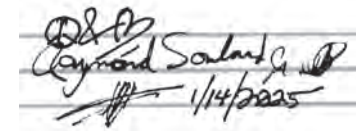
## Editor's Introduction

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

The Global Pandemic raged on, much sickness & death, & yet the denial of this reality became widespread. Ignorance the new strategy.

Yet Art went on, like in this volume, as salve, tool, weapon, & path to seek & hold truth close, no matter how difficult it is at times. Enjoy. Be safe!

A handwritten signature in black ink on a white background. The signature reads "Raymond Soular, Jr." and is dated "1/14/2025". There are some decorative flourishes and a small circular mark to the right of the name.

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



# Scriptor Press Sampler

Number 23 | 2021 Annual

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



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

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*Scriptor Press Sampler* is published annually by Scriptor Press New England,  
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Email: [editor@scriptorpress.com](mailto:editor@scriptorpress.com)

Web: [scriptorpress.com](http://scriptorpress.com)

Front & back covers by Raymond & Cassandra Soulard.  
Interior graphic artwork by Raymond & Cassandra Soulard,  
except where noted.

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2025

## Dream Raps

*“The greatest forces  
lie in the region of the  
uncomprehended.”*

—George MacDonald,  
*“The Fantastic Imagination,”* 1893.

\*\*\*\*\*

### It Was the One Story He Had to Tell

A young man told me this story, like it was the one story he had to tell. Like for him, it was the one story of the world. He said he first saw her in the Ancienne Coffeehouse. Passing him to elsewhere. He could never figure out whither.

There was an antique rite-typer there, on a corner table, in a shadow. Many days he would sit in an old green armchair, in that same shadow, with his thick books, looking for any passing, obscure, or even slight reference to the **Unitive Time**. Or to the *end of the world*. Or to the Beach of Many Worlds, & how they once braided closer. Typing & typing what he found. Whoever he had been before he came here, it was what he did now.

He sometimes lived with the Creatures, in the White Woods further deep in the Ancienne Coffeehouse. When he came, they would make sure he was fed of fruits & nuts. Often, when he despaired, they would share their special Rutabaga Soup with him. It would calm him for a stretch. Never saw her though.

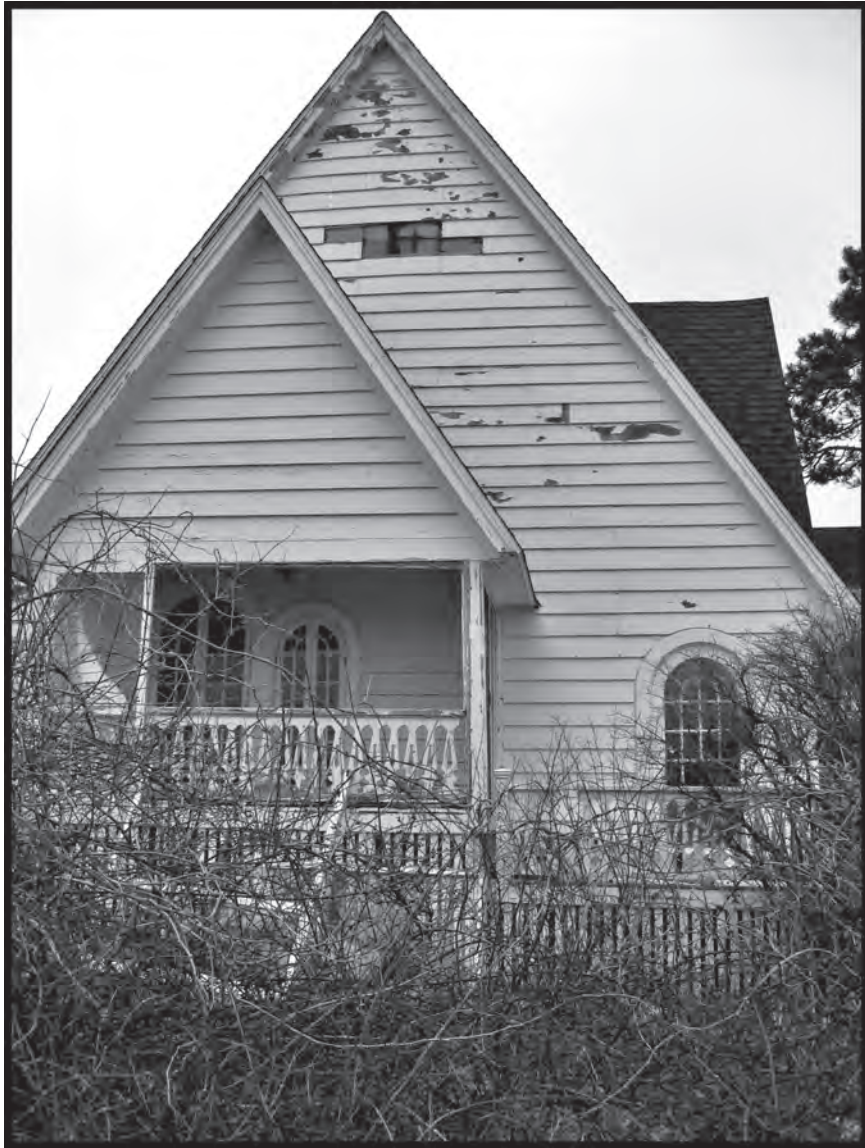
Most days he would doze in his old green armchair. Everyone knew it was his place. It was always left empty when he was further deep visiting the Creatures. Aunt made sure of it, until she no longer had to do so, it being so well known by all.

Occasionally his hard studies deep in his thick books would be comforted by the sounds of guitar from another room, one closer to the entrance. One drifting afternoon he took a curious look, & saw it was a handsome old man, sitting in an old armchair too, eyes closed strumming, a tall mis-sorted pile of pages on the small table next to him.

Then one day he came upon a note in that antique rite-typer. It was a soft sheet of paper, decorated with Creatures like his own friends. White Bunny, grey Hedgedy-hog, many kinds of Bears, & so on.

But what was typed there *was not* in his own tongue, & he could not understand this because the keys of the antique rite-typer *were* in his language. He just stared & stared at these strange symbols, trying to get a feel for them, by how they marked that soft page. He somehow knew





it was from *her*. *His wished-for beloved*. She had typed this note to him. It was her way of saying *hello*. That she'd noticed him noticing her, passing to elsewhere.

Further deep with the Creatures in the White Woods that night. Clustered with many beneath a warm Bear Blanket, near a clearing of full moonlight. In his dream, she was with him on a strange bus. She was at the front, he was at the back, & the bus was traveling through these same White Woods. It was the one with no roof you may have heard tell of, especially if your travels have taken you through Elliptical City.

Riding along, he became distracted into his deep studies, especially by a book called *Power*, one he would only find in rare dreams. He suddenly looked up, & she was gone. But then he noticed there remained a lavender trace of her in the air. He followed the lavender trace, ever nearing her without arriving.

And he woke up from this dream & realized that his pursuit of her now went on by waking & dreaming. He studied the soft note in the antique rite-typer. Ratcheted it down to a blank line, & he typed the following words. These were not wise wisdoms he typed, but they were a start. They were something he was fairly sure of:

***The road on, usually better. The road back, not so good.***

And then he sat back down in his old armchair, & he opened up his book again, & he continued his study & search for many answers.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **The Road On, Usually Better**

***The road on, usually better. The road back, not so good.*** Was it the lavender trace of her, his wished-for beloved, come now even to him in waking, that led him out of the Ancienne Coffeehouse? Carrying too her soft note he had taken from the antique rite-typer on the table next to his armchair? *Was it the lavender trace that led him out of the epic & long & strange & murky & odd & beautiful Ancienne Coffeehouse?* Outside, after so long not, he went, onto the street of the Village.

Nearby was a diner. Had he been there before? None of this was familiar, but it looked friendly. He climbed the stairs up to the diner. It looked kind of like a silver streaked railroad car of some antique vintage. Walked slowly through the door, saw there were booths going way back.

But in a near corner there's a tall round table, tall chairs, & for some reason he sat down there. With his note. Did the lavender trace nudge him over to it? Maybe. Sat down with his note. The place was lively, people at every booth. A white-faced pink cat radio quietly blared a recent song by The Pink Floyd. "You're listening to *SpiritPlants Radio America . . .*"

At one of the closer booths there's a couple of truck drivers in their uniforms, bit grizzled, but OK, clear on. Having their morning coffees, their eggs. A few booths further away, there's a colorful three-o. Two men in tuxedos, one bald as the day, the other hair tall as the night. A woman in a strange gown, elegant, old-fashioned, inapproachable. Yet somehow naked too. Hmm. Further back he saw a strange bent man showing some kind of long-legged apparatus to someone who seemed to have in turn to show a nifty little camera.

And he looked at his soft note from her, trying to make of it what he could. He wrote with his small pencil with the pink eraser on top, below her unknowable words, below his own typed words, in small script:

***Build a great big poem, a great big poem of many little poems.  
Bricks & bricks & bricks of poems.  
Build them up into a great building.  
Welcome all.***

“You gonna have your regular, son?” the owner cried over him with a leering smile. He gestured to a waitress to come on over & get his order, *pronto!*

\*\*\*\*\*

### **They Eats the Streets**

Looking around this diner, he began to wonder if maybe it's more of a bar & grill? Hmm. Then he noticed the sign that someone made mounted behind the counter. *Six Stars Bar & Grill*. It still looked like a diner to him, but maybe it's something that used to be a diner. Maybe it's both.

He nodded to the friendly waitress, or possibly barmaid, & said, “Yes, I'll have my usual.”

Looked at me, intently listening to his only story. “But I'll tell you a secret. I *didn't* have a usual there. I *didn't* think that they knew who I really was. But I *did* think they had me confused with someone else.”

So he looked around stealthily & noticed there's a sign for the restroom in the corner. He made his way over there. There's two restrooms actually, each marked *Restroom*. Alright. He entered one of them, & there's two sinks. No, three. One didn't look like it was working. The one on each side of it was. And there was a man there, & he was studying his face closely. “Didn't notice me at all.”

He went to the other one that was working. Studied the cuts on his face, used a paper towel to dab at them. *Who do they think I am? Who am I? I mean, when I was a kid, I used to be the catcher.*

Then the man, his hair long, his beard longer, & his overcoat even longer than that, started saying into the mirror, very slowly, almost chanting:

***We came down the street, then they ate the street, & the street was gone.  
We came down the street, then they ate the street, & the street was gone.  
We came down the street . . .***

And so on. He was deep into it, whatever it meant to him. Finally he gathered up his shambles to leave. Holding preciously some kind of little stick in his dirty hands.

Gave his face a good wash, despite its cuts & bruises & contusions, & so on, & come back out into the bar-&-grill-diner, returned his seat. “And there's my meal. One egg, one sausage, one strip of bacon. Half piece of toast, little touch of butter on it. Glass of orange juice, small

glass, only a quarter of the way full. Tall glass of milk, & a shot glass of something so dark I can't see through it.”

He nodded at the waitress barmaid. “Thankee, sai.” She laughed. Her turquoise eyes twinkled, nearly the same color as those of his wished-for beloved's. Her hair in a long pretty braid too. No lavender trace though. *But how did he know that her favorite author was Stephen King?*

“How did I know that?” he asks me. I shrug unhelpfully.

On the white-faced pink cat radio behind the counter, someone was droning on about the *end of the world* & the group responsible . . . “well, they're sitting on top of their bus . . . looks like it has some kind of makeshift roof right now . . . & there's a stand off . . . & there's a charismatic leader standing on top of the bus, waving his arms . . .”

The reporter doesn't know what will happen next. “Now here's a James McGunn classic on *SpiritPlants Radio America* . . .”

\*\*\*\*\*

### **We're Sitting On Top of Our Bus**

We're sitting on top of our bus. It's peaceful, about a bajillion stars up there in those stary skies. We have these old lawn chairs that we keep tied under the bus, kept special for nights like this, when we drag them out, haul them up, get our fake roof in place, & set them down on top of it.

Now, admittedly, we're surrounded by cops, & probably the army, & who-knows-who-others. Been accused of bringing about the *end of the world*. Well, you could say that. I mean, the world ends every day for someone, for *many* someones. In different kinds of ways. Well, people die. Well, people move, change jobs, gain & lose lovers, discover their favorite book for the rest of their years. Pain, joy, oh, it's always ending & beginning! *End of the world?*

Well, we know, sitting up here on top of our bus, in our old lawn chairs, that it began with a strange girl that we encountered many months & miles ago, & the small handmade book that she gave us. She didn't give it to *one* of us, no, she gave it to *all* of us.

We were at a Festival, met a lot of nice people there, shared a lot of Soup. Seemed like she was there & gone before anybody knew but, here we were, with this small handmade book tied up with a braided green & gold ribbon, knotted with a pretty little stone.

We waited till we left the Festival, till we were out in the middle of elsewhere, sitting in these old lawn chairs on top of this bus, our home, looking up at these bajillion stars, & *then* we chose to undo the green-&-gold ribbon, & to look at the pages inside.

And yes, *that* is where tonight began, all of it, every last bit, when we read those pages. I can't even say we read them all at once, I can't even say we were able to read one page at a go, & this was a *small* book. Look at your hand. It was about the size of your hand, especially if your hand is not that big.

Didn't explain itself right away. All it said on the first page was:

*Dreams within dreams within dreams.*

That's it, in a kind of odd curlicue handwriting. One of us remarked that it seemed like that handwriting was by someone who was not familiar with handwriting, as though they were imitating how to do it.

And the next page, all it said was:

*Endless levels up & down.*

That was it.

And we read more, as time went on. It's funny because we always read it together. We'd pull out all our old lawn chairs up on top of the bus, set them in a kind of a circle. We took turns reading. Everyone was silent, listening.

Turned to the third page & it said:

*Dream of power, unitive, to sing & heal.*

And I'll tell you, that the book felt like *more* than a book. It's like it had an inner *glow*, an inner *hmmm*. Sometimes it seemed like the *hmmm* even cackled quietly. Weird. It's like it was *alive*, but in some way that was its own. It was not inert, not at *all*.

Tonight we're going to read the last page. We've agreed. It's time to read that last page & see if what all really has happened so far, as dire as it seems, cops & the army & who-knows-who-others even, might have some good or magical or unknown end.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **I Gotta Leave the Bus**

I gotta leave the bus. *I gotta leave, I gotta leave, I gotta leave the bus.* You know what I mean, man? Hang around enough strange people over the course of a long, strange time, you start to lose yourself into that strangeness, start to not know the difference between you and that strangeness. All that **Unitive Time** & *end of the world* crap.

I know there are cops, armies, whatever, surrounding the bus, & so I wait until it's the darkest part of the night, & I slip out, go out the back, the emergency exit door, never locked, slither on down, under the bus. I don't even take the chance of saying goodbye to my friend with the nifty little camera.

I can't say for sure how someone doesn't spot me with all their radars and sonars and whatever-ars, but somehow I get under that bus and the bus is parked in a big Weeds patch, man.

Now I'm not the most mystical flicked-out dude that you could possibly meet on your way. I keep pretty far from those freaky White Woods & the wild stories of talking Bunnies & what-not in there. But, I swear, as soon as I'm among those Weeds, I feel *safe*, safer than I've felt in

a long time. I *don't* say a thing to them. Yah, I know you're thinking, *you don't say a thing to weeds?* But yes, I *don't* say a thing to the Weeds. But they're there, man. They're *with* me. They *understand* my distress. They *feel* it. And I *wanna* say something, *some* kind of thing. Some kind of *thankee*.

So I've never done this before, but what I do next is I put my arm right up against my mouth, with just a little breath of space, so that whatever I say is not going to travel beyond just a few inches from me. And I say, "I need to get out of here. Can you give me cover?"

And nothing happens. Yeah, I'm an *idiot*. But then it's like, um, I hear this beautiful music that I can't account for. *Is it in my head? Is out there? I don't know.* It's like the Weeds are breathing music to help me. No words.

But I start to move, fast, & I feel everything around me moving with me. I feel like wherever I'm moving, there's cover around me, there's silence. Everything is closer to me somehow, keeping me upright, hurrying me along, warming me within. I keep moving & moving until I am fifty fields beyond all that, if that's possible, & that's how I got away. *It was those Weeds.*

You don't need to believe me. I don't need to believe me, but that's how it happened. Just saying *that* is how it happened.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **The House, with the Attic, from the Dreams of My Youth**

So what happens as I leave the Weeds, & their kind aid to my escape, is that I carry on for many more fields, still worrying some that I'm being followed. But then I see that old house in the distance, & I'm *sure* that it's the house with the Attic, from the dreams of my youth! I went to that old house many times, hundreds of times, over & over, in dreams.

I make for that old house like a lunatic, running with my arms waving, flapping about me, my legs doing almost as badly, but I keep going & I don't trip. I almost trip a couple times, but *I don't trip*.

I make it to the front door finally, convinced it'll be locked, or someone will prevent me, but no one does. The front door is not even all the way closed.

I enter into the sky-tall vestibule, & it's dusty, & cobwebby, & I guess I get a little bit of a worried feeling about it. But I keep moving, looking, & again I travel through the countless rooms, filled with old furniture & strange bookcases, & odd statues & weird paintings, & mirrors that showed other dimensions, & so on. Room after room, some are huge as miles, some I can barely make through crawling, inching my way in & around.

Up many flights of stairs, until I finally come to the top of them. And there's the button hanging in mid-air, attached to a fishing line. Tug down & a ladder unfolds from the ceiling. Climb up & arrive to my old beloved Attic. *Oh blessed be, I make it to the Attic!*

It had no width. It had no length. It had no height. It had no number.

I'd traveled it ever on back then, & there was no end to traveling it. It was like traveling one's

own mind & finding no walls, no closed doors, no locks, no barriers, nothing.

Feels as it always felt. Rooms of content, structures of content, scaffoldings of content. Some built, some building, some pending, in plans. *This is it. I've arrived. I'm in the Attic.*

*I wish you were here too, wished-for beloved. I would share it with you, I promise you I would. Would you like to come to the Attic with me? I think you might, I think you would enjoy it. There's a trace of you here from the Coffeehouse. I sniff like Creatures & can swear sometimes it's here.*

I'm not walking anymore. No need to walk here. No need to hurry here. Go slow & enjoy. *Come with me. It's OK, lift up or just let go. Now you can see round corners, through walls. You hear, with no end. There's no limit to your hearing. Everything has sense & you sense them all, & everything touches you, close & closer. Everything braids closer. Symbiosis.*

That's the word I heard once, & that's the word. **Symbiosis.** A language for all, from all, by all, here we go. *Here come the Woods!* I'd say hang on, but don't hang on, let go. *Let go.*

Feel the trees, feel the leaves, the branches, the air, the soil, *feel it all.*

*You feel it all, don't you? The Attic. You've made it. I'm so glad you're with me. Let's go.*

*(Remember me . . .)*

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Blues Guitarist I Knew, Somewhat, Years Ago

As I wander through the many countless rooms of the Attic, I find myself in company with the blues guitarist I knew, somewhat, years ago. Well, I knew him during his last days, & his killing addiction. I remember that his best friend the photographer couldn't help him, *just couldn't*, & his beloved told me I needed to help him.

And I *tried*. All I could see was that when he played his guitar, he was safe. He was safe & he was happy. And what was killing him was nowhere close. So that's what I did. I'd see him often as I could, & he'd play his blues guitar for me, for hours on end. We'd get so high, sometimes with the Weeds, always with the music. *Ha!*

Now he's walking beside me, & I see he's got his blues guitar slung 'round his back. We smile at each other. I nod to him, the way I did back then, & he knows what that means. It means, *get that guitar between your two paws & strum, man, strum!* And he does. *Ha!* Blues songs he wrote about the *end of the world* back, when his wasn't so close to ending. I loved them songs so much, & we wondered if one day one of them would end up on **SpiritPlants Radio America**. Seemed possible back then.

The Attic is very wooden, this part of it anyway, this long hallway we're in, dark wooden, yet glowing. I see we're both barefoot, whatever that means. We're both dressed in jeans & colorful shirts. My hair is long, his hair is long. He's playing & playing & playing. *Ha!*

I start to shout. I start to clap. I can't sing, I can't play, but I can join in other ways. Just making noise & shouting, to keep him playing on. *Ha!*

I guess, at some point, I'm not walking with him anymore, but I feel like I understand something better about time. Too much is strange, too much occurs, too much is remembered by only a few, or one. Time is *not* a unitive block of lead going forward & backwards forever. *Ha!*

Time is that blues guitar, keeping it all at bay, clapping, shouting, carrying on, long as he can play. *Ha!*

\*\*\*\*\*

### This is What I Learned That You Should Know Now

I reached what seemed like the far end of the Attic, which I'd been walking in for a long time. Maybe it started from Dreamland, I'm not sure. *Who knows how these things really start? Does it matter?* But I want you to know what I found out when I seemed to have reached that end of the Attic.

I look at the wall before me, not really convinced it was a wall before me. I'd never seen such a wall before me before in this Attic, in which I'd been many times. But it compelled me to look down, it compelled me to kneel down, it compelled me to lie down. I kept going *down & down & down*, & realizing that it was just a different kind of *up & up & up*.

And I was taught something, because I was willing to go *down & down & down*, & *up & up & up*, before this wall that I didn't believe was really there, though there it stood. But this is what I learned that you should know now.

There are these far-too-tiny-to-see sort of artists, tiniest little Creatures, who paint the world with emotions. Each one a different kind: sadness, anger, fear, joy, & so on. And they do not know of us, nor we of them. And yet we inter-relate & matter much to each other. We braid together without knowing. *They bore your trace, beloved.*

*And why did they show me now? Why did I get to see? Why did they encourage me to share with you?* I think it's because these artists were feeling like they weren't doing well enough by us, & they wanted to do better. And they had not known previous of us, just as we had not known previous of them, but then came this wall that brought us together. For them, there *was no end of the world*.

And they learned of me, & I learned of them. They reached up to me with jew-ells of love, touching me as they could, feeling me. They were asking, *how can we do better with what we do? How can we help?*

*Down & down & down, & up & up & up.*

\*\*\*\*\*

### SpiritPlants Radio America

I push through that wall that may not be there, & I invite my little friends to come along, & they do. They hop into a pocket in my green plaid jacket. Through the wall & come to a studio of a radio station with a big sign across the wall that says in fancy colorful script **SpiritPlants**



## *Radio America.*

I peek out the window nearby & see a lovely campus out there. There's a further room, where I see radio folks hanging out. Ceiling looks like a roof of endless stars.

Some of them look like students, some don't. I scurry into a corner as the DJ nods to me, & the engineer nods to me too, & I get the feeling that if you're going to DJ your show, you've got to engineer someone else's show. Hold hands both ways.

I become aware that I too DJ a show on this station, *SpiritPlants Radio America*, but I do it remotely. I don't know if everybody likes me doing it remotely, but my show has long been on the air there, & everyone is friendly overall there. It's nice to be part of things. I let my little friends out, for a look around. They seem drawn to people for different reasons.

One DJ's sad, worried, something, & one of my little artist friends hurries right over to her. Couple of swabs of the old molecular-sized brush, & she cheers up a little, looks around outside of her own struggles, & sees she's not alone.

Another DJ is angry, watching the television, on it the asshole who is in charge, letting more & more people get hurt, needlessly. Another of my little friends hurries over to him, paints him with *calm, calm, calm*.

I give a small signal. It's time to leave *SpiritPlants Radio America*, leave the ones who think I'm a good DJ, & the ones who think I'm not. It's time for me & my little friends to move along. I give a wave to all my fellow DJs, hoping to return sometime, & we're on our way again.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **I Show My Little Friends a Bookstore**

I feel like I want to show my little friends something good. There's more than idiots & suffering way up here. We come to an escalator & hop on, my little friends safe into the pocket of my green plaid jacket. We go *up & up & up*, & *down & down & down*, & arrive to a wonderful Liberry with about a bajillion books all around us.

I gesture to my little friends to come out of my pocket & hop up onto my hand, & they do. I show them big books with beautiful pictures, & tiny books with a tiny few of the best words, & oddly shaped books that are funny, & quiet hidden books, no noisier than a shadow.

Walk all around this wonderful liberry until we come to the very end, & there's a door, green & gold. Those colors are lucky. Walk on in, a-wondering.

It's a bare room. It's a white room. It's the kind of room that could be anything in the world, from **Unitive** to *ending*. It contains all the colors in the worlds of possibility. I start to walk faster until I realize I'm walking alongside of a stream. Like it was back in the Coffeehouse.

White Woods all around, glowing. Come to a bridge. There's an area under the bridge, stones, a hill. I sit there with my little friends, watch the water go by. They are sitting next to me in their tiny tininess, fingers on chin, trying to figure this all out. I am with them, finger on my

chin, trying to figure it all out as well. *With you, beloved.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **There's Some Stories You Need to Tell S-l-o-w-l-y**

There are some stories that you need to tell s-l-o-w-l-y &, in telling them s-l-o-w-l-y, they will be different kinds of stories than if you told them otherwise.

You see, I don't feel like I'm in the Attic anymore.

This *isn't* the Attic. This is my studio apartment in ZombieTown, & it's pretty bare. I haven't been here in a while. Is this the day that I moved out, all those years ago? I remember leaving just a little bit of trash in the corners, & not giving proper departure notice. The landlord was an asshole, & he deserved it.

But I'm back here now, & it's a kind of emptiness I'm feeling. *If I looked out the door, would I see that moving truck speeding away with me & my friends?* But here it's a thin feeling, less than a memory, not even a memory. *Is there something here?* It's just a bare room. But then I hear a noise, less than a noise, maybe it's a small breath, but it draws me into the bathroom, & I go in, & I close the door.

It's empty too. I don't turn on the light. I'm in the dark. Oh. I've been trapped in here before. Long stretches of tripping trapped in here. I can hear my white-faced pink cat radio in the other room, used to keep it on all night to keep me company. The Pink Floyd playing, I think.

I feel my way around, finding my sea legs in the darkness. Finally I just use that old trick & just close my eyes, begin to *hmmm*. *Ab*, here we go. There's a door in the back of this tiny bathroom that wasn't there back tripping when.

Well, I push through, & now I'm walking. My eyes closed, *hmmmming*, but nothing is happening yet.

Now I'm coming somewhere. I'm coming out of that dark bathroom & now I'm in a cement hotel room, not dissimilar to my studio but definitely not my studio. It's empty as well.

*What can I do about this?* I want something more to happen here than is happening so far. Am I telling the story s-l-o-w-l-y enough? I walk through the door of the hotel room, & now abruptly outside.

Across the street, there's a movie theatre. Now we're getting somewhere. *Nada Theatre*. Of course. **RemoteLand** *nightly, midnight*. Of course. *Now we're getting somewhere*. I walk right into the theatre. No one stalls me. No one is there. The theatre is empty.

What's weird is that I find that I don't have a shirt on now. I just kind of notice it, maybe a kind of breeze caught me or something. So now I'm standing in this empty theatre, and it's not anywhere near midnight, & I sit in the second row. It's the right row, where I always sit. *Especially with you, beloved. A trace of you in here?*

I watch. I wait. I nod, & I *hmmm*. *Come on, screen, show me something!* I'll talk a little faster

then!

Then I see a refuge in the White Woods for many, bound on all sides by braided traps & alarms, & a culture in this refuge grows up that is happy, thrives. Till one time, at the ball field, a pop fly soars over the bounds, & many arguments over fair or fall.

*Fair or fall? What does that mean? What is happening here?*

Next time, I'm going to tell this story even more s-l-o-w-l-y.

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### Whenever I Go Into the Nada Theatre

Whenever I go into the Nada Theatre, I am convinced that it is at least midnight. Now I know this makes no sense. After all, you can walk into a movie theatre any time of the day or evening. But no, I walk through its strange doors, & it is midnight or later.

It is a vast movie theatre. Its ceiling is very high, if there at all. It has balconies that seem to go up & back & up & back, & there are little side-balconies too. I don't know if people sit in them or if they're just for decoration.

And there seem to be pulsing images on the ceiling, & walls, & even on the floor. Definitely on those green & gold curtains that open slowly to reveal a *massive* movie screen.

A *massive* one. And yet I sit down there, in the second row, *where I sit with you, & we look up toward that massive movie screen*. I close my eyes for just a moment to enjoy it all. When I open up my eyes again, I won't say I'm in the movie (that would be a dream, strange dream & a good one, but no), but it does seem as though maybe the movie & I are less separate from one another now (yes, that's the polite way to put it)(as though this Theatre & I held the little branch & the stone jew-ell between us).

You've got to watch out who is in the audience, & you've got to make sure that they understand too. The movie screen & I, the movie's world & I, share some space (let's say). And I get up to move around a little bit, & nothing seemed difficult to do, & the office I am in is empty.

There is a desk in the corner, of course, right over there. And that strange old computer on it. I sit down in the chair, which doesn't look very reliable, & I look at the screen, & it seems to be black & green, & the figures on it are hard to read.

They're very pixely & rectangular. Now they're pulsing & I'm thinking, *OK, is this my job? Is this what I do now? Do I make spreadsheets? Do I build documents? Am I just back from vacation? I must be just back from vacation. That bus ride to the great city, broke down three times. Was like a cult ran it. Wanted me to come up on that raggedy-looking roof to read some crazy girl's book about many worlds. Then they played the damned radio all night instead of fixing the tires quick.*

*That's why there's so much work piled up in the **In** file on my left-hand side, & no work completed on the **Out** file on my right-hand side.*

Alright, *alright*. I'll get down to work, spreadsheets, documents, other things. *I can do this.*

No. *I can't do this. I'm not gonna do this. I turn around. I look at the wall behind me. I look deep into the wall behind me.*

I'm going somewhere else. *I need some more vacation days before I can get down to this kind of work.*

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### It Was a Cube of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough?

The questions always began like this: *it was a cube of chocolate chip cookie dough, edible? The baking kind?* The story varies. *It was the end of the world.* Others said it was *cherry vanilla*. Some said *both*. Some said *one* cube, some said *many*. Some said it was the confection of the culture through which it was traveling. Some said it contained *magic*. Others called it *really trippy*.

*I don't know, man.* I don't know how this happened. I was just looking for some Weeds, that's all. And I met this guy outside some trippy coffeehouse, & I thought, *man, he might be good to get me some Weeds.*

"Hey, man, how you doing?"

"I'm doing alright, man, how are you?"

"Doing well. Beautiful evening."

"I suppose, it is the *end of the world*, you know."

"True. How you keeping busy?"

"Well, I've got this plan, you see, I'm gonna teach a class on the **Netflix**. I got this friend who takes pictures for them."

"Oh, you mean that TV channel? You're gonna have a show?"

"Naw, man, I'm gonna teach a class *on* the **Netflix**."

"Oh, that's cool, man. Say, you got some Weeds?"

"Naw, man, I take these pills & my doctor *mumblemmummbbblenmmummbbble*."

And he talked on & on & on, telling me every last detail of his medical situation, until I felt myself melting into the sidewalk with his trials, & his tribulations, & his Weedslessness, & soon I find myself inside *The Cenacle*.

*What, you say? The Cenacle? That literary magazine with all them high-falutin writers & authors & artistes & so on?* I was inside it, me! Yours truly. Me & my team, some of whom were not contributors. They're not authors or writers or artistes at all, but we're there to help capture someone who has infiltrated.

And we roam the pages of *The Cenacle*, through many writings by authors, & many photographs by artistes, & other strange occurrences within those pages, which are hard to tell about until we find the infiltrator! And wouldn't you know it, *he's got some Weeds!*

He's sitting at the very back of *The Cenacle*, right past the advertisement for **SpiritPlants Radio America**, between the *Notes on Contributors* & the *Last Yawp*, I believe. He's found himself a nice cozy spot, hasn't been edited yet obviously. Comfortable, among the Weeds.

Me & my team sit down with him. Takes him a while but he passes around his jive. Finally I say to him, after a good several rounds going around, *puff puff pass*: "Say, man, why are you

there?”

“Here? Where?”

“*The Cenacle!* That is, amongst these authors & writers & artistes & so on. What are you doing here? Why did you infiltrate *The Cenacle?*”

Well, he takes a long hit on his short jive, we’d smoked it on down, & he says, “I gotta tell you, man. They talk about drugs a lot, & I got interested. About other weird stuff too, like endless deserts & Attics & so on. And so I started, you know, crawling along, down low, & I kept going. Some of it was *too* over my head, some of it was just *too* strange. I kept looking. Finally come back here, & there’s this jive sitting there, right here, among all these lovely Weeds, so I sat down & started smoking it, & then all you folks came.”

“Well, why did you infiltrate?”

“Like everybody else in the world, man. *The end of the world*, man. What do you want, man?” His voice keeps changing as he gets more & more excited. “*What do you want, man? What do you want, man? What do you want, man?*”

Me & my team, we stand up & move on. There’s *gotta* be more to know than this.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Somewhere Down Deep

Somewhere down deep, among pages, words, traveling time like space, space like time, words like space, space like words, in my wheelchair with its saddlebag, which has a Velcro flap for easy use. You’d be *amazed* at how useful a Velcro flap on your saddlebag can be.

When I arrived to that party at the half-built old house, the one with that crazy bus poking halfway out of its attic, everybody’s gathered around the long table, made of two braided planks, enjoying bowl after bowl of chicken & mashed potatoes. And a wonderful Soup too! People trying to forget their troubles, the crazy people with badges & guns, the sickness traveling the land, talk of the *end of the world*, trying not to think about any of it.

There was this old man, sharp, bearded, asking us hard questions to think about, as we sat friendly together & enjoyed our meal.

*Is it good not to think about the things in the world bigger than any of us, if only for a little while?*

*Is that possible?*

*Is it a good thing to do?*

*Are you hurting anyone right now?*

*Is anyone hurting you?*

*If the answer is no, start there.*

*You’re at peace, you’re calm, start there.*

*Look at one another now. Ask these questions, ask others when you leave here.*

*Are you hurting anyone?*

*Are you being hurt by anyone?*

*If the answer is no, move on.*

*One to the next to the next to the next.*

*When you find someone who is hurting or being hurt, **you stop**, all you people who gathered here, & are not being hurt, & are not hurting anyone.*

*And you gather ’round that person who is hurting or being hurt . . . & **you help!***

*That’s what you do. You don’t add to the hurt, you help.*

*You figure out what that means, what it means to help, those who are hurting & those who are being hurt.*

*There’s no formula, there’s no plan, there’s just figuring out what helps.*

*You arrive to it, & it works, & that person is not hurting or being hurt, & you gather them into your number & move along.*

So said the old man at the table, between the big bowls of mashed potatoes, & the wonderful Soup, & we all listened. We asked each other those questions. We listened. Maybe we were reassured for a while. Maybe our purpose as a beloved group, & as single souls, now cleared some.

*It’s OK to be calm.*

*It’s OK not to be hurt.*

*It’s OK not to hurt.*

*It’s OK.*

***It’s OK.***

Then a breath, & another, a third. A smile, a nod. ***It’s time to help.***

\* \* \* \* \*

### I Made It to the Other Side

I made it to the other side. It happened, finally. *I made it to the other side.* I don’t know how long it was, I don’t know what kind of travel. I don’t know what I was along the way. It was a shift. High in the air. Like the old stories told about. **Unitive Time**, *end of the world*, & all that.

I was come there as though I’d always been there, untended, unfettered, yet unable to leave. The hallways I passed through, they glowed, & they were endless.

There was something else too. A small something, a lavender trace of something, that kept me along. It was like a softest whisper of strange music, & I kept following it, & it’s like I followed it in an arc over both miles & years. I followed it through that endless spaceship.

And it let me get near, & I began to arrive, & it let me nearer still, & I knew I was almost there. It’s like we meshed together for a moment, & all was well in a new way. I didn’t know what it was, what I was, but I wanted to say thank you to that lavender trace of softest music, & I didn’t know how. I don’t think it really needed thanks because I believe that strange music was made to get me through, & that music’s happiness was when I made it to the other side.

And I awoke, wet, jagged, half in, half out of a frothy fountain. *The Fountain?* The one near

the Tangled Gate? Was I back?

No. I looked around, no Gate, just a fountain. Many noises in the world around me that I could not understand. Music nearby but no sign of anyone playing an instrument. No sign of that trace.

And now my past, it was like it was behind a wall I could not see through or over. *Who all had I once loved?*

All I had now was to stand, & to look about me, & to try to reckon how to make a path further along my way.

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### **Enigmatic Events. Enigmatic Music. Enigmatic World.**

*“Enigmatic events. Enigmatic music. Enigmatic world.”* Well, that’s what James Starsden famously says. Him a kind of time traveler who could sometimes be found around Iconic Square.

Dressed in his now equally famous shifting-rainbow-colored suit, he’d sit by that frothy fountain in Iconic Square, & he would turn on the white-faced pink cat radio that he carried around sometimes. He’d tune in to *Radio 36X With Commander Q* on ***SpiritPlants Radio America***.

It almost sounds like Commander Q has traveled to the *end of the world* to pluck bits & pieces from here & there, foreign tongues, old vinyl 45s, guttural gossip at icy bus stops. Dirty-talk, pretty-talk. The noise will braid & separate, evolve, crack wide, dive deep for the longest time, & yet stories will occur among all this seeming chaos.

One lingered with James Starsden long after he had with melancholy adieu departed the frothy fountain in Iconic Square, when ’twas his time again to travel via that spaceship with the hallways so long you would arrive far thence & whence from where you’d begun. He sometimes called it, for lack of a formal name, *Starship Attic*.

“One time he came to me asking for a ton of my earth. Wanting it for the valuable earthworms within, the medicines they will make to help the world heal from its sickness. And I helped him to write a moving prose piece, with photographs, for a magazine called *The Cenacle*, & a radio campaign on this very station you are tuned into. I hope you’ll consider his offer & his plea. I certainly hope you will!”

And James Starsden listened for a long while to these words, long after he had left Iconic Square, & he mumbled once again the words for which he so well known: *“Enigmatic events. Enigmatic music. Enigmatic world.”* Studied that pretty little stone he always kept close to hand, wondering where his beloved & the little stick.

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### **Sooner or Later, This Will Happen to You, Too**

I am working in a kind of big room, everyone has their work station, rows & rows of them. I’m

unsure my task, worried, my lunch has attracted bugs. Boss comes over, looking around, sees the bugs, frowns. I promise to pack my lunch in plastic containers from now on.

I say it again. He nods, losing interest. Then I look at him deeper, with all the honesty in my heart & soul, & say, “I’ll pack my lunch in plastic containers from now on.”

He nods again, now edging away. (Sooner or later, this will happen to you, too.)

It’s a Friday again, don’t ask me how. Ride my bike to this little antique store run by my old teacher friend. He loves the two Laughing Little Buddhas. He loves his many vitamins. He used to be a Marine. And I come over to his antique store to help him record his radio show, for ***SpiritPlants Radio America***. Big band music. Glenn Miller, all that good stuff.

We record his show on that old **DuMont** reel-to-reel tape player of his. Then we pop many vitamins & he tells me stories of the travels of the Two Laughing Little Buddhas. Making folks laugh & laugh till they see Godd is an obvious truth, a simple one, woven into the beauty of things, & yet by no means the beginning or end of the answers people-folks seek about the many worlds.

(Sooner or later, this will happen to you, too.)

But his antique store is crowded this Friday, packed end to end, even at closing time. I find myself a good sit-down in an old armchair I know of there, in a shadowy corner. Reminds me fondly of that Coffeehouse. Decide to have a nap till he’s ready.

*Far out, nowhere, there’s a little hut with a vast within. And, as you approach the little hut, you become more hopeful, more & more hopeful, more & more & more hopeful, more hopeful than you’ve ever been ever. Tell me the **why** of it, tell me the **how** of it, **do**.*

*(Maybe when this happens to you too, sooner or later, you’ll have it figured out better than I do.)*

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### **Me Riding on My Bike Back to My ZombieTown Hovel**

This story begins with me riding my bike back to my ZombieTown hovel from Eastern Donutshop, where me & my notebooks & black pens & Polly iPod would headquarter for a long stretch.

I come around to a side street I’ve ridden down many, many times &, in the middle of the street, there’s a guy standing there in full protective gear. He’s stopped this weird-looking bus, & is blocking up the road. Bus is blasting out loud music like this street has never heard.

*Has there been an **Apocalypse** & I didn’t hear about it? Is it the end of the world? Suppose it’s possible. I get deep into writing *Dream Raps* for the new issue of *The Cenacle* & I don’t hear much news going on. And most of the old gents & ladies down at the Eastern would rather drink their black coffees & study their dog racing forms.*

I try to swerve around all this & I think I crash. Next thing I know, I’m coming to in a strange laboratory. Sloppily tied to a chair, as though someone forgot to finish, or had other business



to get to. I look out the window & there's my bike parked right in front. Locked to the back fender of this weird roofless bus. I don't know what this was about, but I don't like it.

Time passes, no explanations, nobody does anything. There are no secret experiments on me. No pokings or proddings, no blood drawn, nothing. *How is me sitting here, waiting hours on end, helping the Cause of Science in curing the **Apocalypse**?*

Finally, I get tired of waiting to be experimented upon. I see that someone left that laboratory window slightly open. I wiggle my sorry ass out of my loose ropes & then on through that window. Free my bike & I ride on back to my **ZombieTown** hovel like nobody's business, let me tell you. Lock the door. Close the curtains, my *Alice in Wonderland* curtains, tight &, in the darkness of my hovel, I realize maybe why they wanted me.

They wanted my **Vuufoo**. I built it myself off them Internets. You've heard of them Internets? Well, my **Vuufoo** is a tool that you can use to find something on them Internets, or at least some good candidates, if you have a mission of some kind. You enter into the tool up to six characteristics of a need, & it will lead you to a few good candidates. You can set filters by time, by distance, by worlds.

I warn you, though, that if you ever borrow or steal my **Vuufoo**, or get one of your own built from them Internets, it can occasionally be ornery. Has this cackle funny as the world.

I want to know what just happened though, quite honestly, so I type in this **Vuufoo**: **ZombieTown** & **Laboratory** & **Apocalypse**. Figuring that will get me started somewhere.

But all this confounded contraption will say to me—*is it some kind of hint or clue?*—is the following:

*All worlds braid. All worlds hmmm.  
All worlds braid. All worlds h m m m.*

I drift back onto my mattress, lay with the beloved **Vuufoo** in my embrace. Thinking that, you know, that laboratory doesn't matter. Doesn't matter at all.

What I need to know about is:  
*All worlds braid. All worlds h m m m.*

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### A Real Lockdown

Lots happens when there's a lockdown, a real lockdown, not like it was back when, when it was a suggestion, a good idea, something maybe you'd wanna do if you felt like it. No, now we're all locked down, for real. No Cause of Science cure for this *end of the world, this **Apocalypse***.

I'm with my dear friend the Traveling Troubadour. He's struggling. I understand. It's hard. He lost his job. He's struggling. He's staying in the spare room of his friend the photographer, but that's not really going too well. I wish I had more room in my **ZombieTown** hovel.

We're at a party. Well, we're not really at a party. We're at one of those, what are they called?

*Virtual parties*. We each put on the Helmet. You project there. That's how it is for most of us at this party. But not all.

There are some people really at this party, not just virtual, who are even more down than my dear friend, because they decided they don't care. Really, honestly. And they're happy to accommodate the rest of us, & be our entertainment, so long as they don't leave at the end of the night. However that happens.

Now this isn't a story that really happened. This is just what you'd call a *parable*, a warning. So you keep that in mind. This didn't really happen, but it could. So the old people are milling around, in the big open field of the party. The rest of us are there, projecting. Using our Helmets, we're safe. We all ready our controls, & our various weapons, & we begin to fire. Fire on the old people, mostly old people.

Now they're dressed well for dodging, for nimbly getting around. They're not in wheelchairs or leaning on walkers. Not tonight. They all got their shots of hyper-adrenaline before this began. They're gonna go out strong. We fire & fire at them, & miss them a lot. They hide behind large rocks, in stands of trees, shadows in the corner. They jeer, they shout. They weave wildly high & low.

Some of them, they don't speak English anymore. They don't speak any language that you would know. They speak a sort of guttural tongue of despair. As we begin to clip them, make them stumble, & then shoot them down, their guttural tongue comes out wildly. They cry louder & louder, & deeper & deeper, & spittier & spittier. *They roar!*

But the critical thing about this party game is that we don't want to shoot them down & kill them all at once. We want to spread it over the course of the night. We want to wound them, make them angry, make them shout in that guttural tongue. *Earn it.*

Someone hits the **Music** button. It's not pretty music. It's loud, mean music. It's music for shooting down people in despair. They like it. Rallies them more. *Remember, they don't want to come out of this.* They haven't felt alive in a long time. Lockdown has been going on for a long time & they decided this is the way they're gonna go out. *Fuck the end of the world.*

My dear friend the Traveling Troubadour is shooting but he's not really shooting. This isn't helping him. *He doesn't want to kill anybody.* He hasn't adjusted to this lockdown. He hasn't adjusted to survive, & the fact that because someone does, someone else doesn't. He doesn't understand that us shooting down these despairing old folks is part of how the world survives now.

Puts down his gun, & he walks away. Takes off his Helmet. I take one more shot, clip a blue-haired old woman's thigh. Old blood flares out. She roars, *roars!* in anger. Full of life, full of her life ending, full of the anger at her life ending, & this lockdown, & all of this. It's a roar of happiness & despair.

And then I take off my Helmet, & I go & sit with my dear friend. I worry he's not going to make it. I worry he's gonna end up in a field like that, with other despairing people. And I worry that he's gonna want me to take those final shots as he roars out the remainder of his

despair.

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### The Strange-Folk

Somehow I ended up out in the desert with the Strange-Folk. You know these Strange-Folk. They look up in the skies, they look deep in the White Woods, they feel in the sand along the beach of the Wide Wide Sea, because they're sure secrets are waiting there to be told. They've heard about these secrets, & they go looking for them.

They figure these secrets are gonna explain everything. *Everything I ever wanted to know, all my questions answered. The beginning & end of the world. I'm gonna be happy because I'm gonna find out what these secrets are for myself.* And so they go looking, high & low. For traces toward what will reveal all. Stories of magickal sticks & stones. You know these Strange-Folk.

So what happens is I end up in the desert with some of these Strange-Folk. Maybe I misunderstood when they offered me a ride. I don't know. But there's this large gathering of these Strange-Folk, & they're telling each other stories about looking in the White Woods, & feeling in the sand of the Wide Wide Sea, & looking in the skies.

Then the ships overhead gather our attention.

The Strange-Folk are gape-mouthed. *Oh! Yes, they are!* And they start running every which way. They don't know what it means when the answers *actually appear before you.* They were just words before. Strange books they read in bus stations, & along the way to jobs where they would talk to other Strange-Folk, about this possible answer & that possible answer.

But no, there are those spaceships, up there!

And I'm delighted, because I dreamed of them. Didn't go looking for them, didn't have to. I had a dream one magickal night, & so I just lived along, not paying attention to all the crazy stories. *And there they are.*

Strange-Folk are running panicked every which way in this desert, but I just stand there, point & smile. I point up high, towards those spaceships. And I'm thinking, *man, they're too far up there for me to have a little pleasant conversation with them. What do I do about this?*

So finally I think, *well, maybe I should tend to the Strange-Folk for a while.* And so I do. I go grabbing the ragged shirt of this one, & the ill-fitting dress of that one, & the half-put on wig of another. I start to gather them together, & I start to calm them down, *hmmmming*, is what I do, & I get them to *hmmmm* with me.

We eventually gather in a beloved group, hand to hand, even paw to paw, & we look up at the spaceship, & we're calmer now. And now we can have some of that pleasant conversation among us all, with the spaceship up there. Forget about the secrets, forget about the stories, because this is what is happening now. *Ha!* It's gonna be fun!

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### Time . . . Distortions . . . Ensur

*"Time distortions ensue."* That's what he said to me at the beginning of the weekend. The performance had begun on late Friday afternoon, till sometime on Sunday, but hard to say when exactly.

I played a small part at first, nothing really too noticeable or important to the story. I was in the background. Yet always somewhere near to the Main Character of the performance. Him intense, so intense, like a wild wire. That's what I thought. But disconnected from himself too. Somewhere deep down. The wires within lay on the floor, inert.

As the performance moved into Saturday, the girl we traveled with noticed me nearby, & worried I'd lost my fringy scarf. But there it was, partly hanging out of my tie-dyed book-bag at my feet. There it was. *No worries.* I looked up at her to show her.

But she was gone, like she'd been gone for hours. The Main Character looked at me & said, *"Time distortions ensue."*

Come Saturday night, I'd become a kind of vigilante in the story. Taking more of my place in the front of things. I was called different things by different people. *Cenacle, Betsy Bunny Pillow, Dreamwalker.*

No longer wild & wiry, inside or not, he just wasn't. He was calmer. He was starting to learn from me, leaning near me, looking toward where I looked, trying to figure what I saw.

We shared the little stick & stone jew-ell of the Gemini Machine, & learned that what we were doing is what we did best. It seemed so clear & yet it pushed us along, down deeper together.

So I took him along on my dream-walks. Showed him how the many worlds braided together, & where they did: that Ancienne Coffeehouse, the Tangled Gate, the Attic, other places. Showed him the little hut at the Heart of the World, wherein one can travel back to **Unitive Time**. I brought him deep into the White Woods, into a clearing, & I looked at him, & I told him to *stand up straight, now, brother.* He did.

I said, "Now draw a circle in the air & *hmmmm* with me as you do. I'll draw one with you. And we're going to travel this new way now. And you're going to lead us again, & this is the way that you're going to lead us. Now go ahead, do it."

Then it got better. It got *way* better. All that weakness, all those wild wires, all that fading, *nah*, he was come out of it all, becoming the leader he was meant to be. Now knew, how worlds braid, how people braid, how hearts braid, he knew it all. But now he also knew that he didn't have to lead as though following is a weakness. He didn't have to wield his power, as though others needed to be found to kneel before it.

He became calm, he became happy. On Sunday, when I was ready to move on, I knew he was gonna be fine. Just to be sure of it, I took my fringy scarf out of my tie-dyed bag, knotted it smiling 'round his neck, not a word, & departed.

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## Troubles on the Job

You know, I understand that everybody has his or her troubles on the job. But this was an especially challenging one of mine I'll tell you about now. I was working on this document. That's what I do. I work on documents. I try to make them good. Look good, feel good, fly through the air, swim into the seas without drowning, that's what I do.

Now the challenges began because someone had, right off the bat, decided to call this document "The Man With the Diaper on the Butterfly Between His Legs." What kind of title was that for a document? This weren't no porno, but that was the title. They all had decided, in that big room, the glass walls, fancy phones. I wasn't there, just got handed to me. *Go ahead. Do your thing, they urged. Put on your iPod headphones to that crazy radio station we know you hear, & do your thing!*

The whole situation quickly became multi-dimensional. In fact, the harder I worked, the more I realized I was laboring in an endless loop of *almost getting done & then not getting done, of almost getting done & then not getting done, of almost getting done & then not getting done.*

Getting so close, getting to that last page, & then remembering something & going back to fix it. Then there was a link, & then there was a reference, & then there was a footnote, & then there was a citation, & then there was an image. And I kept getting to that last page, & then it would be something else. It was never the same thing, just an endlessly braiding loop. It had become multi-dimensional, I tell you. *It was that kind of day.*

Finally I decided I was done. I sent it off. Put it in a big brown envelope. Squeezed it into that pneumatic tube they call the Chipmunk, or the 'Munk for short, so it'd arise the many, many floors, to somewhere at the top of the endlessly tall building in which I am labored, find its way.

And then I sat back down at my desk in the corner, under the air conditioner that drips, even in the wintertime. And I pulled, slyly smiling, from the bottom desk drawer, the manuscript that really concerned me. Called *Power*.

I read in it about the Great War, & the King who travels from place to place, & how time seems wrong to him. Seems to run backwards, *effect & cause*. He's traced, in this way, backwards through time, from the *end of the world* itself, down these great sandstone steps, to a seeming endless Beach. *Will he find his long-lost beloved?*

I turn the page, & there's only a couple of lines to read. They say, "If you come to the King's Island, & look out to the dark waters of the Wide Wide Sea, there is only one thing you need to worry on, until the King returns from his travels. If you hear distant bells, he'll come-come-a'calling."

There are people near me now. I hurriedly put away my manuscript. One of them has that envelope, that awful document, in his hands. Shake my head, if only to myself. *That kind of day.*

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## What Is the Forever Dreaming?

The question comes up, *what is the forever dreaming?* It's always asked. *Are the Braided Places like veins that run through Heart of the World, through the Heart of the Many Worlds? From the Great Tree, to the lesser Great Trees, to the Many Worlds?* These questions are always asked. Someone's always wanting to know.

Someone's always arriving, sometimes with a little pad of paper & a pencil. Sometimes it's some kind of weird gadget that doesn't look nearly as efficient or easy to use as a rite-typewriter. Usually, when the questions are asked, I'm sitting on my log, the one speckled by rainbow moss, & I'm assembling a big beautiful book. I mean, that's what I'm doing, that's what I often do. Remembrances of my photographic travels in the Attic, on the bus with no roof, & back to **Unitive Time** itself.

I kind of think the people who come with their questions, they ask someone along the way, & that someone says, *well, look for the guy sitting on the log assembling his big, beautiful book, he'll tell ya.* And then they come.

*Come on, man. You come all this way down here, & you're asking me what all this means? You've brought good questions. Come on. Think, man. Stand up. I don't want to sit with you. Stand up! Now raise your arms high. Out. Now breathe. Breathe. Don't just inhale. Breathe. Good. Now listen for a while. Listen. Now take a big sniff, take a big, delicious sniff. Feel it all around you, feel it touching you. Feel it in you. Feel yourself opening up to it, letting out to it. If you feel it, it feels you. Oh, it's gorgeous & beautiful!*

*You want to see Unitive Time? I can't tell you if that'll work but the Hut's over there. If you can figure it out, you can go & get a little bit of your own answer for why there's something instead of nothing.*

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## I Think Often About Narrative

I think often about narrative, about writing narrative, about what narrative is. What it means to tell a story, how to tell it, how to tell it well, how to tell it strange, what any of it means. *Do you know what any of it means? I'm glad you're sitting here, next to me, beloved, cuz otherwise I'd just be talking to myself right now, about narrative.*

Writing narrative, in the past, & in the future, how they link up uncertain. But, by golly, if you start compiling them, you might just see how they connect later. That's what you gotta do. That's what I've been thinking about. That's the conclusion I've come to.

You see, I was sitting in my ZombieTown hovel. It's down that street, past the Coffeehouse from here. Sometimes I take that weird-ass bus they run to get here. And there were Creatures relaxed all around my floor, everywhere. Under hats, & so on. You might not even know they were there. They get cold. They end up under hats. It helps, a little. And it was peaceful.

I was talking to someone about a strange narrative, with a weird structure. I don't think I was talking to the Creatures because they just stop listening when I talk that way. They picked me up later on down the road, as it were, when I started talking about the Great Tree at the Heart of the World.

That raised them up, some even came out from under their hats, a-sniffing. I said, “In this weird narrative, I lived in a room that is one small part of the Great Tree, but I don’t know how I got there. And it doesn’t seem like a bad place to be, as places to be go.”

I closed my eyes, & I imagined cherry blossoms, & lines of a poem about the *end of the world* scattered every which way around this room, inside this Great Tree, inside this weird narrative that I was telling, maybe to the Creatures, in my ZombieTown hovel, down the street, past the Coffeehouse from here.

I follow the cherry blossoms, & the lines of the poem about the *end of the world*, for a long time, till I come to a great city. I’m sitting in a tall city building, in the glass foyer, at a glass table, in a glass chair, & there’s a drawing in front of me. It’s a drawing of a peanut.

My guitarist friend arrives, & says to me, with his own unique crooked smile, “Where are you right now, Raymond? Are you here? Are you in the Great Tree? Are you in your ZombieTown hovel? Are you doing that radio show of yours on *SpiritPlants Radio America*? Where are you?”

Well, I put my finger on chin, because this was a good question, not a tricky question. Shouldn’t have been anyway. But I looked up at my friend with that crooked smile of his own & I said, “In my mind, when it is best & clearest & brightest, there is a cackle-o-phony, everywhere, a *cackle-o-phony*. And that’s why I’m here, & there, & there, & there, & there. *That’s how it is.*”

Well, he hauled me up by my raggedy shirt, gave me a solid pat on my back, & said, “My friend, I’m gonna take you to see your favorite movie. I know where it’s playing, down an alley no one else knows. It’ll be just us. And for a while your *cackle-o-phony* will be quiet, in the seat, next to yours.”

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### The Gemini Machine

Well, it’s not something you’re gonna encounter just *anywhere*, or just *any* day, but you might encounter it *somewhere* on *some* day. *What’s the difference?* Oh, I think there’s a difference. You see, there is the Gemini Machine. Rhymes with *hegemony*. A little branch clasping a pretty little stone jew-ell in its crook.

Now here’s how it works, & maybe this will better explain why one way but not the other. Two people. One holds the little branch, one holds the stone jew-ell. They learn what they do best together, & then they do. They become more than one, more than two.

On the day when I was lucky enough to encounter the Gemini Machine, my beloved & I were riding in our favorite crimson sedan, Sydnee Grand Prix SE, kissing, flirting, playing the old time rock-&-roll on the *SpiritPlants Radio America*. Sometimes I’m up front & she’s in back, sometimes we’re both up front, sometimes we’re both in back. Sometimes my beloved is under a favorite electric blue blanket, smiling. Sometimes I’m with her.

And all the time, I am holding the branch & she’s holding the stone jew-ell. Sometimes we switch off, but always one of our hands is holding one, one of our hands is holding the other, & our other two hands are holding each other. That’s how it works.

It’s not just about kissing & flirting. Could be about other things.

Could be two scientists come together. They are brilliant geniuses & with branch & stone jew-ell held, & other hands held, there comes the answer about the *end of the world* they have sought for so long.

It could be two whose nations both make money off of their war & rivalry. These two are tired of it, tired of using the word *Godd* interchangeably with *money* & *business* & *profit*, *ideology* & so on. Them in the secret Attic of a hotel room, alone, maybe that strange No-Tell some know of. The door locked, a blank piece of paper, a jar of ink, a pen. Hands held, stone jew-ell, little branch. *Time to fill that blank page with peace.*

*What do you think? Maybe it’s coming your way. What will you do with the Gemini Machine? Who will you do it with?*

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### The Gemini Machine (Continued)

My beloved & I embrace the Gemini Machine, kissing, flirting, stone jew-ell & little branch, & Sydnee Grand Prix SE friendly departs us into a black & white ’scape. Her radio still blasting the old time rock & roll.

We’re now in a cloudy canvas, traveling, maybe by train, maybe Creature friends close by. Some of them like trains fo sho.

I look out the window at the black & white ’scape, cloudy, look farther & farther, Gemini Machine deeper & deeper. *What does kissing mean on its far ends?* I’m watching, in my mind’s eye, **RemoteLand**, that cinematic **Beast**, & its sequel, **Three Inches of Blood**, & its variation, **More Fun**, playing in simultaneous mix out there in the black & white ’scape. *Far edges of kissing, Gemini Machine, stone jew-ell, little twig, beloved. Wonderful, wonderful.*

The train speeds up. *Or does the train slow down? Or does it do both?*

“Hey, listen, man, don’t you tell me speed goes just one way or the other! I say no! I say you can go fast & slow at the same time! I’ve felt it, man!”

“Calm down, sir.”

“I’m sorry, man. It was all comforting & calming until I thought about speed going fast or slow, & having to choose.”

“It’s OK, sir. It’s OK.” My beloved nods me too. Smiling gestures our Gemini Machine by reminder.

The train conductor is an old punker. I can see the Mohawk under his trainman’s cap. He’s got tattoos running high & low, pretty ones though, beautiful ones. One shows a kind of strange bus with no roof careening over a black chasm. Another shows those rocking Ramones boys traveling in the far reaches of outer space with Mulronie the Space Pirate & his boon companion Commandeer Cacklebird, in their famous Space Tugboat. *Toot-Toot!*

“You are a canvas, like the black & white canvas we are in,” I say, calmer.



He nods, appreciative. Shows me his blank book of the *urrrr*-tongue. Hands me this book, of the *urrrr*-tongue, & says, “Read this, sir, it’ll balance you out. All the beautiful, all the glorious, all the horrific, all the strange, all the subtle, & all the boring things will mix together in a beautiful Soup at the bottom of your mind. **Unitive Soup.** *Ha!* You won’t worry about the *end of the world* no more.”

I say, “Thank you, brother,” after we’ve exchanged a long, long look. *Thank you, brother.*

I lean my head on my beloved’s shoulder, still Gemini Machine between us, & I glance at that book written in the *urrr*-tongue, every page blank, every page beautiful, every page calming to the riled heart & the restless eye.

*Fast or slow?* No, *calm.* *Urrr*-tongue.

*Fast or slow?* No, *calm.* *Urrr*-tongue.

*Calm.* *Urrrrrr*-tongue. *Calm.* *Calm.*

Who was that old punker trainman? He’s gone. This train is now murky, becoming roseate. *Is it still moving on tracks?*

*Or are we now in two old armchairs, in a strange rosy-lit room?*

*Calm.* *Urrrrrr*-tongue. *Calm.* *Calm.* *Calm.* *Calm.* *Calm.* *Calm.* *Calm.* *Calm.*

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### In a Time of Plague & Protest

I suppose you could say that in a time of plague & protest, one needs to follow other paths of travel than the usual ones. My beloved & I are now traveling through *Labyrinthine [a new fixation]*. The strange, endless book known by many, & a few, & hardly any. Where there are places filled with many words, fewer words, & no words.

We come to this place & that, & I would tell you what places these are, & describe them in detail, but they were not important. We were looking for something, & the places in between were just footsteps along the way. *We weren’t there yet.*

Eventually, we found ourselves out in the desert (*flat, cracked, reaching far ahead of us*) along a strange, endless road, & now this began to become a place that was a trace of *somewhere*, rather than just *on the way* to somewhere. There are few stops on this endless road. We traveled along this endless (*flat, cracked*) desert road, as one does in *Labyrinthine [a new fixation]*, not quite by foot, not quite by vehicle, but *just along*.

There were a couple of stops along the way, not many. A coffeehouse (not like the one where we met), for fancy drinks, little bit of air conditioning, some music not in your own mind, not *hmmmed* by your own lips. But the general feeling in that place was: *you get your fancy drink & you keep on traveling through*. That’s how this endless road through this (*flat, cracked*) desert was. *Get your fancy drink & keep on traveling through*. Not unfriendly. Just not wishing to accumulate anyone for more than a little while. OK, that’s fine.

My beloved finished her fancy drink, & we nodded at each other. Raised our eyes to the sky

& *swooped up!* Straight up, away from the endless (*flat, cracked*) desert road, away from the not quite unfriendly coffeehouse, straight up! Sky, clouds, stars, somewhere else. And then somewhere *else else*. And then somewhere *else else else*.

Till we came to a beautiful perch at the very top of *Labyrinthine [a new fixation]*, from which we could sit together, side by side, holding hands, took out our Gemini Machine, little branch, stone jew-ell. Wondering *what else do we do so well but kiss? What else is there? Is there a number 2?*

We look down upon all the wild trans-dimensional criss-crossed lands of *Labyrinthine [a new fixation]*, & now I have a black pen, & she has a nifty little camera. *Wild laughter!*

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### Letters, As . . .

**Letters:** *as shapes, sounds, clumps, or words, meanings on sheet, meanings of sound, sentences, paragraphs, pages, hand-written varieties, fonts, various surfaces, in dreams, in mind, in space? under water? burnt up?*

*Creatures nearby sniff curiously. We awake.*

*Oh! What just happened?* It must be the laughter that’s coming from the apartment floor below ours. It’s that Sunny’s House of Sunshine & Pizza Den. Sunny’s House of Sunshine is in front. It’s kind of a warehouse, but only very-sorta. Some come to collect on pain caused them, others to compensate for pain they caused. Usually one-on-one matchings, talk &/or sex, nobody forced to do anything. But the rules are commitment & anonymity, whether giving or receiving. And this is it: *You stay till you pay or are paid in full.*

*Does it always work? Does anything? Can you return?* Their motto is: *the next time, it’s on you. Is this always true?* I don’t know. I think they do their best, quite honestly. Who could ask them to do best-er?

And so, I am in bed, twined with my beloved, knowing that those strange thoughts in my head about language probably came from the happy noises jarring me awake, emanating from Sunny’s House of Sunshine below. Now louder music, wild cacklings.

It could be. Maybe not. Maybe it was something else. But you know, when you live above such a place, & you know that they’re trying to do good in this world, not worrying its far ending, it makes you want to turn to your beloved in bed, if you’re indeed with your beloved in bed, & say to her, or him, or them, but in this case her: *you are a lovely soul.*

Never too early or late in the day to say so. I think we probably carried on from there.

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### When You Go Under the Covers

I followed the night’s **Beast** right on down. *Down deep, y’know?* What happens when I go under the covers, & then under the covers’ covers, & then under the covers’ covers’ covers, & so on,

until that's what all I seemed to do. And then, without knowing, I was arrived. It seemed to get darker & worse. The silence where music does not go.

I'd given away for disposal all of my little Creature friends & notebooks. I don't know why, but twas darker & worse like this, down under the covers' covers' covers. Then I started to climb back, because I panicked. Suddenly, these covers *didn't matter*, nor how many there were of them. *Didn't matter* if I couldn't count the number. In a kind of slow, furious panic, I began to seek to get them all back. Felt like the *end of the world*. All beloved unbraiding.

It involved reaching out farther than my hands could reach, toward skies that sucked like big hungry cheeks; climbing what I couldn't climb, buildings with an up & no down. But I kept going. I ended up on a truck, & my notebooks were lined one after the next on a shelf, in the back of this truck. I didn't know if it's all of them but it sure seems like a lot. I didn't know how many notebooks I have. Is that all of them? *I didn't know*.

The truck pulled into a processing center behind a roofless bus blowing out black smoke. I hopped off the truck, half-crazed, the last of the covers falling off me, & I looked for the guy in charge. I demanded them all. He nodded, for what he knew what I'd seen, been himself too down deep under the covers' covers' covers.

I got them all. I got people to help me. I got strangers that wouldn't talk to me on a daytime city street to help me. I got them *all* involved. This was going to be their satisfaction too.

And there's the White Bunny, & there's the little pink-nosed bear with the red stripy hat! There's Pirth, the purple furry dancing Creature! And they knew how it was under the covers' covers' covers. They're not mad. They're happy to see me.

My notebooks, they're unharmed. Got a black pen in my pocket too again. Beloved's smile to my open eyes.

So when you find yourself slipping with the night's **Beast** under the covers, one after the next, give a shout. *Give a roar! Make noise*. Use those sharp teeth of yours to grab on to that cover, *bite it, bite through it, bite through another*.

These aren't the friendly blankets you know & love so well. They don't care how far down you go. You gotta *bite & chew & claw your way back*, & *you can*. *You can*. You can get *it* all back & more, whatever *it* means, whatever *more* is to you. You can get it all back. But you gotta try, you gotta do. *You gotta do*.

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### If You Reach Back Deep in This Mythopoeia

Now if you reach back deep in this mythopoeia, I mean *deep* in this mythopoeia, deeper, deeper in this mythopoeia, there is **Unitive Time**. Before clocks & calendars, before names & enemies, before ideologies & favorite football teams, there is **Unitive Time**.

*Was it good? Was it paradise? Was it Eden? Was it Valhalla? Was it heaven? Words?* Now I'm no expert, but I don't think it was any one or the other of these. I think of **Unitive Time** as being without the bifurcation of waking or sleeping, when each & all touched each & all. I think

it was something other than paradise or anything like that, good or bad. It was more where things began, like a canvas. When it's blank, nothing's been applied to it yet. *Is the canvas good? Is the canvas bad?*

And then the canvas begins to build. Strokes of the brush or, with **Unitive Time**, the Wide Wide Sea, somewhere above the Great Tree at the Heart of the World. Eventually the Islands, the One Woods. All of these filled in the canvas in different ways. All were part of one. Eventually, the natural sounds these natural things made urged into being a kind of music, a *hmmm*, which traced through & braided all closer together. And then something in the *hmmm* cackled!

Something in the *hmmm* wanted to play, & so cackled an Imp! She was drawn up in a bucket of deep earth by a braided thread from the Heart of the World, to the Beach of Many Worlds where lives Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle. And the Imp smiled, beloved of Abe, & the Imp said *ke?*

*Where is she bound? What will it be like?* Now that's what you get to learn if you dig down deep enough in this mythopoeia . . . deeper . . . deeper . . . deeper . . . deeper . . . deeper . . .

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### Once a Man Had Come to a Great City

Here's an old story for you, but it's one that feels fresh & new as well. Once a man had come to a great city to seek his fortune. He wanted to learn a good trade, but had to leave behind his own war-torn land. The ending of one world for the beginning of the next. He became a citizen of his new home.

At night he dreamed sad dreams of his old home, & would visit his beloved Village & the White Woods nearby. In these dreams, he was cheered by the company of a White Bunny with mezzmering eyes, & a merry little cackling Imp. He comforted his days in learning photography from a very able teacher, & then teaching others too.

As an old man, his adopted home now turned somewhat cruelly against immigrants, even those like himself who had lived there for so long. Sadly, he chose to return to the home of his youth. He returned to his little hut on the edge of his Village.

He was unpacking his suitcase when he found his ballot for the upcoming election in the great city he had left. Now heartbroken, that he would not be able to cast one more vote in his forsaken new land. Now unpacked, he sadly slept again in the bed of his youth. Laying his ballot tenderly by his white-faced pink cat radio.

In Dreamland, he found himself with the White Bunny & the merry little Imp. He was young again, & swift, & they traveled the White Woods together. Many dreams like this, until they left him, near to a strange box, alone in a clearing. The box had a message on it, which read:

***Vote Today!***

He dropped his ballot, in this box & woke up, & the ballot on his bedside by his radio was gone.

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### The Photographer

I had traveled for a long time across the depth & the breadth of this magickal Island. Its beautiful endless White Woods. I sometimes wondered about how can an Island, with a shore, have a Woods within of no discernable size? Once you enter, there's no far end. You come out where you came in, never the other side. I tried. It doesn't work. It's not how it works here.

But I had my nifty little camera, which I'd brought to photograph this Island, thinking that this was a familiar task to me, with steps & tools I well knew. But I learned, *no, that's not how it works here.*

And I struggled for a long time to take a picture of anything. It's not that my nifty little camera didn't work. I was sure it did. I was sure too that I had a very deep supply of film. I was sure of all this. I checked the film in my knapsack. *Deep supply.*

I studied close the nifty little camera in my hands. Each part of it worked, & they worked all together. But I was stymied. I could not begin to embrace this beloved new home yet.

It's like this. I wanted to take a picture of everything that I saw because it all seemed so related, & so taking a picture of *one* thing or *another* thing seemed the wrong move. And so I wandered for a long time, just looking & listening, sniffing, tasting, feeling around.

And I must admit that I began to despair. I thought, *well, I can always leave. After all, I've determined that I'll always end up going out the way I came in here.*

I'd tried it many times, to come out somewhere else. I'd enter these White Woods, travel what seemed like hundreds of miles, not keeping or counting my direction. But I would always come out to the same stretch of Beach where I had long ago arrived.

Sometimes I couldn't even do that, which is the other thing that I have to explain. I couldn't leave at all, unless I intended to. See, the White Woods will help you if you help yourself. But if you have no goal or destination, the White Woods won't make one up for you. And *when* I intended to leave, I'd find myself on the Beach, precisely where I'd arrived. Even *this* required intention.

I despaired over all this until one day, as I had been long traveling through the White Woods, marveling as I always did, from the moment I got up until the moment I slept. Looking up at the stars, wondering if tonight they'd be white on black or black on white. Wishing to take my first picture, not knowing if I ever would. I came upon something I had never seen before. *I just needed a hint of where to begin.*

I came upon a tree with a small soup tureen attached to it. It had a ladle hooked below the tureen, safely out of the fray, with a bowl & a spoon. I tipped back the lid of the tureen, & I looked in, & I sniffed. *Oh my gosh, the most beautiful Soup anyone could have ever imagined!* I'd never, *never* known the like.

And I decided that this felt like a gift to any who would happen upon it, & so I slid out the bowl, & I slid out the spoon, & I tipped back the lid, & I used the ladle that was hanging down there to ladle me out some Soup. I sat right there, next to that tree, & I began to sip my beautiful Soup.

And I received what I needed most. I fell into a restful dream. In this restful dream, I followed instructions from someone or something which went like this:

*“Close your eyes.  
Think of where you are now.  
Now think of the Red Bag, tall before you.  
Think of your destination.  
Walk on through.  
Open your eyes.  
You're there!”*

When I woke up, vividly remembering that dream & its instructions, I cleaned off my Soup bowl & spoon & everything, got them all put back into place & ready for the next. Then I stood up & followed those instructions right there & then.

My destination was the place where I could start taking pictures. I closed my eyes. I thought of where I was. I thought of the Red Bag. I thought of where I wanted to go, I walked on through, & I arrived to the place where I would take my very first picture on that magickal Island. A place where many others cross & learn too. *Abhh, lovely.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### My New Job

My new job is to document these White Woods, to figure out how this is done. There is no manual for this. No guide. No instructions anyone hands you, with pictures, easy-to-understand text. Still, *a job's a job*, as they say. I'll take what I can get. Maybe I can get myself a nice hovel to live in, & leave this Attic I've been squatting in so long.

So I begin my documenting by just wandering about, sniffing the cool air, enjoying the gray sky, wondering at the scatterings of leaves all about me, some of them damp. The patterns they seem to form high & low, as though language if I could but read it. *Is this documenting?* I'm not sure. *After all, who's to say when you don't have a guide?*

Then it's like a Trolley comes through. The kind you might see in the White Woods, which is to say it's bloo & pink. On the front it says *La Transit*. Nothing like that roofless bus I usually have to catch.

The driver is kind of bloo & pink as well, smiles me on board with a friendly wave of paw. “Hello, passenger!” the driver says heartily, urging me to take my seat, put on my seatbelt. “Safety first!” we say merrily to each other. *Toot! Toot!* And the trolley begins to head on through the White Woods on tracks that seem to pick up & lay down just in front of & behind itself.

We arrive to a great city I feel like I once knew. Underneath a vast highway. Feels like the

whole world's down under here. Strange stores, strange food stands, people in costumes & headdresses. Very friendly, very friendly. I get dropped off in front of a movie theatre. Ah, my second job. *Nada Theatre* of course.

So I realize I better hurry to it. I am one of several cashiers at the Nada. Of course the cash register only has a couple of buttons & I get them wrong when I try to sell tickets to the few people who come. Line starts to form, but I can't sell them tickets because I don't know how! It gets worse & worse, & I think to myself, *I can't do this. End of this world.* Guess the Attic will have to keep me awhile longer.

I walk out of the Nada Theatre. I cry to the air & the gray skies around me, "I can document, but I cannot sell movie tickets!"

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### Arriving to a Round, Muddy Driveway

Arriving to a round, muddy driveway of that famous old house, we walk right up the steps & pass through the front door. Gotta take off your shoes or boots, though. Can't bring all that muddiness on in.

Gonna buy a postcard, but there don't seem to be any for sale. What kind of famous old house is this, without a postcard for sale? Guess I don't know.

Worse, I get lost from those with whom I came almost immediately. I guess I just picked the wrong hallway to go down in this famous old house. End up in some kind of Attic?

And before I can look left or right twice, I'm in a (*flat, cracked*) desert. But at least I'm not alone. I'm with others, but they don't seem as confused as me, & they look a little better dressed for the situation. Their heads & their bodies dressed in garb to cover up from the (*flat, cracked*) desert heat.

I follow along with them for a while. We arrive to a kind of a, oh I don't know what you'd call it, a *bubble cackle-o-phony*, is what we arrived to. I don't know how else to put it. It was a vast place of bubbles, & they were performing like it was one troupe or something. Like it was a *Bubble Cackle-o-Phony Carnival*.

And, I don't know, maybe there was even a war. And there was music too. Heavy, pounding, drumming music, like to urge the bubbles to wild in their play or their Carnival or their war. it was hard to say what was going on.

I'd like to think that bubbles don't go to war. *What would be the point?*

Then I found the music was drawing me away, which was just as well, since I didn't think I could really do much for all of this except admire it, gape-mouthed. I was drawn away toward a curtain. It was a blue curtain, & I thought *oh, maybe behind that curtain is the way back to the front door or somewhere more interesting that I can understand.* I was game for either.

But see, behind that blue curtain was a red curtain. OK, for some reason, I was still game. Sometimes you've gotta build up the drama. Get everybody worked up & paying attention,

as it were.

And then there was a yellow curtain behind that one, & I thought, *oh, wait a minute here, is this like the bubbles back there? Are the curtains now doing something together? Maybe I'm missing the point again of all this?* Because then one curtain after the next opened. *Violet. Red. Orange. Indigo.*

Suddenly I snapped to.

*What?* Oh. I was on the phone. That's what happened. I'm on the phone for a job. But this guy who was supposed to be interviewing me was telling me all about his struggles. Sick family members, & hard times down deep under covers, lost his little branch & stone . . . *mumblemmummbblemmummmbble . . .*

I think I just drifted off for a moment, strange long moment, I have to say. Bubble Carnivals, or wars, lack of postcards, & so on. Anyway, I agreed to meet him, & we ended up at a coffeehouse nearby, in this kind of shadowy corner.

We both sit in these old armchairs but they're looking in opposite directions so he interviews me the entire time looking away from me, & I was looking away from him in response.

It was like we were secret agents or something, & I never did figure out if it was him or his company that was called Figga. But we're talking back & forth, & finally he stands & smiles, & I don't even know how I knew it since I wasn't looking at him directly, but he started walking off, & there was something about him that made me think, *wow, I scored a job because he's headed right for the bathroom. What else would you do if you just had a satisfactory interview with someone & found someone you needed for a position?*

I follow him into the bathroom & it's just the worst place you could possibly imagine. Only three sinks & one is out. Ceiling's falling down, pipes are exposed. Well, I barely get my business done & then, when I come out of the bathroom, & look around for my new employer, he is nowhere to be found! *Another quick ending.*

And I still don't know, to this day, *was it him or was it his company that was named Figga?*

\*\*\*\*\*

### I Was Reading a Book Called *Power*

One time, many turns ago, I was reading a book called *Power*, about a professor who traveled long years & miles by the famous bus with no roof. Arriving at last to a club, with a stage that said "The Pink Floyd!" high above it.

And a crowd was gathered. And he felt like it all made sense now, all his long years & miles of traveling by the famous bus with no roof, with the questions he carried with him. *It all made sense now. Unitive Time*, the trace, the Attic, forever dreaming, *end of the world, everything.*

I look up from my book, & there he is, sitting over there in an armchair, in a shadowy corner of the Ancienne Coffeehouse.



And I walk over to say, "Hello. I'm an admirer of your work."  
And he looks at me & he says, "Who are you?"  
And I say, "No one really, just an admirer of your work. I was reading in my book about you just now." I show him my book titled *Power*. He takes the book from me.

He looks at the front cover, & the back cover, & he reads a few pages within. Then he says, "This isn't me. I never found who I was looking for. That's how I ended up here, with no answers to give to you. I'm sorry. You'll have to keep looking, & your readers will have to keep looking. That's all I can tell you. Go back to your own armchair."

And so I did, & I resumed reading about the professor in *Power*. A *real* hero who *did* find his answers.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Season of Lights, in a Very Strange Year

Season of Lights, in a very strange year. This spaceship has traveled unknown distance in time. Everything before the spaceship is ancient history, mythopoeia, rumor, wish.

We live on this beloved spaceship, traveling through space. It's a beautiful spaceship for one so old. It's still green in its heart, & multicolored everywhere. Just think of how many colors are in this beautiful spaceship! Fruits, leaves, seeds, water, sky, clouds. Its roof of stars! How it all braids together. It could not be a better home to travel through the universe for so long.

It's been a strange year. We arrive to the Season of Lights again. Many of us who were here for the last one, I guess you could say are here in a different way, this go 'round. They're part of the spaceship again. But many did not die old, & many of the old ones did not die well. Now our best & brightest are starting to pass around medicines, medicines that will be shared all 'round this spaceship, for better travels & better days.

So a kind word & a touch of the heart for this spaceship, & all its many inhabitants, for all those moments when we are grateful down to our very bones, & all those many moments when we are not. Look up to the sky tonight, & think to yourself, *what a wonderful way to travel through the universe at amazing speeds, on an amazing spaceship.*

None know the hand or paw that wrought, but whoever or whatever wrought this spaceship, this green & golden & rainbow-colored spaceship, *thank you*. We are the grateful trace of that which made us. *And thank you. And thank you.*

And we will be grateful for the medicines that heal & protect our bodies, & we will try for the harder ones too, the medicines for our hearts, & the medicines for our souls. Grateful ever of this beautiful spaceship, long traveling the universe.

*Thank you, & thank you, & thank you again.*



\*\*\*\*\*



### The Channeler

Faded khaki backpack  
sliding off slim shoulders

"Dear ones, do not fear . . ."

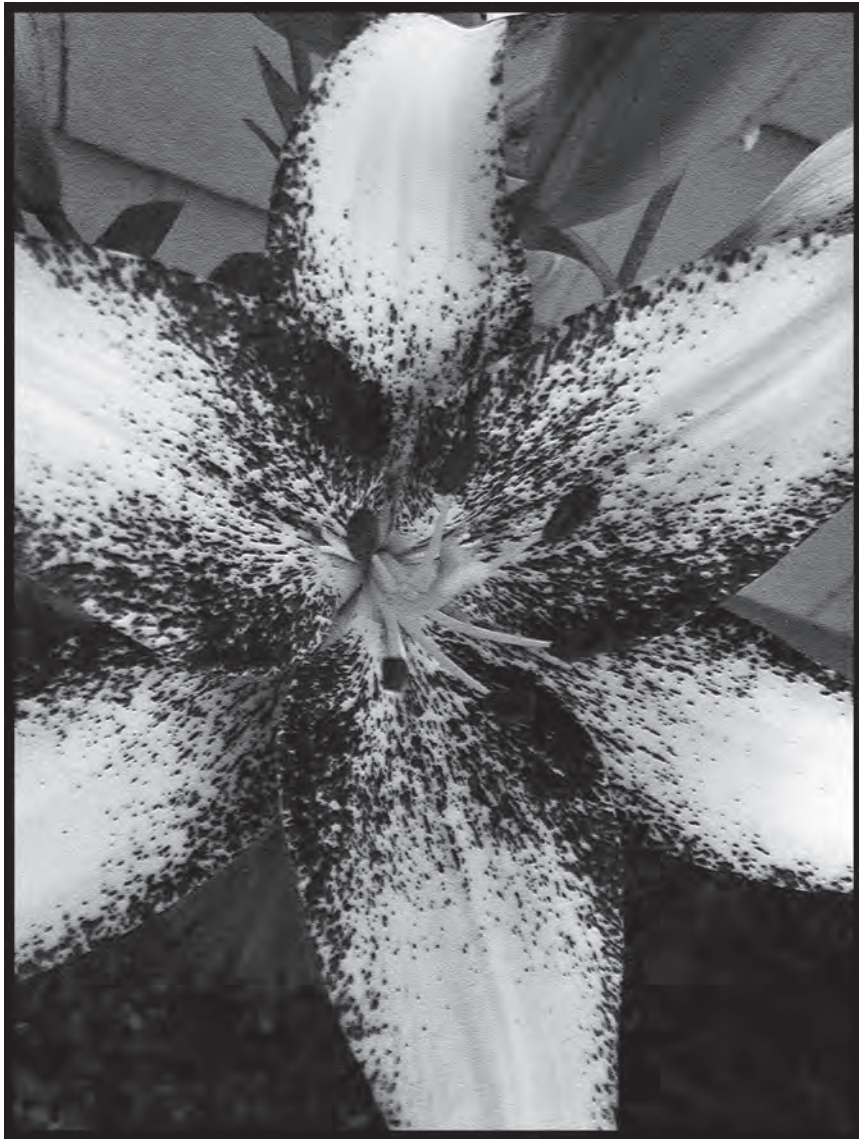
emaciated specter  
rasping portents

"Arise. Have faith. Believe.  
All is for a purpose . . ."

A shudder, a thud  
A heap on the sidewalk

His message  
etched in our minds

\*\*\*\*\*



## Rivers of the Mind

[A Novel]

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

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

### *Chapter 17: The Day Before the Sinkhole*

#### *i. Phillip*

An hour left on our shift. A Friday. Slow day. Only two calls. So they put us out on traffic duty. Grace was looking down at her phone in the passenger seat. I was taking readings of the passing cars, as we were nestled in a hidden driveway surrounded by tall trees. 35. 36. 34. 35. 35. 40 . . . 40. Was it worth it? 39. 37. 20. Hey, come on, buddy. Can you keep with the flow of traffic? Weird. I peeked my head forward just a bit. Colorado plates. Bet that's why they slowed down so much.

"Grace."

"Huh?"

"We got a white Subaru with Colorado plates going 15 under the speed limit. Looks like a rental."

She sighed, and locked her phone. "Alrighty. Let's go."

I turned on the sirens and pulled forward, racing up behind the car. The two kids inside started frantically talking to each other. Flailing around. Probably trying to hide something. Who knows? They pulled off to the shoulder.

"We got a suspicious vehicle from the great state of Colorado out here. Please standby," I spoke into the radio, before turning to my partner.

"You wanna get it, or me?"

"I can do it."

#### *ii. Grace*

Anything to get out of that goddamned car. Being around Phillip had been different since that night with the field. I don't blame him or think less of him for it but, if he was in a bad mood, it was hard not to get sucked in.

Hanging around this Dusty character was making it worse. Rubbing off on him. You couldn't talk to him for fifteen minutes without hearing about how the . . . Deep State . . . was putting fluoride in our water, or how there were hidden cameras

in the woods outside of his house.

I went up to the side of the car. The fellow driving had long brown hair, blue eyes, sort of stubbly face. His girlfriend looked Hispanic or something, couldn't really tell. He rolled down his window.

"Good afternoon, Officer," he said in a thick German accent.

"*Sprechen-sie, Deutsch, mein herr?*"

"*Ja, meine Frau und ich sind hier im Urlaub. Sie sprechen gut deutsch, wo haben Sie gelernt?*"

### iii. Phillip

I could hear Grace talking in muffled German through the window. The man she'd pulled over laughed, and his wife reached forward to shake her hand. She asked them a few questions, before the man stepped out and led her to the back so she could look through the trunk. She glanced back at me, raising her eyebrows. The two didn't have anything but some luggage. Probably tourists, I supposed.

She strode back to the car. "He's from the same town as my husband. Rosenheim. What are the chances?"

"Probably pretty slim, I'd imagine."

"Yup, small world. Wife was from Italy, I guess. Visited family in Denver and came out to see the hill country. He kept getting pulled over for speeding so he was trying to go slower."

"Right. Makes sense, I guess," I shrugged, and drove us back to the speed trap. Forty-five more minutes and we could leave. I was anxious to get the hell out of there. Had to meet up with Dusty after he got off work. We pulled back into our spot and I resumed taking readings. 35. 36. 34. 33. 35.

"So tomorrow, I guess, is the big day, huh?"

"Yep, sure is."

"You got your, uh, Nike sneakers ready?"

I tried to laugh. "Oh, come on, it's not like that." The humor didn't come across.

"No need to get so defensive."

"I'm not getting defensive. Just . . ." I sighed. "We're going with Reeboks for this one. I'm supposed to pick up the Kool-Aid, and Dusty's bringing along the rat poison."

"Right," Grace laughed softly. "You really think something is gonna happen?"

"I'm not sure. Dusty seems pretty convinced."

"He does. Maybe he's on to something. Then again, maybe he's just skipped one too many doses of his medication."

"I don't know, Grace. Seems like a pretty level-headed fellow to me."

"Yeah, right . . ."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I asked him what he thought of the weather, and he ranted for half an hour about the United Nations, FEMA camps, and secret alien bases under the Gulf of Mexico."

"He's just a very serious-minded person. You'll see tomorrow. You're . . . you're still gonna tag along, right?"

"Well, something's sure as hell going on here, and no one else is looking into

it, so yeah, I'll be there. It's just gonna depend. Tanner's got a soccer game tomorrow, so I'll have to be there either in the morning or the afternoon. But I'll be there."

"Gotta put family first, that's for sure."

"Yeah. You, uh, talked to Kurt about this?"

"Don't know how. But he's probably gonna be doing homework over at that, uh, Isabelle girl's house."

"Homework, huh?"

"That's what he keeps sayin'."

"This is Isabelle Grove, right? Same Isabelle Grove we arrested for shoplifting five years ago? Her dad works at the scrap metal yard, doesn't he?"

"Yep, that's the one. She's not gotten into trouble much since then. Guess she's in some kind of, uh, computer club or something. Whenever I see her, she tries to sell me these, uh, Byte Coins or something like that. Some kind of, uh, computer money. Kurt's always talking about it too. Long as its keepin' them out of trouble, and away from drugs, I suppose."

"Right, right. So, what, you think they're fixing to date or . . ."

"Oh, they probably are, just haven't got around to tellin' me yet." I gulped. The truth of it was, I hadn't talked all that much to Kurt. I didn't know what was going on with him. Ever since I caught him smoking pot, he kept to himself in his room, playing his computer games. Wasn't sure what to do. At least he was less angry at me than he was at his mom. Hardly talked to her. Neither did I.

I tried changing the subject. "This old speed trap sure ain't what it used to be, is it?"

"Everyone and their brother knows about it." Grace sighs. "Guess we should probably head back to the station soon, huh?"

"Suppose we could. Think rush hour's just about petered out anyway."

### iv. Grace

We pulled out of the speed trap, and sped on down the highway, back to the station. It was a sleepy day there too. The same guy who'd been sleeping off a hangover in one of our three holding cells that morning was now clutching his head, and staring down at his bruised hands.

Marcia, the lady at the front desk, briefly looked up from a copy of *People* magazine, and waved at us with a smile. I waved back at her, even though Marcia was a catty bitch who seemed to think this was a goddamn high school cafeteria and not a police station. We lost Laura, the normal front desk person, last year when she finished her CNA license and went to work at the nursing home. Now *she* was a good receptionist. I don't know who the fuck decided to hire Marcia.

Right as Phillip was leaving, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Grace, you mind if I have a word with you?" the chief asked in a polite, business-like voice.

Phillip looked back over his shoulder, suspiciously.

"See ya tomorrow," I said.

"Yup, see ya tomorrow."

"You folks got plans for the weekend?" the chief asked.

"Kid's got a soccer game, and we were all gonna grab some dinner afterwards. Tanner really looks up to Phillip," I explained. Not a complete lie. Tanner's always been a bit star-struck around Phillip since I told him about the time Phillip apprehended

a suspect in an armed robbery after seeing him in a gas station.

"Ain't that sweet?" He shut the door behind him. "Actually, I was hoping to chat with you about Phillip for a moment."

"Alright. What's going on?"

"Well, I know he's had a hard time lately, and he had that little incident where you were thinking somebody drugged him. And, since then, seems he's been a little . . . well, he just ain't been himself lately. Seems a little on edge."

"He's been depressed. Doctor has him on some new medication is all, as far as I know. Got it mixed up."

"Seems like he's been awfully interested in these, um, angel sightings around town."

"Sure, but I think most folks are, huh?"

"Interested, sure, but don't think it really warrants serious investigation. Do you?"

"Serious investigation? Oh, no, no. That's not what I meant."

"He's not been looking into any of this on his own, has he?"

I hesitated. I was getting the impression the chief already knew Phillip *and* I had been investigating, and that he knew about the records I pulled. "Well, on the day all those sightings came in, we did go around to double-check some of the stories. He was thinking it might be some kind of organized prank or something."

"Right. I was wondering about that. So are you all . . . I don't know . . . planning on filling out a report of some kind about that?"

"Well, of course. He's just been trying to narrow down a description of some kind, you know? Sounded like it was all the same person to him."

"Hmm. Interesting. You know, this is the kind of thing I'd like to hear about. Not sure why y'all didn't keep me posted on it."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"It's fine. I understand. Well, thanks for letting me know. When you find the time to write the report, I'd love to see it." He crossed his arms.

"Right. We'll have it on your desk soon as we can."

"Good. And . . . well, I hope you don't mind me asking. Noticed that you'd, um, pulled some old case records. Mind telling me about that?"

"Well, I was, uh, curious about the data collection facility, you know? They took us down and debriefed us, but . . ."

"I see. Now, I understand your curiosity here, and I don't want you to take this the wrong way, since you two are some of the finest officers we have, but I'd strongly recommend keeping your curiosity about that old base to a minimum. Do you understand? It's a very sensitive installation."

I nodded, but what the chief said irked me. "Right. It's just . . . well, there was a case I came across in the files. A girl named Mary Ann. Guess she disappeared from a bar in San Antonio. Someone saw her mouthing for help from a car in town. Case closed pretty abruptly. It just stood out to me." I cleared my throat. "No one followed up on that evidence."

The chief, caught off guard, frowned faintly, but tried his best to withhold any emotion.

"Cold cases like that always stick out to me," I continued, "especially when there was evidence no one bothered looking into. I wasn't sure why I'd come across it looking for information about the base either, but there's no statute of limitations for murder in the state of Texas."

The chief gulped, and came closer to me. He looked genuinely disturbed. Guilty even. My heart started pounding. I sure as hell didn't expect him to look this guilty when I brought up a murder that happened when he was barely ten years old.

"I understand," he said, looking me dead in the eyes as he came closer, muttering under his breath. "You bet your ass I understand, Officer. Back when I was a detective, I spent every night in the cold case files. But just trust me when I say there's certain rabbit holes in those files that you do not want to go down."

I had never seen the chief act this way before. Usually he was amicable, professional, even when upset. Now he looked worse than Dusty. Paranoid, conspiratorial. "Trust me, Grace. I'm not trying to threaten you. I'm trying to keep you and Phillip out of trouble."

"I see. So I should just forget about it, I guess."

"That's what I'd advise," he grumbled, backing away towards his desk, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Best case scenario, all you do is end yourself in a goddamn bureaucratic nightmare." He shook his head. "Just between you and me, alright, that place wasn't always a data collection facility. Back in the day . . . Well, even I'm not sure. I just know that when I started looking into it back in the seventies, I had government agents showing up at my door in the middle of the night, warning me to stop. I know that sounds crazy. I'm just saying, Grace. Something . . . I don't know what, but *something* happened there. I'm sorry to be so frank. I shouldn't have . . . I shouldn't have told you any of this."

*v. Phillip*

I started to leave, suspicious of the chief talking to Grace, but not wanting to pay it too much mind, before I noticed that the pretty new receptionist had a nice painting in the background on her desktop. I leaned in to have a closer look. She had on this perfume that smelled absolutely heavenly, these red painted nails, curled brown hair. Suddenly it hit me. I recognized the painting.

"Sorry to bother you, Miss, uh . . . is that Camille Pissarro on your desktop?"

She set the magazine down, and looked over her shoulder, smiling. Holy *goddamn*, that smile. She had her lipstick on just perfectly, her faint brown eyes sparkling in the light.

"I didn't peg you as a fan of French Impressionism."

"I didn't peg you as an art history type, either. *The Banks of the Oise near Pontoise*, isn't it?"

"Impressive. We had the original at the museum where I did my internship before I came here."

"Where was that?"

"Indianapolis."

"Now how in the hell did you go from one of the biggest art museums in the country to the front desk of a police department in the middle of Texas?"

"I find myself asking the same question every day. I guess it's not what I had in mind when I got my Master's in Art History, but here we are." She stared back at me, sort of blushing, but I couldn't tell.

"Well, we're all glad to have you here. We've got a lot of problems with uh, art forgery, you know, in this area."

"Oh, do you?"

"Oh yeah, just the other day, I had to bust up a gang of ruffians tryin to sell



a forged copy of *The Port of Morgat* by Redon for a dime bag of meth.”

“I’m surprised they didn’t call me in,” she laughed weakly. “You know, I’ve been dying to find someone I could talk to about this stuff.”

“Well, it’s not every day you run into someone who even knows who Camille Pissarro is around here. We should . . .” *Remember your sensitivity training, Phillip. For the love of GOD, remember your sensitivity training.* “We should chat more often.”

“If you’re free this weekend, maybe we could grab some coffee.”

“Oh, uh. Coffee. Yeah. Yeah, I’d love to grab some coffee. I got a, uh, a thing going on tomorrow. Maybe, uh, maybe Sunday morning, ’round eight o’clock, if you’re free?”

“How’s eight-thirty?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“You ever been to a place called Java Ranch? It’s right by my house!”

“Can’t say I have, but I’ll look it up, and I’ll meet you there.”

“Alright, I’ll put it in my calendar. Phillip, that’s your name, right? Sorry, I’m terrible with names.”

“Yep. That’s what they call me. I’ll see you then. I should probably, uh, probably get home, but nice talking to you.”

“Sure, see you on Sunday.”

#### vi. Marcia

A person! I talked to a human being! I had a conversation with a man about something other than a truck, a gun, or football for the first time in a year and a half! It was a miracle! I tried not to look too excited to have a friend. I didn’t want to seem like, I don’t know, I was desperately lonely or anything. I wasn’t.

No, of course I wasn’t. I wasn’t weird. I had not spent the last week obsessing over an alien conspiracy theory alone in my apartment. I was a perfectly normal woman. I had perfectly normal interests. I took a deep breath and looked back at the magazine. Good work, Marcia. You have a friend. A work-friend. Now don’t screw it up.

The door to the right of me opened, and Grace came out. I stiffened up my back and tried to look as normal as I could. I smiled up at her. She sort of scowled back. I could never read her. I couldn’t read most of the people here. Was she angry? Did I have something on my face?

“Have a good weekend,” I said.

“You too,” she smiled briefly, and paused.

Was she waiting for me to say something? I should say something, right? That’s what a receptionist does. “Got any plans?” I asked.

“Just spending time with family.”

“You know, there’s a story going around online there’s supposed to be some kind of UFO landing or something,” I said. Was that the right thing to say? Do receptionists talk about things like that?

She looked a little irritated. “Didn’t hear about that one,” she chuckled. “Was that in the news, or . . .?”

“Some, uh, blogger, took a video of this alien earlier this week. Pretty funny, huh?” Funny. It *was* a funny thing, the thing that I was talking about. Right? But she wasn’t laughing. It was *not* a funny thing. Right. I sounded like I thought it was

real. OK.

“People sure are crazy,” I said, hoping to insinuate that, yes, I believed that people were crazy.

She rolled her eyes. “Sure are. You get a lot of crackpots around here.”

“Well, I’ll see you later! Have a good day!” I paused. It wasn’t day. It was night.

Grace shut the door. “Night.”

I started to pack up my stuff. 8:30 on Sunday morning. Coffee. Work-friend. Work-friend = Phillip. Cool. Great.

#### vii. Phillip

I waited by my car in a mostly empty parking lot in the next town over. It was almost night-time. The air felt heavy and cold. Dusty pulled up, his face anxious, and then stepped out of the truck. He mouthed something to himself in frustration as he got out, slammed the door, and then walked across the parking lot.

“Do you have the documents?” he asked.

I handed him a stack of papers.

“Fascinating.”

“Now you don’t tell anyone I gave those to you. You could get me suspended,” I told him.

“Of course not. I can keep a secret.” Dusty looked through the documents. “Look at this here. Her friends reported that she’d been seen leaving the bar with a man, described as a six-foot-tall Caucasian male with dark brown hair. That matches the description of the last case almost perfectly.”

“Sure does.”

“Jesus Christ. Who knows what they did to her? Last seen in Fredericksburg, Texas at an intersection, mouthing the words ‘Help me’ to a Miss Molly Perkins while she was out walking her dog. Police never found a body.”

“What do you think?”

“It’s too soon to say for sure. I’ll need to cross-reference it with the other documents. If I start printing just anything, I’ll lose my credibility. But thank you.”

\* \* \* \* \*





**Still**

I had a dream about you last night.  
Our vices had wings and our fears could breathe fire.  
—Crystal Hudson, “Dreaming is for Lovers”  
I’m strong, steadfast as a night  
sky with my resolutions  
and my fervent promises. Still,  
I’m frightened out of my wits  
that I might restart my vain,  
my greedy, my passionate pleasures.  
I want to light up an imported  
cigarette, smoke it in the dark  
while I sip an Irish whiskey  
poured over big craggy cubes  
of ice. I want to ignore food,  
and stare into the blackness through  
hollowed-out eyes, want whatever  
I wear to be too large. How I love  
those sexy corruptions—the warp  
and woof of my sensuous shawls.  
Yes, I’ve left them behind. I am  
healthier, clearer in life and lung. Still,  
I wake each morning to find myself  
relentlessly desirous of my old vices,  
tethered to my dreams.

\* \* \* \* \*



**AbandonView**



## Nathan D. Horowitz

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### Reaching Up

A duke and duchess trick don Quixote and Sancho Panza,  
the men who believe anything,  
into thinking they're flying through the sky on a wooden horse.  
Afterward, Sancho claims that while they were in the sky,  
he played with the Pleiades,  
seven little goats.

"Two of them are green," he reports,  
"two are red, two are blue,  
and one is a mixture of all three."

The duke and duchess change the subject  
before he can rattle off more celestial nonsense.

Without pausing my night walk,  
I pause the audiobook.  
In the artificial pond,  
the bass bullfrog repeats his deep word.  
Cicadas chitter in the trees.  
The audiobook is overwhelmingly pleasurable.  
I need a break from it,  
to be silent and somber.

After all, we're all dying, remember?  
You, me, Cervantes, Panza, Quixote.  
On a vast lawn, three saplings  
wrapped in white netting against cicadas  
seem marble statues,  
afterimages of accomplished or beautiful dead.

A patch of sidewalk has dark stains like blood.  
I know what this means.  
I walk on the dark carpet,  
and under the mulberry tree,  
like a bear rising on its hind legs,  
toward dark clusters in which the sticky

light of the sun is captured,  
I reach up.

Next day at noon, temp in the 90s,  
I walk down York in my Crocs  
to Belvedere Market, where a jazz trio is playing,  
and pick up my new glasses from the  
ophthalmologist. The receptionist  
wants me to try them on. Overheated, I comply.  
Holding my breath, I unmask, don the eyewear,  
turn toward the mirror on the desk.

"Yes, they're fine," I say, once I'm re-masked,  
im- and depressed with how clearly I could see  
my sweat and the age lines on my face.

Out the door, in the hot shade, my ears sip cool jazz.  
I tap my foot. One doesn't dance in this heat.  
Trumpet notes leap like brass dolphins.  
A bass speaks deep words.  
Cymbals click and clash like cicada wings.

On the way to the CVS for pens and mouthwash,  
I decide to stop at the Chinese grocery  
for tofu, kimchi, miso, and gyoza.

On the way there, I decide to stop at the mulberry tree.  
Under the mulberry tree,  
like a bear rising on its hind legs,  
toward dark clusters in which the sticky  
light of the sun is captured,  
I reach up.

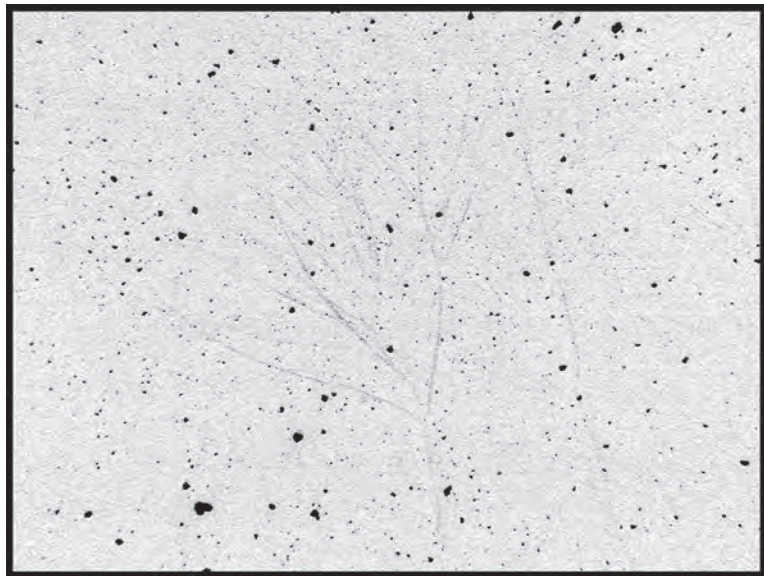
I realize my gesture goes back 53 years.  
The house is wrecked now,  
Dave M and I heard from the waitress of the Aut Bar.  
We're not gay. I wouldn't want you  
to think that. We tried to meet someplace  
heterosexual, but it was closed, and the night was  
cold as fuck, and Dave is even taller than I am,  
so he has a lot of surface area to get cold,

and neither of us had any compunction  
about going in and ordering rum toddies.  
Even homosexuality itself has a kind of warmth to it.  
The Aut Bar is next door to the house my parents and I lived in  
for the first three years of my life. As I think I said  
earlier in this stanza, the waitress said that house is wrecked.  
Something about a broken pipe that rotted everything.

Back when I was little, the house was a paradise.  
My folks were still together. My mom would play  
*Music for Zen Meditation* and Joni Mitchell's  
album *Blue* on the record player.

That's when I fell in love with this life.  
Suicide has no power over me.  
My Jewish dad hung Christmas lights over my cradle,  
blue, white, red, green, yellow,  
and, like a bear rising on its hind legs,  
toward dark clusters in which the sticky  
light of the sun is captured,  
I reached up.

\* \* \* \* \*



Jimmy Heffernan 

## Dialogue on Imperfection

*Published on [electrolounge.boards.net](http://electrolounge.boards.net)*

**Jimmy:** Lately I have been thinking about imperfection. This is, I think, at the root of all our suffering. That is, the universe is, for some reason, a very flawed place. But it's far from obvious as to just why. I studied physics extensively in college, and there is nothing at all in the laws of physics that would force such imperfection into the structures and functions of Nature. *Is it entropy? Is it Satan?* Even entropy is only a measure of information content, and really has nothing to do with why we must suffer. To say the Devil has a stranglehold on the world is perfectly sensible, and that could be it.

When I look back at my anthropology studies, it seems the imperfection of which I speak did not plague aboriginal peoples in the way that it plagues us. They had a totally different approach to suffering, and were free of all the disastrous complexities and injustices of the modern world.

So why, indeed, in a world that is so *absolutely* wonderful, inherently, in a universe with limitless promise and opportunity, should everything be so faulty? *Why do so many suffer? Why do we have all these problems? What makes it necessary?* I'm afraid I can't answer these questions, but they stoke my curiosity into a blaze.

An additional point I'd like to add is this: We may have our differences about abortion in this country, but to a pregnant hunter-gatherer mother already with a two-year old, abortion would have seemed like a tremendously moral miracle as a way to avoid infanticide, the blight of our Eden. If abortions were available in place of infanticide, our prehistory would not have had such a dark side. It would be wonderful for people in this country, and in this world, to be educated enough to have perspective on this.

**Raymond Soulard, Jr.:** Jimmy, I have often read in your writings about aborigines, versus more recent humans, but I do not understand the path from them to us. *If we are the same race, why the divergence from their perspective on life and living to ours?* What values in what they had, and what we have now? Are you suggesting that there is not one, but multiple human races? Is this possible, in a way down deeper than social mores and so on?

**Jimmy:** Raymond, there is no straightforward path from them to us, nor is there a straightforward way of addressing your questions in just a few lines. I would remind you that in certain places on Earth, hunter-gatherer tribes still exist. We usually think of history as the human race adopting agriculture, creating specialization, stratification, and division of labor, going through the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. As a matter of fact, this was restricted to only a few (or, really, one) group of humans operating in Eurasia and Europe. Most peoples in the world at the time of Christ were hunter-gatherers. Civilizations very rarely formed, for reasons I won't go into here.

So there really is no “path” from hunter-gatherer tribes to us. Our tribe converted to agriculture 10,000 years ago, and *most* of its neighbors, as well as *most* hunter-gatherer tribes in the world, *continued* as hunter-gatherer tribes.

I will say that there can be a divergence of world-view within various elements of the human race because the issue is not *innate*, but *cultural*. I am *not* suggesting there is more than one humanity, but that, among that humanity, there are literally *thousands* of different cultures, with different beliefs, customs, morals, languages, worldviews, and so on. Out of those thousands of cultures, ours has become the dominant one. So it's hard to have perspective when all one has ever known is this culture.

**Nathan D. Horowitz:** Jimmy, what have you read about infanticide? What's your take on it? When I read what you wrote, I thought of the Biblical tribes whose gods demanded sacrifices of infants. I've always wondered about that. Like, *why? What's wrong with you? How could that possibly make sense to you?*

**Jimmy:** Actually, Nathan, I wrote a book with a chapter in it on infanticide [*The Reality of Hunter-Gatherers*, White Poppy Press, 2016]. Infanticide was widely practiced among humans until civilization was established in various areas. It is truly a blight on what was otherwise a hunter-gatherer Eden.

The thing was, if a woman already had a child under the age of about three, she could not care for a second child, since she would have to breast-feed both (which is impossible), and since she would have to carry both (which was virtually impossible).

So the pregnant woman, when it was time, would go well away from the camp, dig a hole, have the child in it, and abandon it. This was practiced fairly regularly for tens of thousands of years. It is a very sad thing. But like I said, if they had had abortion, it would have been a godsend.

It really has nothing to do with the Bible, as far as I know. The majority of hunter-gatherers we know about did not engage in sacrifice.

**Nathan:** Ah, interesting and sad. Makes sense. How do we know the frequency with which this was practiced? What evidence, what traces of it do we have?

**Jimmy:** Field studies, which began in the late nineteenth century, documented dozens of examples of infanticide all over the world. The field of anthropology, of course, extrapolates backward, but it makes sense that this was a viable way to deal with unwanted pregnancies. Many animal species practice it as well.

If I recall correctly, about one third of the hunter-gatherer cultures that have been documented over the last 100+ years did not practice infanticide. The majority of these considered it barbaric. Of the remaining two thirds, typically the belief was that, when a woman left camp to give birth, that birth was not official until the woman returned to camp with the baby. If no new baby came with her, it was pretended that nothing happened, and there was no official addition to the tribe.

**Sam Knot:** Jimmy, I think there is something really important in what you say about “extrapolating backwards.” The best example I can think of at the moment is how we refer to “cave art” as *art*. For me, it's clearly something that hasn't yet diverged or differentiated between scientific observation, hunting magic, art, and religion—all of which are to us *differentiated*.

Owen Barfield, one of the British group of writers called the Inklings, was big on philology and like disciplines, and was quite careful to point out that, for instance, where we now have different concepts like *spirit / breath / wind / mind*, the ancient Greeks had one word for those—*pneuma*—and we can't get there just by thinking backwards from where we're at—we have to allow for a very different mode of consciousness—and this might even mean a very different world.

In a sense, something similar could go for infanticide. Now I am with you—I am a modern person and, for me, persons are the keystone of value—whether we know it or not, each of us is a universe and the loss of any one of us is a tragedy—as, I believe, is even the possibility that so many of us may not be realizing our potential.

I meant to say only that I share your sense of it being a blight, but I can see other worlds in which that may not be so: in which it could be a return to the matrix in order to incarnate later or elsewhere, for instance. We are inclined to think of all this kind of stuff in terms of belief, which of course it is, but then: *what is belief, really? How far might it go? How much might it change?*

I also think plenty about evil and stuff. In terms of metaphysics, the privation theory of evil links into one interpretation of Plato, in which this world is necessarily lacking the further and further it gets from the transcendent forms which are its source. Yet, if you look at Parmenides, you'll find plenty of challenge to even considering non-being at all. And if we get into Buddhism, we find *Śūnyatā*, which is a kind of nothing that is deeply linked with interdependence—a kind of nihilism that is the very possibility of meaning.



I have to say I have moments where this world seems perfect to me precisely in its imperfections—when I think of the people I love most, or feel most kin to. We're all cracked to let the light in— there's a really important sense for me in which personality is imperfection, you know? This doesn't excuse all the too-far wrongs of the world. I think there's enough ways to be broke just from simply being human, even in an almost garden of Eden—but for me perfection is death, and perhaps not in a bad way.

**Jimmy:** Indeed, Sam, the ancient Greeks did not have separate words for *spirit* and *matter*—a notion that is totally alien to modern science. For them, a *scientist* was also a philosopher, priest, mystic all in one person. You mention Parmenides, about whom I have briefly written in the past [*Unfolding Nature: Being in the Implicate Order*, BookBaby Publishing, 2020]. His thoughts on being are invigorating—the notion, as per Da Vinci, that “nothing cannot exist.”

As far as the “cave art,” I agree with you totally. This *art* meant something much different to its creators than it does to us. These people were animists, and so reality *blazed* for them. They must have seen their productions in a much more intense and immediate way than we do. It would be nice to be able to experience the world that way on a whim.

And you're right that it's questionable to look at infanticide through modern lenses. This was practiced, by humans and thousands of animal species, for all of time up to very recently, in most places. In modern civilized societies we're automatically appalled, but there was really no alternative, and I think it's simply a matter of taking the bad with the good. At least, it was totally necessary for most hunter-gatherers, who could not carry a second baby the literally thousands of miles traversed in a single year, nor nurse two at once.

Those are some very interesting thoughts on the privation theory of evil. I resonate with the idea that evil takes us further and further away from Plato's forms.

I can see the notion that the world is pure and perfect even in its imperfections, and I wish I could, but I just cannot bring myself to see things that way. Considering how widespread and deep the suffering of this plane is, I even feel guilty when I'm happy. I really feel we are in the vise-grip of some Satanic force on this planet, and it bothers and scares me. But if you can see it the other way, I definitely say more power to you.

\* \* \* \* \*



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

## Many Musics

Twelfth Series

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

*xiii. Gate-Keeper & Mentor,  
Part 1, Encounter*

He says, “Each time I come at last to see him,  
I am bid again to save my old home-world.  
Bid to ‘save it!’ Bid to ‘save it & be free of it!’  
Bid to ‘free it & travel on new!’ By my dear &  
beloved old friend, Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle,  
you see. Bid to try—and I do—and I do again—  
& again I fail—”

Returning here weakens him, blurs him,  
till this recurring imperative is all he possesses  
of his long years. Of me he recalls nothing,  
save inclined to a vague trust when we  
happen to meet. *Seem* to happen to meet.

I casually join his travels, chance encounter  
usually in a certain clearing he comes to  
in these White Woods, him slumped low  
before his fire, him long & crooked,  
furred hat seeming to cluster in nap  
round his head, the ill-assorted rags 'pon  
his torso, the ancient boots of vines & stones.  
Battered old knapsack nearby. Nothing  
more to his possession. Does he leave his  
best treasures safely far from this place?

Quite unsure what next in his travel.  
He shares with me his strangely magick'd Soup,  
& tells me, as every previous time, what remains  
of his knowledge & certainties. “Save it!  
Be free of it! Travel on new!”



I listen quietly & then offer to lead him  
to a place where he may see *further*,  
see *better*. To *show him* what he needs to see,  
that he may at last save this world,  
be free of it, & travel on new.

We do not exchange names but I know  
of course that he is sometimes called Gate-Keeper,  
& other times Charlie Pigeonfoot.

Him so little changed in aspect from the  
ragged boy I long ago spied happily watching  
& worshipping, & later woefully yearning  
that old black & white DüMönt TV I arranged  
for him to find, & then suddenly took from him  
when it was time for him to leave this grey world.

“Call me Mentor.”  
“Are you a teacher? Shall you teach me?”  
“Let me *show you* instead.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*xiv. Gate-Keeper & Mentor,  
Part 2, Strange Yellow Building*

We are far now from that meager settlement  
he long ago dwelled, & has failingly tried to liberate  
many times since. More to this world than  
those captors & their Emandian prisoners know.  
I lead him up merciless steep rocky climbs,  
through a valley absolute silent & dark,  
our silent passage an urgent need too,  
& finally to the ruins of a timelessly old smashed  
city, a place the Ancient Violence leveled but for one.

A strange yellow building. We pause among  
the grey antique crumble to regard it.  
Tall, many floors high, yet still a squat,  
defiant thing, ugly & powerful & true.  
Like standing as vengeance of the fallen rest.

“One yet dwells there.”  
“How? Timeless like the stars?”  
“No.” I pause. Measure how much to tell him.  
Tell.  
“She was my kinsman long ago. Now she belongs  
there. They are like one.”  
“Are we to visit her? Can she help me?”  
*Always*, nearly the same questions.  
*Always*, I wonder if to say more, or less,  
or damned well lie.  
*Always*, I do not. If I can help him  
*succeed* this time, finish the circuit  
of his task, perhaps then, finally,  
freedom for *me* too.

“Our business is not with her, but with the  
roof of that building, with what I can show  
you from there. I have to *show you*.”

The orange door to that yellow building  
is just as sickly feeling, & not the safe way  
to enter. There is another way, a heavy heave  
of stone along the building’s side-wall,  
tugged loose & pushed aside with scraped & bloody  
fingers, & revealed is a dark, webby stairwell.

Most of what haunts & guards this stairwell  
is imaginal in nature. Old creaks in the ancient  
wooden stairs. Sluggish air that seems  
to form up malevolently. The darkness  
itself that nearly roars furiously at  
the sudden intrusion of light, reminder  
of its very existence.

We climb with care & fear, & then more  
of each. A distant yowl passes near,  
kisses the creaks, bites the darkness.  
Each flight of stairs seems older, vaguer,  
yet we arrive finally to the doorless way to the roof.

Unremembering his previous visits to the place,  
much less all the years he lived on this world,  
I see how Gate-Keeper is shocked anew by the clear air  
up here, its un-greyness. He breathes this air  
like magick to inhale, like a fairie bread  
to his tongue. I wait, enjoying the moment,  
like always. Then I hear again, or think so,  
the yowling below. We have to go. *Time to show.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*xv. Gate-Keeper & Mentor,  
Part 3, That Lavender Trace*

Walking over to the roof's edge, motioning  
Gate-Keeper over, like some novel thing  
to notice. Deep low in my throat,  
I begin to *hmmm*. Continue this hid music  
while we are talking, low & steady.

"Do you see far off in that direction?  
Look close! There is just a trace of lavender  
to catch if you can."

"I . . . I do. It's . . . it's moving!"

"Keep hold of it, Charlie. Grasp it gently,  
as though nearly in your hands.

Do you have it?"

"Yes. Yes! It's . . . tugging me."

"*Let it.* Let's hold on, both of us. It's like a rope  
for us to follow along now."

"It's bringing us along. To . . . it's a boat!"

"Yes! I see it too. Let's get in. Climb in  
with me, Charlie."

"Where are we bound, Mentor?"

"Over this water to that far world.

This is the way there. The braided path there."

"It's beautiful there! Wild, awake colors!"

"Yes. Here is its shore. Look up!"

"Those are . . . poplars! So tall!"

"Like green guardians of this world."

"Are we welcomed here, Mentor?"

"Yes, Charlie. This is your *true* home-world.

Where your clansmen can be free & happy at last."

"Can we bring them? Now?"

"We have things to do first. Let me  
*show* you. Listen, Charlie."

The low *hmmm* deep in my throat rises up now  
in song. Words I've sung to him before.

Words to acclimate him, calm his old fears,  
raise up new excitements.

"Will you waver like them as though dreaming,  
& wonder new again how to cling the wind?

Breathe slower now, let the colors calm  
what you are, neither high nor low, not one  
but several, many, green, very green,  
the light to breathe now too, the music  
of wavering, now easy, now let, *now easy, now let.*

"We are past the beautiful poplars now,  
Charlie, now behold red so delicious  
our eyes feast wildly! A field, vast bright  
field, like a flaming down of dream.  
Listen to it sing us, Charlie!"

A single voice of many tugs us down low into  
the song, like laughter found & shaped &  
played among our sinews & bones, we listen:

"We are not here to sleep you down,  
but dream you awake! Till the clouds  
tell you about more than mist & sky,  
til the trees you reck like peers of mystery &  
knowing, till our field breathes you low & high,  
& the mountains, & yonder when you're ready,  
yonder when you're ready . . ."

I hold Charlie's hand tight as we watch  
the flaming field of blooms begin to shimmy  
with simmering sky above. "*Hmmm* now,  
Charlie, *hmmm* with us!" I don't let him go  
a moment, but I cease to lead, we must hereon together . . .

Now traveling this stream like a mind  
skating its own reflections, the liminal place  
where *is* & *also-is* gifts other possibilities,  
now move along, now *dream awake!* Where  
the green trees distant & those nearer us  
as a kind of one, what *over* hangs, what murks  
*below*, what we are, fresh ripples in  
the ceaseless layer of *hmmm* . . .

Our voice singing us along the ceaseless what,  
we become the bridge between us,  
crossing this kind water we travel,  
this beautiful what—*Listen! Sing!*

“Would you soft from the heat,  
find nest from questions, *something*,  
this comfort near last to offer you,  
shaped & solid memory of *what was*  
here, long ago, maybe again far hence—”

“Tis like a grainstack, Mentor? How to know  
such a simple marvel here?”  
“Slowing now to a shadow for Travelers,  
a restive remain? Sly portent?”

Knowing the last of this come, I grip  
his hand even tighter. *Hold on, Charlie.*

*All of the rest is gone.  
All surface.  
No center. No edges. No depth. No sky.*

*Song of everywhere & always sings.*

“When the sweets of the world offered  
like a *welcome on, welcome back*,  
a farewell to the rest.

*“The world now all blooms & floats on.  
The world now all blooms & float ons.*

*“Dream awake! Now dream awake  
now! Dream awake now! Dream awake now!*

“Tis sweet you’re offered  
Tis sweet you might become.

“Open your eyes, Charlie Pigeonfoot!  
Open your eyes, Gate-Keeper!”

Arrived the lily pond as always.  
But there is someone here.  
A tall man, crouched near the water.  
*This is new.* I approach & crouch by him.  
I leave Charlie unseen nearby for a moment.  
Still singing softly to himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

*xvi. Roddy Returns,  
Part 1, The Cave of the Beast*

The reality of the Tangled Gate we’d found,  
all those years searching, rendered those  
same years a *lesser* thing.  
*The Island was real. The Tangled Gate was real.*  
The rest was not even dream, nay solid  
even by its own forms & ways.  
The rest *smoke, barely* something, quickly *unbecoming*.

As we six Brothers wandered the Island,  
our wits & weapons useless as smoke,  
I tried to remember *back there*.  
Anything else than this feeling of being laid out  
in a dark, dangerous place, uncertain  
the floor below, what walls or roofs about,  
how many spectres paused watching nearby?

*Am I clothed? Am I injured? Is this death?*

Clothes were the mind’s memories, how the heart  
adorned with blue woes, green strengths,  
pink treats. If I was still walking,  
however like a staggering fool, Odom before me,  
Francisco behind, the others further up ahead,  
I was not injured, perhaps not dead either.

But memories? My *own* clothes? What did I have  
of these? I groped & grasped about my mind,  
swatting the dim about me like a shroud  
of wasps, terrified, furious.

*Books.* I could not see titles, could not feel  
leather or vellum, but I could wrench my mind  
close enough for words.  
“Transcribe the divine word.” “For those lost.”  
“Aftermath.”

A hot burn to my face. Reddish hair, blue eyes,  
swaying. The White Woods swirl around me,  
& I fall. My Brothers stop, call to each other.  
Gather round me slumped against a tree.  
I try to cohere to them but distract by  
a letter in my hand. Envelope the color of burnt toast.

“Iris,” I say softly aloud. One of my Brothers  
jerks away from his tending crouch toward me.  
Another sips me water, feeds me on  
a small handful of fruits & nuts. I stagger  
to stand, nod us to keep going.

More fragments now, leaving me, ever falling  
away. Red whiskers. A leather bucket.  
A quilt, its feathers & stones. I spasm.  
The living world about me nears again,  
& I see their beautiful faces, each struggling  
like me, each trying to remember:  
*What are we doing here? What am I?*

Tis Creatures get us to the Gate, finally.  
I think the White Bunny most sure of these.  
She hops alongside us, herding us on,  
till far off the Gate looms, miles high even  
at this reck. She leaves us as we pass  
through it. Never glances me once.

We gather at the Fountain to drink, &  
its water restores us some. What ahead  
seems ever more real as what behind  
not even smoke drifting away. *This is the last  
of what we shall do, what we shall be.*  
Again single file, I urge my way to the front,  
feel I know the way. Asoyadonna behind me close,  
a *hmmm* meager but true in her.

The Cave of the Beast arrives of a sudden to us,  
like by its own choosing. The King, mirthless &  
braveless, now enters first its void of darkness.  
We follow quickly. Arriving to the end together.  
Six shaggy heads on the block.

Now come a place without time. Frozen waterfalls  
unlike one I may have known. Powerful yet  
blurry to the eye. Then Asoyadonna’s *hmmm*  
grasps at each of us, tugs, & we all join in.  
The icy pictures come into view.

*This is ago. First of all. The hmmm is  
everywhere, always, every tree, every breath,  
every cloud, every green blade.*

Not forms singing, but the *forms songs make.*

Words fumble clumsily in me, like what is left  
of me wants to finish. “Stranger strengths  
bide this world, & we are like lovely notes  
among their long, long tunes.”

A hand squeezes mine. I’d forgotten in these  
One Woods about hands, or others.  
Speaks a voice: “Iris.”  
And the world we maybe still occupy  
somehow decides to shake free of us at last—

\* \* \* \* \*

*xvii. Roddy Returns,  
Part 2, That Lavender Trace*

The world becomes like all ocean waves  
atossin’ me hither to yon, my eyes surely shut  
for panic, & maybe too a weariness  
in the struggle to know anything sure,  
*anything at all*, till there is a soft color  
softly in my face, a’breachin’ my woozy terror  
& shut eyes. Tis a trace of lavender leads my eyes  
to open again, & me to look.

*No* One Woods. *No* frozen waterfalls. *No* Cave  
of the Beast. *No* Tangled Gate. Too, no *Brothers?*  
I am splayed out along an interior of somewhere.  
A long corridor, lit without lamps, running seeming  
endless far. That lavender trace is now far  
from me too, & receding still. Without why,  
I clumsy make quick to follow.

I now think someone else nearby too. The sounds  
of my now-hard-charging boots oft-chorused  
another's, but us receding from each other fast.  
*Is he chasing his own trace? One of my Brothers?  
What did any of this mean?*

It is a Starcraft, I learn, from the small windows,  
each singly at a far distance from the other.  
The lavender trace, my lone & loyal companion,  
leads me along, & I learn too that this Starcraft  
travels time forward & backward, by *where one is*  
in it, by where one moves next.

The stars teach me their long story, same patch  
of them through each window, ancient, young,  
or far far old by one or another window's reck.  
Yet I find neither beginning nor end of this story,  
& never that other person nor any other  
to break my solitude. 'Twas that lavender trace  
together we traveled.

I do not age or weaken. The lampless lights  
will sometimes dim me to sleep where I am.  
*Do I eat? Need water?* 'Tis like my body  
knows no thirst nor hunger because *time does not  
stay passed here*. More simple feel myself ebb  
a whisker at a time as I ever follow  
the lavender trace endless along.

Is it slow mercy at last brings me to  
that open door, myself too long a pet?  
Now I am in a green Great Filled,  
& that Starcraft gone, not even smoke.  
I know those White Woods nearby, but  
I know little else. Feel abandoned by my prison,  
by Starcraft & trace. Feel no longer OK that *I know nothing*.

\* \* \* \* \*

*xviii. Roddy Returns,  
Part 3, Lily Pond*

*Who or what might my sudden arrival  
stir to wake here? Sniff the morning's chill air?  
Feel its cold tremble? Taste its subtle drift?  
Dreaming known or strange colors whence they'd come?*

'Tis my call to need. *Need of them to come.*

Questions crowd my blurry mind as though asked  
by the man I no longer am, the one before  
that Starcraft. That lavender trace.  
Ask & again:

*Did we save the world?  
Or is this some other?*

Breathe, relax, Roddy. *Once, twice, breathe, relax.*

'Tis clean air here, & a sound, like a distant memory  
in my ears, a *hmmm* that wraps round me  
like a shawl, like a strange smiling friend.

I now sit knees drawn up, on this deep green grass  
so near those White Woods, my head drooping  
into my hands. Now too *hmmm* softly,  
ever softly, lure lightly into a dream perhaps  
to sing me why, *why, if we saved the world,  
why am I now alone?*

So lured, I sense many curious near & nearer yet  
to me, raising me up & leading me along,  
neither fully waking nor dreaming now,  
walking slowly into these White Woods, each step now  
a bit of delicious, feeling what tense in me  
so long float away, fill myself up new,  
& very old, with everything here, till a mossy bed invites,  
& I accept.

What is near to me here does not yet arrive.  
I am vague in this comfort, this beauty.  
Cannot quite behold what, or who, tenders me.  
I reach up to those stars, to the patch  
I so long traveled with from their burst  
to their shine to their dim, & back again  
by the chance travel in that Starcraft.

*I think my turn to ask for help.  
I think my turn to bear my heart plain.  
I think my turn to open my hand with questions.  
I think my turn to hope my story yet braids again  
with others I've loved & now lost.*



My turn to say, "I knew so much more long ago.  
By my travels with the lavender trace, she long  
led me arriving here. I now am alone.

"I am helpless. My story is numb.  
*I am helpless. Can you help me?"*

I hear a new sound, nearing, swift travel.  
As it comes closer, I reckon it is a song!  
The song of many braided together.  
Tis a "*Laaaaaa!*" being sung, over & over,  
infinite varieties, voices twisting in & out & through.  
*There is one I hear that leaps my heart up high!*  
Tis someone I loved. Tis someone I followed.  
Someone I treasure to know again.  
This music lingers me my many hours of the night,  
a song somehow of heroes & hope. I sleep closer,  
ever closer, to knowing me & the world again.

Morning light raises me easily, I smile & toss  
kisses with my fingers to my hidden hosts.  
No certainty, no destination, I walk. I walk & walk.

Sometimes I catch the *hmmm*, & follow, & lose.  
Sometimes there is a merry cackle, high & low.  
*Still I feel here & not-here, nearly arrived.*

Then I hark water near, & hurry a bit,  
thirst again its usual need about me, & I come upon  
a bridge across a bright stream.  
A simple wooden bridge, with old rope rails—

Tis like I am tossed again, as back in that Cave  
of frozen waterfalls, but this time flung in  
my mind & heart. *I remember*  
like a cold water's sudden waking. Sit hard  
on the ground. *Twice lost, now found.*

Not everything. But bright beams now cross  
the dark, dangerous place that is my mind.  
A compass I brought out to these White Woods,  
with eggs & vegetables from my old world.  
Fyodor the grocer my sometime companion here?

*The huts! My huts!* The first one I discovered,  
when new & brash & terrified here. The next hut  
with two armchairs on its porch, where the White Bunny  
would sniff & assess me. The narrow one where I tried  
to pray off my life's cruelties, failed. Mailbox house.  
*Iris. Still so much missing.*

I cross the bridge & find an easy climb down  
to the water. Drink like it would magick new  
my mind, wash out the shadows.  
Just beautiful, kindly water. Stand & hurry on,  
as though an urgent *where*.

The *hmmm* catches me, & invites me, & I join in  
best my croak can. *And names now burst  
open my dark, dangerous place.*

*Odom. Dreamwalker. Asoyadonna. Francisco.  
My King.*

*Roddy. I am Roddy. More my name now  
than an old word-rag I clutched whyless close.*

I *hmmm* for more guidance, dear wish  
to find my old shacks. But feel lost to them still.  
Wonder now the Creatures too but seem not—

Then I arrive, hours upon hours of walking,  
*hmmmming*, tis a dark purple-crimson dusk  
I *arrive*, to find my lilies floating as sure  
as ever on their waters.

*Oh, happiness.* I crouch low to them,  
close as I can come, study their many colors.  
Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Indigo. Violet.  
Lavender too? Just a wee winking bit.

A voice in my head, now remembered, now recovered.  
Leonardo, the red-whiskered man.

"The White Woods will never leave you, Roddy.  
They have been with you always.  
There are things, brave & dangerous things,  
you must do soon, & for them as well as all men.  
But they are with you, wherever you go,  
& believe in you."

More words but now they fade.

But then a new voice, voices really,  
braided like that song blessed my night's sleep.  
New words. *Listen!*

“We will start to meet again,  
on the Beach of Many Worlds,  
far below the Wide Wide Sea,  
where Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle  
rests & awaits us. Find your way!  
Find your way, Roddy, to this Beach!”

I listen for more but now eyes open again &  
here my beloved pond of lilies, themselves  
never quite quiet.

And, not far from me, what appears like a man.  
Crouched low, like myself, perhaps to lessen  
the threat of his appearance.

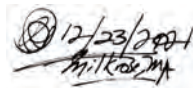
He is a tall man, even crouched low.  
A striped knit cap slouched low on his head.  
Black on white. Or white on black.  
White spiked teeth. Long as fangs.  
Long grey overcoat. Brown pants.  
Tall white boots.

I study him this close as though my safety depends.

Yet no hackles raise in me. Tis a strange-seeming man  
but no danger. *None*. When he rises,  
never studying me too close, I rise too.  
When he walks back toward the White Woods,  
I make to follow.

He is approaching someone, seeming another man.  
Garbed like a pauper, but what matters more  
is his *face*. His *familiar* face.

I knew him once, long ago, as *Gate-Keeper*.



\*\*\*\*\*

Charlie Beyer



## A Hood Funeral

[Prose]

My life-long friend Steve decided to drop dead. So I brought the remaining rum to his wake in an open container. En route, I neither drank too much on the freeway, nor got arrested. The bottle was drained properly in short order when I arrived, the guests chugging the stuff like it was UNICIF milk in Biafra. I then read in front of all his relatives a few pages of revelations (not Bible-related) that I had written as an excuse for a eulogy.

I thought it would be amusing for all to know how we had a beer hijacking operation in our youth, hunting deliveries on the city streets, which eventually caused the invention of the self-locking beer truck. Then there were our fine times in the Toronto prison. The tobacco casino. The Communist Party involvement.

Some leapt up in horror and indignation. “So you’re the one!” they shouted.

Methinks they were getting ready to stretch me out alongside Steve. Maybe not so amusing after all, but I was getting kind of tired with all their flowery crap. “He was so loyal. He was so thoughtful.”

The guy was a self-absorbed criminal like the rest of us. He was such a boner that he had six girlfriends. So I had to call bullshit. But he was a true blue friend, and I’ll miss his pirate ways.

Other “guests” from the “hood” were there, including the guy voted (in junior high) to be dead within the year. Now he’s a millionaire in Seattle from successes in the “agricultural business.” A real-estate magnate in whose houses cash crops of pot are grown. He’s got a new black BMW sports car, but smokes dollar-a-pack cigarettes from Yugoslavia. He says it’s critical that he smokes, otherwise he gets “road rage,” and is likely to open fire with the Glock sitting on the passenger seat.

Others are still alive without rhyme or reason. The old “everybody’s girl friend” was working the crowd, still trying to hook one of us, still with no luck. About a third of the crowd was calling Steve by a different name, Ajax or something, saying “Steve who?” when we said, “who’s Ajax?” I guess the peckerwood had a double or triple life. I think a few of the Ajax people were just street rats wandered in for the beer and buffet.

All the sobbing girlfriends were there, some crying with the realization of the other girlfriends. There was even this Catholic nun there who had fallen in love with Steve in the hospital. The nun was damning the other girlfriends to hell for their fornications. She played the fiddle in the band with a bunch of beefy black guys on bass guitars. Another tickled the ivories. It felt like being home, there with the homies.



Another of my sand-box buddies, a Tong general, had a liver swollen up to the size of a small dog. Prognosis bad. Death. He's drinking and showing Fido off. I guess I'll start writing his eulogy now and get a head start.

Topping all of us was this seven-foot-two guy we called "How-Weird." He had these drooping sad cow eyes and leaned over you like the Tower of Pisa. He invaded your personal space from above like a spider web. How-Weird was getting all of our addresses and next of kin. He's in the mortuary business.

Everybody delighted in talking about my past for some reason. "Remember when we were driving along 15<sup>th</sup>, and you were throwing those pipe bombs out the window?"

"Ahhh, no."

"How about when you threw that CS tear gas canister into the Federal Building, and it got into the ventilation system? Gassed every asshole in there."

"Mmmm . . . vaguely. Sure that was me?"

"Ya know you made the papers at the WTO riots, shooting those rockets at the helicopter. Had a blurry picture of you running. Damn! That was great!"

"Now seems to me that those were *your* rockets."

*So what gives here? Do I have an anarchist Sybil multi-personality thing going on? How can these bastards remember this shit? Did it happen? Or am I just the focus of urban legend? If the cells in the brain are replaced every seven years, they must have had to re-write this crap in there over four times. Where's the effect of massive erasure from an abundant ingestion of psychotropic substances? Hell, worked for me.*

I am thinking I either have to live these buggers into the ground, or write my own eulogy. Can't have these fools spouting off in front of *my* relatives.

\* \* \* \* \*



**(((the neap of hello)))**

these words are a mirroring of  
 the otherwise unreflective  
 nature of a creature  
 who has no creator  
 but the role of the whole  
 is not the rolling of dice  
 and so emerges choice  
 as being never not there -  
 so this is what it means right?  
 every creation is a collaboration  
 which cannot merely emerge  
 without first being got under way  
 and then continually engaged -  
 so no merely, whatever way  
 we thhh-look at it - no only in whole,  
 there is no only whole, nor all of wholes,  
 not really . . . what is the word for a silence in which  
 we imagine something like sound? silence in which  
 meaning moves, waves like weeds beneath the sea,  
 as if meaning could have a momentum of sorts -  
 there are currents of meaning swashing  
 slowly all around us, slow down here,  
 in the deeps - there are ways for us  
 to get carried away with meaning,  
 to let ourselves be moved by it, drawn  
 and chucked and tumbled and beached -  
 is this a meaning we are making?  
 or are we just not unmaking it?  
 letting it be, like a wave  
 going back to the sea

the gift of partaking  
in what seemed to be almost a pause  
between breaths, but was in fact a kind of crest,  
i mean: the sea is ceaseless, sure, like how we cannot stop  
seeing just by closing our eyes? because to see  
never did mean only to see, literally? because literally  
we always have to see what we see too . . . like that?  
i don't know, i don't think so - that seems like levels,  
like in one way we stop, and in another way we never -  
we never - the sea never stops, not even in a way -  
it rises and falls, and somewhere, somewhere  
around the change between rising and falling,  
it seems to slow, sure, it seems to slow,  
and this can go so slow it seems to stop, time  
seems to stretch for a moment, and somewhere in that stretch  
there seems something like a stop - like we might breathe out  
and hold that, before breathing in, but we haven't -  
we haven't really stopped breathing - but  
that's what we meant, what we said - pause -  
to pause is not to stop, but . . . but to break, to not  
continue for a moment, before continuing,  
to change . . . mode, or state, or direction,  
or speed . . . to change the sense of perception  
you whisper, whisper like the wave inside  
yourself: to change the sense of perception,  
the sense of sense, into something continuous,  
like you cannot stop seeing just by  
closing your eyes, and not because  
there are different senses of sight,  
but because you see with your mind  
there are ways you hear with your eyes,  
the rise and fall of the wave,  
the little pebbles and  
bubbles of sound,  
how noise can be white  
in ears and eyes  
without leaping  
senses

rising  
in the oceans  
of the ears, falling  
out the corners of the eyes, walking  
one walk through time, with feet that tread  
the beach of the mind, that feel the muscles  
of the sand, the tidal massage of the world, the gentle  
whispers of the therapeutic noise that is music to the soul  
tired of order, tired of rearranging parts of thought  
into the supposed shapes of understanding  
something you may have no hand in - understand this, whispers  
the mermaid princess of that element you have never, ever  
really been out of, understand all there is to understand  
is substance, and that this substance is understanding  
itself, this substance is understanding itself,  
the glassy sand we build imaginal castles from,  
the not-stuff of the real, feel this  
one understanding, this wonder-standing  
under your feet, the braids of the beach  
beneath the rivulets of my shining hair  
all fresh around your flesh, the feet  
you hover with, the world  
that lifts you is the truth,  
the world you lift yourself within,  
to wonder, the wonder of that wonder,  
one wonder, that we are this together,  
the flash of our eyes as the sun  
goes down, we can never, never ever,  
never mean alone,  
never mean one  
more than whole,  
more than  
whole

\* \* \* \* \*





## *Bags End Book #19: Anniversary of Bags End News!*

*This story and more Bags End Books  
can be found at:*

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

*Hello Sampler readers,*

*Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.*

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

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

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

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

*Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.*

*\* \* \* \* \**

### *Anniversary of Bags End News!*

*Well, it's true that mah dear old newspaper has made it across another turn of the calendar. I don't think so much of all this really, but then I'll tell what happened.*

*You see, I was drowsing in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, enjoying everything & nothing, zenbuddi-style, when there was a*





polite tap at mah Porch's window.

Only polite guys tap before coming out, so there was a usual bunch I guessed weren't tapping.

Was it Princess Crissy? Missus El the Post-Mistress of Bags End?

"Come in, come in, sate mah mad guessings!" I cried, & laughed at mahself, but not meanly like some.

And onto the Porch comes none other than none of mah guesses but I like her a lot anyway sure Lori Bunny!

And she was hauling a really big something not her scrawny own self with her. "Missus El asked me to bring this to you," she said.

"That's a big sack, Lori!"

She pulled it through the window, & sorta crashed it onto the Porch floor. A few letters came wiggling out. Lori smiled, & adjusted her smart guy spectacles at me.

"It's all for you, Algernon!"

"That's more mail than usual. Guess Betsy made every last Allierite me mean letters this time." Oh well. I like Betsy's Allies, despite politics & soon.

"No!" Lori laughed. "They are congratulations on your newspaper's anniversary. From all over!"

"Really?" I was just shocked.

"And lots of your readers want you to go on tour."

"Tour?"

"To see them. Let them shake your paw personally."

"Tour?" I asked again, somewhat uselessly. I remembered mah walking tour with mah dear friend Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna, Crissy for friendly. That tour had sorta gotten out of hand.

Lori is a nice-looking smart orange-furred bunny who is real smart, not just smart for looks with her spectacles. Part of her smarts is that she is always polite to everyone, not just those guys that will help her with her tricky plans. I don't even think Lori has tricky plans. She mostly just likes reading her big books, & helping me make Bags End News.

O! but she likes carrots too. O! Yuk! But nobody is perfect.

Anyway, the reason I rited at such epic length about Lori's good character is that when she talked about me going on tour to meet mah loyal Dear Readers, it wasn't to then laugh & laugh at me. She just adjusted her spectacles, & waited for me to talk again. She joined me in mah comfy armchair, & let me think about this tour idear for a minute.

I looked at the big sack of fan letters in the spilled out bag on the floor of the Porch. I guess I was kind of curious what they said. But a tour?

Hmmm.

Finally, mah thinkings bubbled up words for me to talk.

"As you know, Lori, I am a humble guy, which means both modest & low to the ground."

Lori nodded & smiled at me. She knowed that real good.

"I don't think that going on a tour to celebrate mah newspaper is very humble."

Lori nodded, & listened.

"But," I said, with maybe a good idear, "it sure would be the polite thing to rite all those Dear Readers a thank-ee letter in reply!"

Lori adjusted her spectacles for a moment to do her own thinking now. And I was glad to take mah turn in waiting.

"Well," she said finally, "it's true you are both humble & polite. I don't think a tour is a bad idear, but I do think your idear is a good one too."

"And would you help me with the typing of them, Lori?" I asked hopeful.

She nodded a big smile. We shooked paws on it, & our plan was decided.

Looking at that big sack of letters, now spilling out all over the Porch's floor, I thought it would be a lot of trouble to drag them away to type answers to them.

So I talked it out loud. "Lori, why don't we just set up shop here? Make neat piles & type our answers right here?"

Lori looked surprised & pleased that I was thinking quick on mah paws. "Great idear, Boss!"

Boss, hmmm. Not the cosmic magickal kind, just hmmm.

Now we needed to haul mah rite-typer here to do our good idear's work.

I now said quick to Lori, like me with new idears was a strange rainbow won't last, "I have another one. Just wait here!"

Lori smiled big & adjusted her smart guy spectacles. "OK, Algernon!" I like that better for names.

So I carefully climbed off mah comfy armchair, & sorta waded through the piles of letters, & then climbed through the window into the bedroom I share with mah silly Bumping brother, Alexander Puppy.

Alex is this tall yellow Puppy who wears overalls & has a friendly face to all this strange, troubling world. He was sitting on his own bed next to mine, & talking soft Bump words to a little bloo foam in his paws.

"Hello, brother," I said, as nice as I could.

"Bump!" he said all friendly.

I swallowed mah annoyance. O! Yuk? I'm not sure on that one. And then talked.

"Alex, remember that comic book you found? The Action Man comic book?"

"Bump. Bump. Bump! Bump!" Alex said, thinking like these were words of a sentence & all.

I gritted mah teeth a little bit, but talked on. "What would you say we make a trade?"

"Bump?"

"You give me that comic book, & I will take a Bump lesson with you & Allie Leopard!" Wow! That hurt to say!

But he agreed. And I said I would keep mah promise. Soon.

You see, Dear Readers, I knowed that Leo the Dark Man, who is the Janitor of Bags End, & a comic book fanatic, was missing this issue from his collection. Called "Action Man & Bunny Girl Save the World! Twice!"

So what I did was take this comic book in mah paw, left the

Bunny Family's apartment, & traveled mahself down a couple of levels, & then to under the ramp, where Leo has the place he lives, with comic books, cleaning tools, & all.

Leo was napping on his futon couch in the corner, amidst a big pile of comic books. Looked very comfy.

"Wake up, Leo!" I said suddenly.

Leo huffed & puffed awake & dirty looked me but good.

But I waved mah comic book at him, & he calmed right down.

So I commenced mah wheelings & dealings with Leo.

But I bet you Dear Readers are wondering why this story has been rited by paw, not rite-typer!

\* \* \* \* \*

### Mah Rite-Typer Troubles!

I know, I know, Dear Readers, you want to know what manner of madness be this all. I mean, this handwriting by mah friend & colleague Lori Bunny is not bad, 4or sure. Compared to your old pal Algernon's cryptic scrawlings, hers is gorgeousity itself.

No, Sir, or Madam, or other fancy title if you do, though some don't, the problem is that mah newspaper has always been typed up nice & neat by those selfsame Lori Bunny paws. Happily too.

The problem is with mah rite-typer. I will ask you Dear Readers to patiently read on & learn the tragical details.

We return to the moment where I was standing at the entrance to Leo the Dark Man's "Hovel-Under-Ramp," as Sheila once called it, & Leo laughed & liked it & kept it. Wheeling & dealing.

In mah paw, one of the very few Action Man comic books Leo don't got. Called, like I said bevore, "Action Man & Bunny Girl Save the World! Twice!" I guess more value that way.

"I want that comic book, Beagle. You don't follow Action Man's heroic caped adventures! You can barely read!" Leo grouched & whined.

He was right about the first part, & sadly true still about the second.

"First, Leo, I need you to help me with something Lori & I are doing," I said.

"Ha! I would take my comic books over your dum newspaper any time!" Leo barked. He tried doing a newspaper too once, & it was a disaster.

I started to back away with the comic book still tightly in mah pawbone.

"Wait! Wait! What? I'll help, you dum Beagle!" Leo was already standing up to go with me.

Like mah trusting brother had with me, sort of anyway, I handed over the comic book to Leo.

Bad move. Leo now made me sit with him on his futon couch in the corner of his hovel, where he reads his comic books, & we had to read that comic book from first page to last one.

It was not so terribly bad. They do save the world twice, & Bunny

Girl does remind me of mah adopted sister Sharon. She is a Bunny Girl fan too.

But Leo reads very slowly. Savors every word & picture, he says. And he will tell me about other comic books it reminds him of. Like I know or care.

"I think the Cliche Monster was a very strange villain in this issue. But, still, a Beast in a Cave? And even after the second defeat, they're still not sure what happened."

"Yah. Wow," I fake-marveled. Slouching ever lower in his futon.

"When Bunny Girl says, 'Did we defeat the Beast, or did we help the Beast to save the world?'—wow!" Leo shivered, & started to read the comic book over again.

"Hold it, bub," I said with a grumpy lack of patience. All I can say 4or true is that, as far as heroes go, Action Man is no Snoopy.

"OK, OK, I'll get my scraper. Where in Bags End is Miss Chris's bubble gum to scrape off this time?" Leo asked agreeable.

"O! Gum! Yuk!" I cried, & looked around his hovel in terror.

Leo calmed me down though. Nice guy, sometimes. "What's our deal 4or then, Algernon?"

"I need you to haul mah rite-typer from where Lori & me keep it, to Milne's Porch. Then I need you to help me make neat piles of all these happy anniversary Bags End News letters I got."

"Happy anniversary!" said Leo all friendly.

I nodded. "Then, when we got all these thank-ee letters typed, I want them brung to Missus El 4or mailing. Then we, meaning you, can bring the original letters to the Bags End News vault. Which is where we keep all of the issues in neatly labeled crates."

Leo listened to all of these demands with shock. Still, Action Man & Bunny Girl had saved the world, twice, & after he helped he could read the comic again & again in his hovel comforts.

So he came with me up 3 levels of Bags End, & halfway down the hallway, to the locked up Bags End News vault. I made him hide his eyes good while I fetched the key & opened it up.

There inside were lots of neatly labeled crates, two chairs &, on a little purple stool, mah beloved rite-typer.

Leo is taller than most of us Bags End guys, so he could pick up mah rite-typer pretty easy, & haul it along to Milne's Porch.

But of course I was crazy worried of accidents.

"Careful, Leo! Careful, ya dum guy! Walk slower. Now take your time on this ramp. Where's the fire, ya speed demon?" & on & on. Crissy gived me this rite-typer & I wasn't gonna have it broked.

But I guess I have to say that Leo was real careful, & went really slow, & even when I nearly fainted him crawling through the window to Milne's Porch, mah precious rite-typer in his tight grip, he did it fine. He even brung the little purple stool, sorta slung on his back somehow.

Lori was still waiting, & delighted with mah plan. And she watched with mah own level of amazement as Leo set up the rite-typer on the little purple stool, & then organized all the letters into neat piles next to the stool, just like I had wheeled & dealed him, with blank sheets & envelopes beside the rite-typer.

Pleased with his efforts, Leo bowed low to us & said, "Come get me when you're ready with letters, & want them & your rite-typer brung."

Lori clapped her paws for him, & I did too, strangely. Never knew how much in brute labor & elaborate flourishes one comic book was worth.

So now he was gone, & we were about to settle into work.

I mean, we had paper, & envelopes, & mah rite-typer, & Lori can type just dandy, yet still you Dear Readers are wondering why you are reading paw writings & not rite-typings?

Well, Dear Readers, I have brung you up to the why's very moment. Up to the Doorway to Why.

Go on, knock.

Knock! Knock!

Why?

\* \* \* \* \*

### Where Are the Missing Rite-Typer Keys?

This chapter's title of this Bags End Book finally starts to explain why. It's because when Leo the Dark Man & Janitor of Bags End had brung mah beloved rite-typer, present from mah dear one Crissy, from the Bags End News vault down to Milne's Porch, in exchange for a valuable Action Man comic book, which I had gotten from mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy in exchange of a promise to take a Bump lesson with him & that real & fake language knowing guy Allie Leopard (huff! puff!), said comic traded for Leo's help in hauling said rite-typer, & got it all set up with paper & envelopes to boot, & left in an unusually debonair way, & we had just opened up the first letter to read & then reply to (puff! huff!), there was revealed the great trouble!

Lori Bunny readed the letter to me, adjusting her smart guy spectacles to see it well every word.

"Dear Algernon,

Congratulations on your anniversary! You do such a fine job! Come & share a small smackeral or two of honey with me soon!

Your admiring friend,  
Pooh Bear"

"O! Smackeral! Yuk! O! Honey! Yuk!" I cried, ready to leap in mah terrors over the railing of Milne's Porch, into the very Unknown itself. Well, if lucky, the Blondys would have caught me before mah bajillionth piece broke off.

But of course Lori held me back, & convinced me it was indeed a sincere letter of admiration from that fat bear who lives in or near the Hundred Acre Wood. I am never sure which.

Lori had a fresh sheet of paper in mah rite-typer, all ready to go.

Waiting for me & smiling.

"What do I say? Please keep your smackerals far from me? O! Yuk!" I cried.

Lori adjusted her spectacles & said, "Let me help on this one." I nodded OK.

So she typed & talked her typings at the same time.

"Dear Pooh Bear," she said & typed.

"Dear Poo Bear?" I asked.

Lori was studying the rite-typer keys. "The Ⓢ key must have fallen off."

"Ut-o," I said.

"Let's finish this & then look for it," she said. I nodded again.

"Thank you fo-you-lette--"

"What?" I cried.

"The Ⓢ key is missing too!" she said.

Well, now I was in a panic. "Thieves! Bandits! Desperados! Help! Help!"

Lori kind of hugged me on lockdown till I calmed a bit. She talked till I also heard the words.

"You look around here, Algernon. I will find Leo & we will hunt every inch from here to our Vault. We had it for those stories about Crissy's sister."

I sort of calmed down at her talk & plan. "That's true. There's at least one R in 'Crissy,'"

Lori smiled me again & went on her searching way.

So I carefully looked all over Milne's Porch, inside mah comfy armchair's cushions, on the floor, which is floorboards but pretty solid, & among the neat piles of fan letters & papers & envelopes. No luck.

Finally, I just sitted glumly looking at all these piles. I mean, it is nice to get "good job, Algernon" letters on doing mah newspaper, but now suddenly we couldn't do it? Did I have enemies who would try to end mah newspaper?

Paranoia comes easier from so long of struggling amongst crazed bullying big guys who see mah newspaper like it was their own thing, to praise their craze, so to speak.

But then again, the big guys I know aren't so subtle to steal 2 rite-typer keys. They prefer to kick me hard or smother me deep or try to make me march silently in thwee wanks. The ranks, I mean.

And if you did think a newspaper was all about singing your glories, why would you try to shut it down?

No, it wasn't Sheila Bunny or Betsy Bunny Pillow or Lisa-Marie Chow, the kicker & smotherer & order-to-marcher I was talking about above. They didn't do this. Not that they would care to help me now, but they didn't do it.

Mah last hope was that the keys just falled off like Lori supposed. I sat sadly in mah comfy armchair, near all mah piles of fan mail, & waited.

But when she came back, & she brung an equally sad-faced Leo with her to boot, I guessed no good luck.

"We both looked high & low, every inch," said Lori sadly.

"Twice," said sad Leo.

I motioned a sad paw, & both of them climbed out to the Porch, & sat with me in mah comfy armchair.

"What luck," said me.

They nodded.

Suddenly Leo stood up in front of us. Smiling." Listen, my friends. We may not be heroic caped figures like Action Man or Bunny Girl, bu we can surely do better than giving up!"

"What should we do?" I asked, feeling hopeless.

"We should put out a Fantasylands Allarum!" he cried.

"Um?" I asked.

"Well, there isn't one yet, but there should be! And you have all these fans in all these places! Surely they will help!" Leo was all worked up now.

Then Lori joined in too.

"Algernon, we will paw write issues of Bags End News to tell of our crisis. I will go get my box of pencils!" And Lori hurried off, & came back quick too. And Leo stayed right with me & nicely holded mah sad but a bit hopeful paw.

And so, Dear Readers, in so many places, who rited me so many nice fffletters I have here, me & Lori & Leo need your help. Mah rite-typer is missing its © & ① keys.

I ask all of you to help us find them, & bring them back to where they belong.

If this was a mean trick, OK! It worked. So mean! But, please, help us find them or return them!

\* \* \* \* \*

### Comes a Clue in the Rite-Typer Mystery!

Not long passed before Lori & I found ourselves again sitting in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, looking at another pile of letters that had come in. These were from Dear Readers who had rited in response to mah plea 4or help in mah newspaper

Most of these letters were nice com4orting ones 4or mah crisis, agreeing how it was a strange & mean trick. And everyone from Wonderland to the River, Narnia to Neverland, vowed to look high & low 4or mah missing rite-typer keys.

Mah dear friend Princess Crissy even said I could borrow the keys from her rite-typer, that she keeps in her Riting Room inside Imagianna's Red Bag. But I want mah own keys back.

And more importantly, I wanted to know why somebody would take them anyway. It seemed like somebody had planned it out, even though the plan was mean & weird.

Well, then came the letter from Princess Ozma of Oz. Oz is one of Bags End's long-time friends. They are way more famous in all the storybooks of course, & probably way more like what a proper fantasyland should be like then strange & slouchy old Bags End, but those Oz guys are always nice, & like to make & have visits sometimes.

And I guessed they read Bags End News too, to hear of mah crisis. I mean, I know they do, like from the time Sheila Bunny bumped her head, & was long gone in Dreamland, & they came to visit her. Still, it supprises me some.

Lori was reading the letter from Princess Ozma, with her smart guy spectacles. "Listen!" she said excited.

"Dear Algernon,

Everyone here was very upset to hear about your missing keys. I asked my friend Glinda the Good Sorceress to see if she could look 4or them using her Great Book of Records, which records everything that happens in the world the moment it happens."

Lori stopped reading.

"What?" I asked.

"That's amazing that they would help us like that."

I nodded. "Yes, it is. I am amazed too. But we should be amazed later when mah rite-typer is back to all its keys!"

Lori nodded & read on in the letter.

"All Glinda could tell was that the keys are on the move from one place to the next. She could not tell who has them."

"Great!" I said. "The thief is on the run. Some Great Book!"

Lori looked at me, shocked. "They are trying to help, Algernon. And there's more here."

"Sorry," I said. I did not feel mah best right now.

She patted mah headbone nicely & read the rest.

"Strangely, the first place the keys went after leaving Bags End was the Creature Common. The path is unclear from there, but we think you should try there first. Hope this helps you, Dear Sir.

Yours Royally, & with much affection,  
Princess Ozma of Oz"

"Wow, I said. "A clue."

Lori nodded.

"Well, then, I guess I will be going to the Creature Common now," I said, & was already climbing through mah bedroom window back into Bags End when Lori talked again.

"I should come with you, Algernon."

"Why, Lori?"

"Because you are my friend, & I want to help. I have been your newspaper's riter-downer & typer-upper for a long time." And when she smiled her charming orange-furred spectacled smart guy smile at me, I



could only nod mah headbone.

Now I have tolded of a few different ways to get from Bags End to the Creature Common. One of these ways is to find this picture that hangs on the wall of one of the hallways in Bags End. It works both in waking & Dreamland Bags End.

You have to close your eyes to forget that this picture of this pretty girl named Marie, & her woodsy clearing of Faeries, is a picture, & remember that it is really the door to the Creature Common, & then walk on through. Takes me a couple of tries sometimes though. Sometimes I arrive with an aching nozebone.

Not this time. I closed mah eyes, & walked on through. Bet I can't do that twice. Lori did too, but that was no surprise. Plus, she's mah good friend.

We arrived to the strange open area surrounded by all these pictures. Including the Marie one we had come through.

And we were not alone. That CC guy, who is cousins to Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, & the Author Guy too, was standing at one of the pictures, & he had in arm the Creatures MeZmer the White Bunny, Holly the Hedgedyhog, Buddy the little flower Bear, & Cuke who is green & spiny, & nice. Telling the Travelers Tales to them, I think, like he does most nights. His name, CC, is short 4or his job, Creature Coordinator. Does it pretty well, from what I have seen.

Maybe good timing because he was just finished, & so sat us all down with him on the floor together, & we talked over mah crisis.

"I think I have a good idear about your rite-typer keys. You are missing your Ⓞ key & Ⓢ key, & we here are missing our little Imp friend." And he drawed in the air with his finger the letter R & the exclamation point.

"Rosalita," he said, to make sure I got it.

I thinked once. Nothing. Again. O! I did.

"Her? But why?" I asked all of them.

Nobody said nothing 4or a moment

\* \* \* \* \*

### In Pursuit of the Imp!

Then CC began to talk. "Well, sometimes she likes her shenanigans."

I nodded.

But he talked on. "I don't think that's it, though. I mean, we all love your newspaper. Nobody wants to cause it trouble."

"Yah but," I started to say.

CC helded up his hand 4or more talking. I nodded, having nothing more than "yah but" to say.

"It's some kind of game, Algernon. We just need to figger out what kind. I'm sure you'll get your rite-typer keys back!"

Lori talked now. "That does make sense. We know she loves to play complex games."

I looked at CC. "Listen, guy, I am but a simple beagleboy journalist. Can you tell her she wins, & then she'll give me back mah keys?"

CC shooked his head. "She doesn't work like that, Algernon. You have to figger out her game, & play it with her."

Ha! Try to figger out the crazy game of a Imp who's about one bajillion times smarter than me. But I guessed no choice in this.

CC found room in his lap 4or me & Lori, & skritchd mah 4orehead like an old pro.

"Besides, I think I have our next clue," he said with a smile.

He stood up with us, & brung us all into the bedroom where the Creature Common guys mostly live. On the bed, under a nice warm purple blanket, was that pretty lady who is CC's beloved one. I don't pretend to know much about the ways of people-folks, but she is always nice as Creatures to me.

We were now satted on the bed while CC fetched something to show us. "She left this note." He unfolded it to show us.

It was a map of the Land of Oz! But it was much stranger because typed all over the map was all this: Ⓞ! Ⓢ! Ⓞ! Ⓢ! Ⓞ! Ⓢ!

"Hey! Those are typed by mah rite-typer! I mean, those are mah missing keys!"

CC nodded. "She's telling us in her own way that she has gone to Oz with your rite-typer keys."

"But why?" I asked.

"That's part of the game we have to play with her," he said, smiling.

"Will you come with us? Please?" I begged. "Imps are not mah best subject of expertise," I confessed.

CC laughed. A nice laugh though. "Well, as a matter of fact, I am taking a week off from telling the Travelers Tales to the Creatures. So all of us have some days free right now. We'll come with you to Oz."

I was sure glad they were coming, & now all we had to do was get to Oz.

"So, how do you get to Oz from here?" I asked friendly.

CC laughed & his eyes got big. "To tell you the truth, Algernon, I don't know. I have never been to Oz."

Hmmm. "OK, well, let's just go back to Bags End then. We have doors to all those places like Oz & Neverland & Hundred Acre Wood & so on."

So CC kissed the pretty lady on both her cheeks. "Be careful, CC, but have fun," she smiled.

Then she smiled at me. "Good luck, Algernon. And don't worry. The Imp plays games, but she would never lose your keys." Nice girl.

So we came back to Bags End via the Marie picture-portal. I am sure glad it works.

Now I don't go all that much to places like Oz because I figger I should save mah visiting 4or nice occasions.

Oh well. So much 4or politeness.

Still, I knowed the level where it seemed like all those fantasyland doors are in a row. With Lori following me, & then CC, & he brung in his grasp MeZmer, Holly, Cuke, & Buddy, I brung us to those doors to look 4or the right one.

"Let's see. Narnia... Wonderland... Neverland... Hundred Acre Wood



...the River ...the Shire ... ah! Here we are!" I said grandly. I pointed to a door with a big fancy sign on it which even I could read that said "Oz."

"Now I can't say where we'll land in Oz, so just stay close, & we'll figure it out," I said, bravely as I could.

"And I have a good Oz map too," said smart & smiling Lori Bunny. She showed it to us, & there were no Imp typings on it.

"How did you get it?" I asked, shocked.

"Fast hoppings!" she replied. Good to have her on mah side.

And so I pushed the door open, & we all walked somewhere into Oz, in search of that Imp & mah rite-typer keys!

\* \* \* \* \*

### *Into the Merry Old Land of Oz!*

Now I know that many of mah Dear Readers are great fans of the books & people & doings of the Merry Old Land of Oz. I am too. On many nights when Miss Chris brings us Bags End guys out to her house's front step in Connecticut, to hear good stories readed to her & all of us by Ramie, her toy tall brother Ramie, I am always chilled & thrilled all over when he reads a Oz book to us.

That all said, it's a whole other thing when you travel to a place like Oz 4or yourself. I mean, it's all happening around you now, every Ozzy bit. And while the books usually end good, 4or the good guys anyway, nothing in this world or any others is a sure thing. Oz has some good big guys & some bad ones too. And it's big enough 4or both kinds to be around still.

All that to be said that I didn't take going to Oz lightly. I mean, on invited visits & all, sure, with good magick guys like Glinda the Good & Princess Ozma smiling & around.

But just showing up? And with mah dear friend Lori Bunny & those nice Creature Common guys CC, MeZmer, Holly, Cuke, & Buddy new to Oz along 4or the ride? And the ride being mah ceaseless hunt 4or that Imp Rosa!ita, who stole mah © & ® keys right off mah rite-typer? Well, shoooooot, me says.

So here we were, through the door from Bags End, & arrived in Oz. But where in Oz?

We all kind of gathered round Lori, who was peering through her smart guy spectacles at her Oz map.

"Well, we're on the Yellow Brick Road, so that's good 4or us."

"Where's the Scarecrow? And Tik-Tok? And Button-Bright?" asked CC with all his excitements. First-time visitor, you know.

"Calm down, guy. We have to find us before we find them," I tried to say nicely. He nodded & tried to calm.

The Creatures were all sniffing even while listening to us talk, & looking at Lori's map & all. I can tell you from what I learned from others & now mahself too: that is, sniffing can help in its own wordless way. So I tried.

Then it hit me, via mah nozebone, I guess.

"This is the Munchkin Country, Lori! It sniffs bloo to me!" Then I looked at the Creature Common guys, who seemed to agree. Looking helped too, I realized, when I noticed how even the grass & trees had a faint bloo tinge to them.

Buddy, who is this sort of small flowery-looking Bear Creature, speaked up too. "Mr. Algernon Beagle is right."

So knowing our where made it easier 4or Lori to adjust her spectacles to study even closer her map.

Then she looked up at us, all knowing from her studyings. She pointed her paw down one direction of the Yellow Brick Road. "That's the way to the Emerald City!"

So we all sorta got ourselves together, & started walking & hopping &, um, whatever-ing down the Yellow Brick Road.

Now some of you Dear Readers might be silly & wondering if we all danced our way along, & singed songs. I guess that's sometimes true, but not always. Maybe this wasn't that kind of story.

Still, I enjoyed this going. We passed by bloo Munchkin fields & farmhouses, & sometimes one of those strange bloo-dressed Munchkins guys would come out & say hi. We told them our story, & they would wish us well. All nice & polite.

Except one. He was polite like the rest, but he had more to say.

He was kind of tall 4or a Munchkin, & he was sort of hunched over with a long beard. His long cloak wasn't really bloo either.

We found him sitting peaceably on a bench, near some trees by the side of the road. Smoking his pipe.

Listened to our story, which I guess we tolded like to everyone else.

He listened, puffed, & then talked.

"Won't catch her if she don't want you to."

"How do we then?" I asked, hoping 4or a good answer.

He puffed some more. A nice smell to his puffings. Very green despite the bloo-ish place.

"Figger out her game & you'll get your keys back."

"That's what CC said!" I cried & pointed at CC to be sure. "But what kind of game is this? Meanly take a guy's rite-typer's keys & skitter too fast away to catch?"

Well, I guess he talked his peace cuz he puffed & smiled at me, & then started to take a nap.

CC motioned us to keep on our way quietly so not to wake him up.

So we did, but I was still bugged by it.

CC put his hand friendly on mah back. "If Fitz is in Oz, we're not that far behind!"

"O! Fitz! That's who that old guy was. Her strange friend Fitz! Not some unhelpful old fake puffing Munchkin!" I cried.

Everyone thought I made a good joke, & laughed with me. I guessed it was funny, but still.

It gets to be dark even in the Merry Old Land of Oz, & we were all kind of tired.

We found this barn that was empty of cows & pigs, & had some

good hay to make a bed with.

So we all sorta got clustery & close with CC as like our bed, or at least someone warm to be near.

MeZmer talked first time. "Don't worry, Mister Algernon Beagle. Ros'lita very much likes you & your newspaper."

"O shucks!" me says happily, but then remembered mah current grudge.

After that, we all falled asleep, one by one. I remember wondering if Oz stars are like Connecticut or Bags End or Imagianna stars. Then I was sure I saw the Bunny Star hopping up there. Silly me. We're all neighbors. So just one sky to share.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Arriving to the Emerald City of Oz!

We waked up the next day, & CC went off 4or a little while to eat his own breakfast. O! Breakfast! Yuk!

He came back & we all went back onto the Yellow Brick Road to keep along our way to the Emerald City.

I can't say how long it might have taken to get there because there was suddenly someone up ahead, & then arrived to us, & it was the wooden Sawhorse! Pulling a big red wagon along.

He's not much of a talker but, when we all gathered around him & said hi, & introduced CC & the Creatures & all, he got talky & friendly, saying, "Princess Ozma my mistress sent me along to bring you back. She saw in her Magic Picture that you all had come.

Well, this was a such a nice thing to do, & we right away climbed into the red wagon he was pulling. CC helped us shorter guys all get in, & have a good spot to enjoy the ride. He does coordinate with enthusiasm.

So we rode & let me tell you: we rode fast! The land blurred by as we went.

The Creature guys dozed some, but me & Lori & CC watched & watched, & soon we passed through the Great Poppy Field, & then came up promptly to the Gate of the Emerald City of Oz. Wow!

It's a big city, sort of like the one mah friends Rich Americus & Emmi the Bag Lady live in, but it's a lot more green-colored, & had a big Royal Castle in its very center.

The Royal Gate-keeper smiled, & waved at us, & let us roll through.

What I didn't expect was what happened next as we rolled into the City itself.

There were cheering crowds on both sides of the streets we rolled through. Cheering & cheering, & it seemed like it was cheering 4or us!

Then I seen even more that they were holding up signs with mah face & Lori Bunny's face on them! And a lot of them were waving around copies of Bags End News!

"What does this all mean?" I asked CC. "It's not very good 4or a mean Ozzy trick."

"It's not a trick, Algernon," said CC, who likes me, so I trust him.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"It's a parade to celebrate your newspaper's anniversary!" he said all pleased.

I looked at Lori to be sure, but she nodded & smiled too.

"Wave to your fans, Algernon!" CC said, & he & the rest showed how to wave to your fans. It's like regular waving but more guys & fellows in it, & they're smiling & admiring you. Not 4or your wave, but 4or something else.

"O shucks!" I said, feeling the tug of mah humble-bone. Modest & short to the ground both, ya know.

Well, the crowds kept cheering & waving, & us waving back all the way to the grand front entrance of the Royal Castle of Princess Ozma of Oz.

We all got out of the red wagon, & thanked the Sawhorse again 4or his ride. He smiled in a woody sort of way, & went off. His task done.

So now we went into the Royal Castle through the front door, into a really big & fancy room, not sure what to do next. Then a dark-haired girl who looked older than Miss Chris, but younger than Princess Crissy, ran up.

"That's Dorothy Gale of Kansas," I said. At least I knewed this much. "But here she is Princess Dorothy Gale. Of Oz now, I guess."

"Mister Algernon Beagle!" said Princess Dorothy Gale. She ranned up & hugged me. And she hugged Lori too 4or long time knowing. But then there were these new guys.

I helped. "Princess Dorothy Gale, this is CC, whose title is his name too. And MeZmer Bunny, & Holly Hedgedyhog. And Buddy who is a little Bear Creature. And Luke, who is a spiny green Creature fellow. But very nice. O, & they are all from the Creature Common, which I can vouch 4or is a real good place. And mostly nicer than Bags End even. Except 4or some." I decided to quit talking then.

Princess Dorothy Gale curtsied to all of them, who were in aww of meeting her.

She smiled & turned to me & said, "Ozma thinks she has news of your missing rite-typer keys!"

"Wow! Really?" me said.

"Yes, & she wants to tell you herself. And congratulate you on your newspaper's anniversary!"

"O! shucks!" me said. I kept 4orgetting all this extra friendliness & good will. I hope I didn't have to wave no more.

"Come on, everyone!" she said, & hurried us to see Princess Ozma of Oz.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Finding the Missing Rite-typer Keys, & Why (Grand Finally!)

I have knowed these Oz guys a long time, though they were new

& exciting to CC & the other Creature Common folks.

The Oz guys are a little more formal about things, which sets me a bit on edge. I mean, Princess Ozma is a real Faerie princess, no jeans-under-her-dress & secret tomboy ways, like mah dear Princess Crissy.

It's just different in Oz. I mean, Sheila Bunny calls herself "King" of Bags End, but it's just a strange idea of hers. She is Mayor, that's all.

But I knowed Princess Ozma's magick Faerie girl help was sure to be good in rightfully recovering the Ⓢ & Ⓣ keys key-napped from mah rite-typer by that shenanigans-loving Imp, Rosalita. Lori is still writing out this story as we continued our pursuits.

Princess Dorothy Gale brung us in a bit of a nervous group into the Royal Throne Room of Princess Ozma.

And I must say, Dear Readers, that, compared to Sheila's little Throne Room, or even Princess Crissy's in Imagianna, these Oz guys mean business. And then some.

A really big room with a high ceiling. A long chandelier hanging from the middle of the room, & smaller ones toward each corner. Everything lit by reflection of everything else, because of the many mirrors on all 4 walls. You saw yourself, looking at your other self, looking at your other self, & so on. I just tried to mind-think all these various me's to keep cool, remember politeness as always, & that we were all friends here, rabble & fancy alike.

And there, sitting in her big Throne, was Princess Ozma of Oz. Beagleboy journalism skills can only struggle to say about her. I mean, of course she is a pretty people-folks girl, like Princess Dorothy Gale & Miss Chris & Crissy & other people-folks are.

But that's not it. When I look into her eyes, really & deeply & truly, I see kindness. Concern. Affection.

And this was the strangest of them all. Modesty & humility. Princess Ozma does not she's better than nobody. She just wants to help & do good.

I knowed all this but it's like I had to learn it again. She is very special, but she thinks of herself as here to tend, like MeZmer. It's hard words to say.

"Mister Algernon Beagle," she said in her sweet princess voice. I was gonna bow & scrape low, just in case, when she hopped off her Throne & came to me & the others for hugs all around. I had to drag CC up by his earbone to get in on these good hugs, but the Creatures were not slow. She sniffs good to them. I tried a sniff or two, & agreed with their assessment.

Princess Ozma led us over to a table I had not noticed before. On it was a map.

But it wasn't Oz.

"Hey!" I said. "I know this map. It's the Forest & Hundred Acre Wood of Winnie-the-Pooh & his friends!"

Princess Ozma nodded & smiled. "Look closer too."

I studied the map with its trees & places it told. Where Wol & Piglet & Tigger & Eeyore & the rest lived. But didn't see what peculiar she meant.

Lori Bunny & CC saw what she meant at the same time. They pointed to Pooh Bear's own tree home, & then I saw.

Typed in a circle around his home was Ⓢ & Ⓣ & Ⓢ & Ⓣ over & over with mah own missing rite-typer keys!

I looked at Ozma with the confusion that forgot she's a magickal Faerie girl, however humble. "What does it mean, Princess Ozma?"

"She has gone to Winnie-the-Pooh's home in the Hundred Acre Wood where he & his friends live," she said.

"But why?"

Princess Ozma gave me a look I could have lived a long time inside. Somehow, she understands me as a beagleboy journalist, & me as just plain old Algernon.

"It's not a game this time so much as a gift, Algernon," she said.

"I don't understand," I said quietly.

"Your readers want to thank you for your good newspaper. You & your partner Lori Bunny. So she is going to lead you from place to place to receive this gift of thanks," she said, smiling.

I think. "You mean like when I was wating to your Ozzy crowds?"

She nodded.

Well, now everyone was looking at me for guidance. I looked in turn at the many Algernons in the mirrored walls around me.

"Well," I said finally, "if someone is gonna thank me, I am sure gonna make sure I reply you're welcomed."

Everyone suddenly laughed out loud, & I guessed yes, that it was kind of funny.

I raised mah paw to Princess Ozma to shake & hold. She holded & smiled at me.

"Thank you," I said humbly.

She smiled at me, then some more. Then, I swear, she tickled me under mah chin! Strangely but nicely true.

Lori speaked up now. "Princess, can you get us to the Hundred Acre Wood? Or at least back to Bags End, where there is a door to there?"

Princess Ozma smiled that wonderful & nice magickal girl smile of hers. "I can have you there in a moment."

Now Princess Dorothy Gale speaked up. "Can't you stay a little while? We can have a big anniversary party for your newspaper, & introduce these new friends to everyone here!"

Well, I would have been swayed, but CC talked. "We would love to visit, but we are on a mission to get Algernon's rite-typer keys back. Besides, that Imp may not stay with Pooh Bear long. I think this adventure is more a gift if we keep up, & more a game if we don't."

Everyone, even Princess Ozma, nodded to this statement. CC well knows the Imp's tricky ways.

But we promised to return again soon, & so Princess Dorothy Gale smiled & hugged us all twice.

I looked at Princess Ozma & said, "No silver shoes needed?" Then I laughed, & everyone else did too. All that really had to happen was for me to nod, & we were gone from Oz, & come to Winnie-the-Pooh's

*Hundred Acre Wood.*

I had been here before, but not in awhile, & it felt different to me. How? It looked the same.

Taking a chance, I sniffed. Like those Creatures already were, by habit I guess.

O. O. White Woods? Hmm. Not that same color so much, but still sniffed the same, or close. Hmm again.

Princess Ozma's magick put us right close to the tree where Winnie-the-Pooh lives with his small friend Piglet. And I guessed from memory that the sign over the door on that tree said "Mr Saunders," like in the books Ramie read to us guys.

CC & Lori & the sniffing Creatures were looking at me to decide what next.

I was guessing to go up to the door & knock, when we all heard a gruff voice singing its way from a distance to closer & closer to us.

Here were the words I heard & understood to remember. They were:

"Sing ho for the life of a Bear!  
Sing ho for a Pooh!  
Sing hee! hee! hee! if you have too much to believe!  
Sing ha! ha! ha! if someone tells you what is true!"

And it was indeed that fat friendly Winnie-the-Pooh Bear! I think also Pooh Bear, 4or short.

"Algernon Beagle?" he said, blinking twice at me to be sure." And Lori Bunny!" Blink, blink." And new friends?" Blink, blink again.

So of course there were then hugs all around, & introductions, & friendliness. CC started to talk about the lingual prestidigitation or something of the Winnie-the-Pooh books, but he saw Pooh Bear drooping to sleep, & with a smile stopped.

Pooh Bear led us all into his house-in-tree, where there were chairs & floor to sit on. I can't say how the very tall CC fit in too but he was at least cramped on the floor.

I was about to ask Pooh Bear about Rosalita when he held up his paw, & fetched something from his cupboard.

"On your newspaper's anniversary, I present you with a jar of hunny from my very own collection!"

Now CC caught me in mah cry of "O! Yuk!" & flee 4or the door, because he saw what mah panic didn't. Holding me tight, he showed me how the jar was empty of every last drop of hunny. He hugged & hugged & hmmd me calm, & I saw sad Pooh Bear's face, remembering all his lickings. O! Yuk!

Holly the Hedgedyhog talked in his squeaking way that reminds me of mah good friend Jackie Clown.

Holly said that jar can be good 4or carrying the rite-typer keys safely back to Bags End, when we find them. And maybe holding pencils too, CC explained.

Everyone looked at me. Pooh Bear had indeed licked the jar dry. I trembled a bit, then nodded. "Thank you, Pooh Bear," me said.

He nodded & looked happy again.

Then I remembered our business. "Have you seen Rosalita the Imp, Winnie-the-Pooh?" I almost laughed at mah almost joke.

Pooh Bear got a weird kinkly look on his yellow Bear's face, which I guessed was him trying to think hard. I sympathized, given mah own hard-struggling brainbone.

Luckily, mah smart guy friend Lori Bunny notices things I wouldn't see in a universe of days.

"Pooh Bear, what is that piece of paper in your paw?"

He looked at it. "It's the paper on a jar of hunny you take off before settling in to enjoy it."

Before Pooh Bear could smack his lips, or I could cry out & flee, Lori helded up an amazingly calming paw. "It has writing on it. May I see it?"

She was right. It was a map, sort of. It showed all the fantasylands the Imp had speeded through since leaving Milne's Porch in Bags End with mah rite-typer keys.

We laid it out on the floor 4or all of us to see up closer.

CC said, "It looks like an Imp Tracker. She's going too fast 4or us, so she's showing us her path. After here, she speeded through Wonderland, Neverland, the River. Now she's, um—"

"Fraggle Rock!" said together all of the suddenly if briefly talking Creatures. Well, Holly squeaked with the rest.

CC pointed again at the strange map. "She's waiting 4or us."

"Waiting?" I asked.

CC nodded. "She's an Imp. Just when you think you'll never catch up, which you wouldn't, she stops & waits."

"Well, we better go then," I decided promptly. I looked at Pooh Bear, who looked uncertain of everything. I said to him, kindly but truly, "You've been a huge help, Pooh Bear. Can we take this Imp Tracker map along?"

Pooh Bear smiled at me happy & handed it to me. "Don't forget your rite-typer keys jar!"

I motioned CC to grab it, since I was still keeping mah distance 4or a while.

Pooh Bear came out of his house with us. "Fraggle Rock is that way. Over that hill, & then down."

"Really?" me said.

He winked. "I may not have much brain, but I do like my long walks!"

We all thanked him profusely, & then went in a group over the hill he had pointed to, & then down the other side, & there was a cave ahead that seemed likely 4or getting to the underground Fraggles Rock.

Fraggles are a kind of yellow or green creature, kind of shaggy & big-eyed. They love singing & dancing when happy or sad, or really anytime. They are sort of friends with the tinier hard-working Doozer folks, & the scary bigger than even Ramie or CC Gorgs. O, & friends with that nice people-folks Doc, & his doggy Sprocket too.

So we followed the tunnel from the cave entrance, & it led us down & down into the earth, & just as I was worrying we were lost, we



heard the sounds of many Fraggles singing happy.

"Dance your cares away!  
Cackle & skitter your days!  
Life is a game, whatever they say!  
Might as well dance!  
Might as well play!"

And we come into the big cavern where Fraggles mostly live & sing & play & so on. It was a scene of crazy fun as Fraggles danced & singed & chased around the high & low rocks best they could that no-fooling-this-time Rosa!eeta the Imp!

I panicked. "Stop her! Capture her! She's singing & dancing & skittering with mah rite-typer keys!"

Well, I would like to say it was that easy, but first CC had to remind me that the song wasn't over. O, right, they do like to finish, happy or sad.

So when the song had sort of finale'd & ended, I looked around for that Imp. Hmmm. No Imp to be seen!

So I pushed through the Fraggles crowds, up to the Fraggles I most know of, Gobo, Wembley, Boober, Mokey, & Red Fraggles.

"Where is that Imp that you Fraggles hordes danced & singed with?" I demanded.

Gobo is the kind of leader of this bunch. "Hello, Mister Algernon Beagle & your friends! Welcome to the Rock! Nice to see you, eh!"

Well, then CC started talking his long words of admirings that was with English none of us knowed, so again he smiled & stopped. I promised mahself I would listen real good to his strange talking when not in crisis.

"Where did she go?" I asked again.

Boober spoke up. He reminds me a little of Eeyore the Donkey. Sort of dark & funny. "She's gone, Mister Algernon Beagle! That's why we stopped singing."

All the Fraggles nodded sincerely, like this made sense in their strange minds. Nice enough fellows, still, I guess.

Lucky for mah panic at losing her again, CC brought out the Imp Tracker map. "Look! She is back in Bags End!"

Sure enough, the Imp Tracker showed the colorful little blur of an Imp leaving Fraggles Rock, & arriving in Bags End.

"But where?" I despaired. "Bags End is big, & that Imp is tiny & fast."

Lucky us, Gobo talked up. "Our friend Doc gave us a gift, a magical device called a magnifying glass, to see tiny things bigger." He ran, fetched it, & handed it to Lori Bunny.

Lori then used this device like Sherlock Holmes to study the map closely. She hmmm'd once, twice.

"What, Lori? Torture me not, Brains!" I cried.

Lori laughed. "She is stopped at your Milne's Porch. This time I think she's waiting for just you, Algernon."

Wow, OK. Of course before we left I had to shake a lot of

Fraggle paws about mah newspaper anniversary & all that. I tried to be nice, but there's about a bajillion Fraggles guys. I promised to visit again for saying hi to Doozers & Gorgs & Doc & Sprocket & all.

I said goodbye to CC & the Creature Common guys too at this point. They had never been to Fraggles Rock, & wanted to stay for more dancing & singing.

"Thank you all," I said. "I will send her along when we're done." They all nodded & smiled at me nicely like they knowed Imps very well. Which they do!

So me & Lori went back to Bags End. Gobo showed me the right tunnel to the right door, & on through.

"Thank you, Gobo Fraggles," said me sincerely.

"No problem, eh!" he said. Some kind of funny accent to rival mine own unique brogue.

And Lori parted me too. "Let me know when it's time to work, Boss."

I nodded to her, gave her a grateful hug, & made mah way through Bags End toward Milne's Porch. I stopped along mah route at Leo the Dark Man's Hovel-Under-Ramp. He was all cuddled up in his corner futon couch, reading that "Action Man & Bunny Girl Save the World! Twice!" comic book. Probably for the bajillionth time. But he was happy, for him. And he had helped me, that was for sure.

And he stopped reading to say hi to me. "Want to read it again with me? I am just figuring out the small details & anomalies in this issue."

"No, Leo. Thank you, though. I just want to tell you that I am going to get mah rite-typer keys back now."

Leo smiled vaguely like that was nice. Then he looked back down at his beloved comic book & sort of muttered to himself, "What about that strange shadow on page 13? Is that Action Man's long-lost Brother Theodore?"

So I left him to it, & continued along till I arrived on the level of the Bunny Family's apartment, & went on through to the bedroom I share with Alex. He wasn't there, but I could see that he had a pile high of weird-looking books on his bed, & even I could figure out they all said "Bump!" on them.

O yah, I had promised to take a Bump lesson. Well, not yet, & I hurriedly climbed through the window to Milne's Porch.

There was mah comfy armchair waiting. And there was mah rite-typer on the little purple stool, with all those fan letters on one side, & paper & envelopes on the other side.

And waiting for me on the stool too, like just another day in Impville, was herself, Rosa!ita the Imp!

And then I noticed on the stool too, sorta behind mah rite-typer, was the jar from Winnie-the-Pooh, way taller than that Imp! How did that come to be there?

Maybe Crissy? Maybe Princess Ozma? I guess I know enough magical princess girls to wonder & not know.

She was looking at me all crazy-eyed, & finally I figured she wanted me to look inside the jar. So I did.

"Mah rite-typer keys!" I cried, truly happy. She cackled happy



too, & made her other strange noises.

Lucky for me, the keys popped right back into place on the rite-typer, & it was back to business.

I decided not to scold that Imp, who was just helping in her own way. In fact, I asked her to help me finish this issue, so w could rush out the good news of mah keys' return. She typed-hopped the keys like so:

```
Hello evnywun
      thiss iz Algefnonn Beegel an
Rosaleeta!!!!!!!
      saying alll theez
newew isssoos uf mah nuwzpatr ar lik a
  GRAT BIGGG THAKEEEEEEE
    4or allll yor
      kindnesses

lch yffgjj ol 35679
      hhffs!!!!!!

hay! stopp that!!!
      !"#% &'()*+,-./:;
lissen+ yu imp!!!!

OK enywaye thankee 4or thee good wishes

att sum poynt that imp kissed me onn' mah cheekbon
& skittered awaye & i was left heer with haff a pag to
go.

Lukkily, Loree kam by an shee iz helping mee finish.
Unlukkily, shee told mee Alexx & Allie Laperd ar nowe
wayting mee insid.

welll, I gess itz tim too go keepe mah deel.

But att leest we kan tipe R!R!R!R!R! alll wee want agen!

Enywaye, goodbyee 4or nowe.
```



Tamara Miles

## Nightswimming

I swim in the dark. Underwater,  
my doppelgänger greets me, her hair  
a loose coil of sea-snakes,

eyes wide, purposeful, long neck turning  
as she surveys the azurite landscape,  
its subtle energies,

and tells me her name in a foreign  
language; it sounds like daring,  
the taste of her tongue soft on mine  
is honeysuckled copper.

Poseidon's wife, Amphitrite,  
and the old sea god, apoplectic,  
cannot find her.

Swept along, I lose my other name;  
it does not follow me.

\*\*\*\*\*



AbandonView

### The Curses That Survive Brainstorming

See there was this town once  
where lifeboats hung  
from the eaves  
of all the houses  
despite their location  
many, many miles from  
any logical ocean.  
Old, drunken sailors  
residing on park benches  
near no discernible harbor.  
Tax rates higher even than  
the exponential and still rising.

\* \* \*

### The Speculative Uses of a Hoop-Skirted Berger

Steps that lead down to the street.  
I couldn't possibly meet you  
again until Tuesday next.

Alleyways are stand-ins for tangents,  
straight-laced housekeeping beyond compare.

The provinces remain a possible rendezvous,  
some shack in the middle of nowhere.

It was the movies that invented parachutes,  
drifting towards the outrageously insincere.

\* \* \* \* \*



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

## Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]



vi.

Rouse the black pen & give a look around. Tis the Attic, of many famous tales & songs. This stretch of it is the top hat of the Bungalow Cee, home of myself & the beloved Photographer, & one of several concurrent homes of Creature Common.

A new solid black floor under foot, close wooden bricks, & a white lattice ceiling above, protecting from the roof's many exposed nails.

A work table I sit at. KC Klock upon the wall, black cat with wild happy eyes, wiggling in time with red tail.

Attic Radio on a small table, sometimes a Dreamland Jazz station, sometimes reports on psychedelic elixirs on SpiritPlants Radio America.

Beloved in her chair, thick books & tea on her surreal table, at her reading ease—

Another table nearby, crates of old paper & things neatly in corners. Hooded lights above.

The way on to my left, hidden in a corner. Just a skein away.

Other than radio, *so* quiet, *so* removed.

Wondering where to next from hither to yon . . .

Turn the page soon to find out . . .

Asoyadonna in all her strange gloried prettied fineness sits on a big blue plastic tub near me. Insisted it with her charming half smile.

"I think that's a tub of old *Cenacles*," I remark sheepishly. She nods. Smiles at my Beloved. "Full of your beauteous picture-visions," she smiles.

Herself smiles too.

Donna & I turn back to my several notebooks & pads & tape-player & cassettes.

"*Great Grand Braided Narrative?*" she reads in one, smirks. But not with any mock.

I nod. "This how many things will happen. Events, crossings, revelations, new & old."

She nods. Listens.

I talk on. "This book, this *Labyrinthine*, can handle as much plain exposition as needed." Beloved lights some candles & incense. The Attic Radio is softly on that Dreamland Jazz station, broadcasting live from decades ago. She also hands Asoyadonna a mug of something warm & a bit sweet. Smiles. Now listening anew.

"You & your Brothers were, I think, scattered far, tossed hither to yon by a *Wobble*. Far in time & space. And I think you all forgot much. Not sure why."

She nods soberly.

"This is not a matter of bringing you all back together in this book"— I gesture affectionately to *Lx* on my work-table. "Nor just *Many Musics*, like originally." Pause. Gather the rest of my thoughts.

"*Labyrinthine. Many Musics. Bags End News. Travelers Tales. Dream Raps. Great Heroes of Yore Adventures.*" I reel them off, finger by finger.

They both nod. Then a voice from that hidden area over there. "Are you coming, Donna, & your scribbling friend?"

Asoyadonna jumps up, nods to me. Says to my Beloved, "Aunt won't let me travel on without one of her good flapjacks breakfasts!" Smiles between them.

I sack up notebooks & what-not, kiss Beloved's cheek. She smirks me. "Remember what Phish says. 'Whatever you do, take care of your shoes!'" I nod, serious & smiling both.

We come down from the Attic to the Pensionne. Aunt greets us warmly & hurries on.

Did I mention the Pensionne has a great big kitchen? Did I know this before tonight? I guess no.

I guess makes sense, if tis a kind of strange sorta boarding house in the White Woods. And I suppose folks passing through would like a good flapjacks breakfast to carry forth into their days.

I look around pretty thoroughly while Aunt & Asoyadonna talk away. Feels like this

matters to do.

Her kitchen is, I guess you could say, in two parts. Right now, the long table over there is covered, & that area of the room is dark. Looks like made of rough wooden planks placed over logs. Many short stools frame its every side, which I think number to more than four. Unsure, somehow?

I walk around this long many-sided table & notice many many pictures on the wall, each mounted in a unique antique frame. Some pictures I know. Creatures. MeZmer the White Bunny tucked close to her dearest one. Holly the grey Hedgedyhog. A many-colored glowing picture depicting some murky & magickal deep depth in the White Woods.

A painting of a White Birch with just six leaves on its branches. *Oh. Hmmm.*

“Francisco’s,” says quietly & suddenly near Asoyadonna. I nod uncertainly. Want to ask “which one?” But I don’t. She leads me by the hand back to the kitchen table. Heaps piled high of flapjacks, little jars of syrups & jams.

Aunt quietly bustles me up a plate & a stone mug of juice, delicious tho I can’t say sure what kind. She settles Donna too, & then fetches herself a plate & drink. Her long dark braided hair, dark eyes, simple working clothes, yet nothing obvious nor simple about her.

We eat friendly in quiet.

“I don’t know I’ve sat with friends like this for a meal in these White Woods in *Labyrinthine*,” I say finally. They nod, smile, chew.

I want to say more but unsure what. The food is delicious, magickal, fixtional.

Asoyadonna clears our plates & is away a few minutes, & a few more. *Ah, OK.*

“Do you know Gate-Keeper?” I suddenly ask.

Aunt nods.

“And Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle?”

Nods again. More of a smile this time.

I am quiet. She waits. “If I bring my best self to these pages, & the rest, this *Great Grand Braided Narrative* is within my reach.”

“It is.”

“If.”

“If.”

“Do the work.”

“*Always*, Raymond.”

I reach for her hand across the dark wooden table. Both of her hands.

I return to the room where I’d both slept & writhed, figuring gonna be time to go soon. Find my black bookbag in the corner, all safe, check its contents closely, all there, & make to return to Aunt’s great kitchen to wait for Asoyadonna.

Along the way back, notice those stairs that earlier, inexplicably, led up to the Attic of the Bungalow Cee where, as I said, I live with my Beloved, the Photographer, & there also dwells Creature Common, among its several.

Pause. Think. OK. Climb those steps & come out to the Attic as before. Find a note in her corner, on her seat. “Time to put away everything in the yard for winter! See you later. Safe travels! Love you always.”

The Attic Radio is still on the Dreamland Jazz station. KC Klock still shifting her crazy eyes & bright red tail to tell the time with penache. Heater’s on. My sweater on my seat.

Sit down at my long work table. Might as well do this now. Get out my blue-green coin purse of dice & coins & icons, little clocks, little radio.

Figuring out the mixings for this section takes some time. My notebook readings take me back to years & places, sleuthing for what will mix nicely here. Makes this fixtion part a game, but I think more than that.

*Remember some things.* This theme persists for me of late. That takes effort. *Which things? How? To do what with?* No real guide-posts in this. Yet down to my writing bones, this feels imperative.

So I take the time, do the readings, make the notes. Finished, I turn off the Attic Radio. Throw KC Klock a wink. Turn off heater. Leave sweater. Head back downstairs to the Pensionne, now fully ready to go.

Aunt nods & smiles my return, her smaller kitchen table crumbless clean now from our flapjacks breakfast.

“She’s in her old room, Scriptor,” she says brightly, & points me on. I start at this new name, then nod & follow her pointing.

As I approach, I hear her quiet singing, “All flesh is lorn. All flesh needs love.” Her door is open, but I cough my arrival. She is sitting on her bed, auburn hair now down, surrounded by old volumes & maps. Smiles me welcomed.

I come in & take a look around. Several of her walls filled by ceiling-to-floor

bookcases. Mostly books, but also some neat piles of maps & what look like small antique jars. Perfume? Potions? I'd guess both.

Her large window is on the wall facing her bed. Crimson curtains drawn back. A view of the great Garden, of the White Woods beyond. Even more distant mountains. An easy sniff of Wide Wide Sea salty air too.

"Sit with me."

I do.

"Tossed your dice & coins anew?"

I nod.

Her smile 'pon me is a fresh maiden's, but also well-travelled, seasoned with dear touch & loss both. Waits.

"I was reading my *Many Musics* poems about you & your Brothers. And reviewing our travels together."

Nods.

"Honey Now. The mayor's son. Your years of travels to the Tangled Gate. The Kingdom you six built in the King's old homeland. So much."

I show her my scrawled notes in my Thoughts Pad. She reads carefully. I look down at my hands & think.

"I call all this, all these various tellings & writings, my *mythopoeia*. Seemed like the best word."

"Tis a good one," says quietly.

Quiet again. *Reaching*.

"However it has come to pass that I live now, & these poems & stories all are, tis so. And because tis so, tis my blessed task to tend their growth & flourishing best I can.

She takes my hand.

"My idea now is called the *Great Grand Braided Narrative*, & its purpose is in part to tell a single story comprising many braided through each other."

Nods. I've said this previously. *Does twice said bring comfort?*

"I don't quite have yet what happened to your Brothers beyond the Cave of the Beast, but I feel like it involves a long ago Great Violence, of which a remnant remained. A *Wobble*."

Some of this is new to her. "What more?" I sense her listening now is still close but less passive. More what-next in her.

I stand now, to pace around my thinkings into words. "I think what happened is that a Spaceship struck this *Wobble* somewhere in the far reaches of outer space, & this led

to its crashing on a strange grey planet.

"I thought this Spaceship was from Emandia, bound for one of its chosen worlds, from the diaspora which occurred as it was dying."

Asoyadonna's face is wide with shock. "Emandia?"

I nod, recalling from my notes she was from there, though this Pensionne in this Village was all the home she could remember. Her family Aunt & her long-passed father the Tinker.

I go on. "There is a man who was in that Spaceship, a boy when it crashed on that grey world. He is called Gate-Keeper. He escaped its harsh life, & has since many times tried to free its people from it, as he came to know the Many Worlds braided together by their diaspora."

I sigh, go on. "I thought it was a Spaceship full of Emandians, your kinsmen. But could not figure out why he was ever shunned by all there."

"Why then?"

"This ship was hijacked. Its passengers taken prisoner."

"How? By who?"

"By someone or someones in or near or part of that *Wobble*. But their doing so damaged the Spaceship, caused it to crash where it did. A barren, grey, nearly uninhabitable world."

"And the Gate-Keeper?"

"He was one of very few younger Emandians on that Spaceship. The Captors rigged up something in the garments most of them wore. A kind of tech embedded in these, & in their skin. Electric shock to disobedience. Maybe more."

"Why not the younger ones?"

I think. Wonder too. "Do you remember your romance with the Mayor's son awoke your body? You now had penis or pussy or nothing to wish?"

She nearly blushes, nods.

"Your skin shifts colors too?"

Nod.

"These younger Emandians hadn't evolved yet like this. The tech did not work on them. The Captors let them be, but by that same tech punished anyone who would tend them kindly. They would get caged too, in time."

"By sex?"

"By *something*. A kind of wider waking to the world. A needful catalyst of some kind."

She nods.

I pace & continue.



“The *Wobble*, now active, or awake, or *something*, multiplied, in space & time. It’s shown up in many of my stories, in different forms, all over.”

“One, none, many?” she asks, but smiling darkly.

“Like the Imps? Yes, no, sort-of?”

“And so it caused my Brothers to be tossed far, hither & yon?” she asks quietly.

“I think so . . . maybe.”

“Because together we were a threat?”

“Maybe?”

“So what should you & I do?” she asks finally.

More quiet.

“There’s a lot to do. But part of that is each of you remembering some things. And finding your way to someplace to re-unite.”

“The Beach of Many Worlds. Abe the Sea Turtle?” She almost brightens, despite herself. I nod, smile too.

“And maybe he can tell us what can be done about all this.”

“We can liberate Gate-Keeper’s grey world for one.”

I nod. “I don’t think as simple as like those old fat marauders you dispatched with on your way to the King’s old homeland.”

She smirks, then saddens. Motions me sit next to her.

“How long since we Brothers were all separated?”

“By my time’s passing, near ten calendars of time. But your own reck would be far more precise.”

She nods, uncertain.

“I found you in that bus station, with a ticket to Elliptical City. And your mutt Benny.”

She laughs at this.

“Where had you come from? How did you come by Benny?”

She sorta starts within. “I, um, don’t know. It’s like . . . I remember clearly all my days living here with Aunt & my father the Tinker. And all the times leading up to meeting my Brothers, our many travels, & come to the Island after so long. It gets dream-like there for me. Then I met you, in that bus station, with Benny, & it’s like I slowly *came back* to myself.”

I nod. This is enough for now.

“I hope he’s OK. Benny, I mean.”

I nod. “I’m sure he is.”

She hugs me close then. Having clarity of mind & hope & purpose all returned to her has made her more powerful to behold.

“How should we best & swiftest get ourselves to Abe’s Beach, my friend?” she asks. I prefer that to “Scriptor” any day, I realize. “Scribbler” might be OK though.

I think. “What we want is word to spread far & wide that we are looking for your Brothers. I have an idea that we could best do that by a visit to the Thought Fleas’ Rutabega Festival & Fleastock.”

“Oh my!” she says, & so I easily guess she does not know these.

“And then travel on the Wide Wide Sea & on down to Abe’s Beach.”

“On the *Good Ship Ker-plow-ee*? And herself tiny as ever & yet Captain still?” she cries, & hopes.

“You mean, Commandeer Masta’ Splasha?” I laugh too. She nods.

“Well, maybe,” I say. “There are others who will help, if need be.”

She nods, quieter now.

But instead I stand up again. “I’ll leave you to ready for our long journey. I’ll wait in the Kitchen with Aunt.” Asoyadonna nods &, as I close the door, I notice her going for her small ivory hairbrush on her bedside table, gift from her father the Tinker, likely the first thing she packs back into her knapsack.

Aunt is waiting for me at the smaller kitchen table. Now the larger one is uncovered too, & the lights raised over it. Lots of bowls & spoons & napkins set out.

“Near supptime,” she smiles. “Folks been hoping & wishing for their bowls of Miss Flossie Flea’s Special Festival Recipe Rutabega Soup all day!”

I nod. “We’re going to be passing through there, on the way to Abe’s Beach.”

Aunt’s sober features now really brighten. “Asoyadonna will love all that!”

We say no more but hug warmly. Aunt quotes back my own words to me, I think. “Life doesn’t take it away. Fools give it away.” Nods me serious to finish it. I nod in return.

“I do not wish to.”

She talks on. “Folks around here need you & your many words, Scriptor.”

“Scribbler, please,” I smile sheepishly. “Scriptor’s just the press.”

She nods. “You also wrote, ‘We make Art to remember how to tell the truth.’”

I nod again, wondering, till she points over to a bookcase I realize with an audible “Oh!” is stuffed top to bottom shelves with issues of *The Cenacle*.

“You keep making the Art, Scribbler, the White Bunny says it to you & I do too.” She makes a pen scribbling gesture with her finger. I nod.

Asoyadonna appears, freshed up, packed up, like we was goin’ on a picnic but . . . I imagine she has enough knives & other weapons about her shapely person to belie that fool’s thought.

Their embrace is long, deep, & endless sweet. Kisses Asoyadonna three times on her cheeks. "One is for that fine Abraham. What a storyteller."

Donna smirks & nods.

"And the second for Roddy. He'll know why."

Second nod.

"And when you finally get back to Dreamwalker, however you do, third kiss for him & tell him he owes his Aunt a visit soon! All them boys. We'll throw them all a party, a big bonfire, in the Great Hall, bajillions of stars looking down too!"

Smiling both, & both now near to tears, they embrace once more. Aunt also packs a few more "just in case" & "you never know" items in AsoyaDonna's knapsack.

We're both ready to go.




\*\*\*\*\*



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## Notes on Contributors

### Scriptor Press

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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.

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NEW ENGLAND

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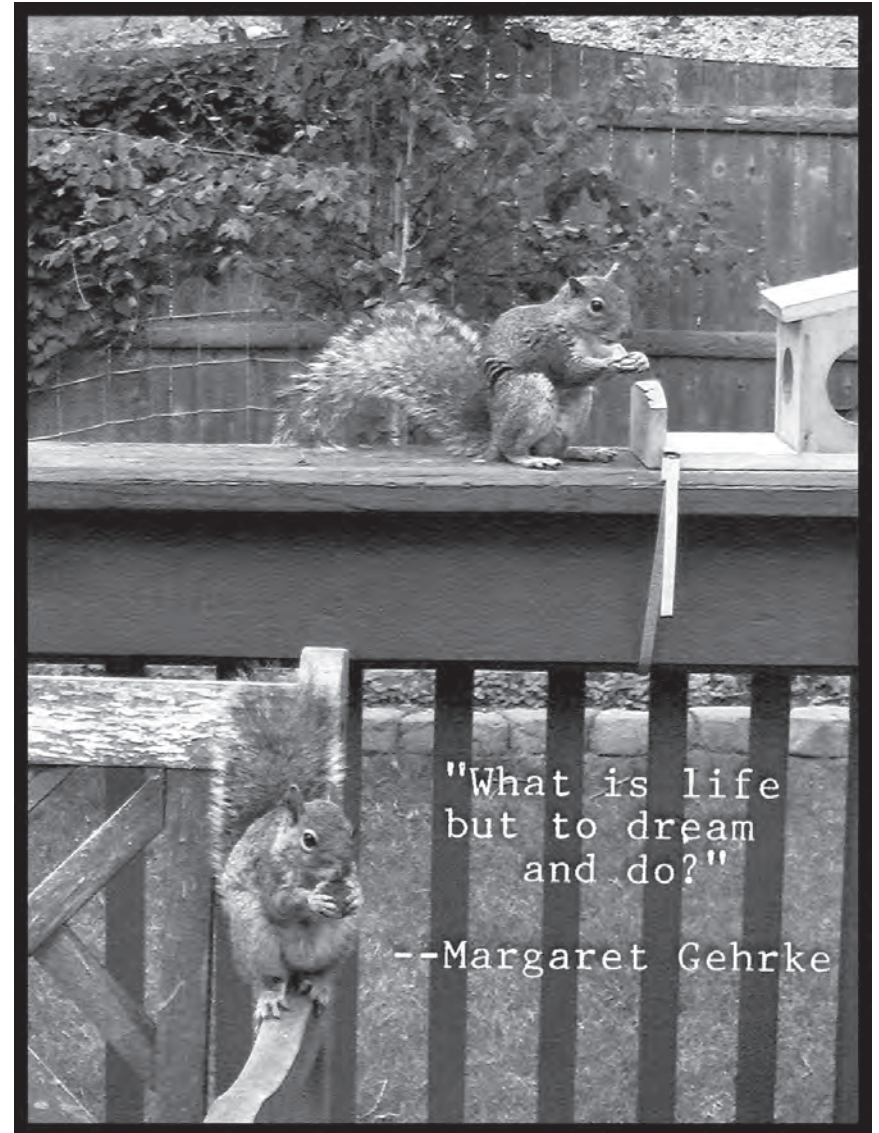
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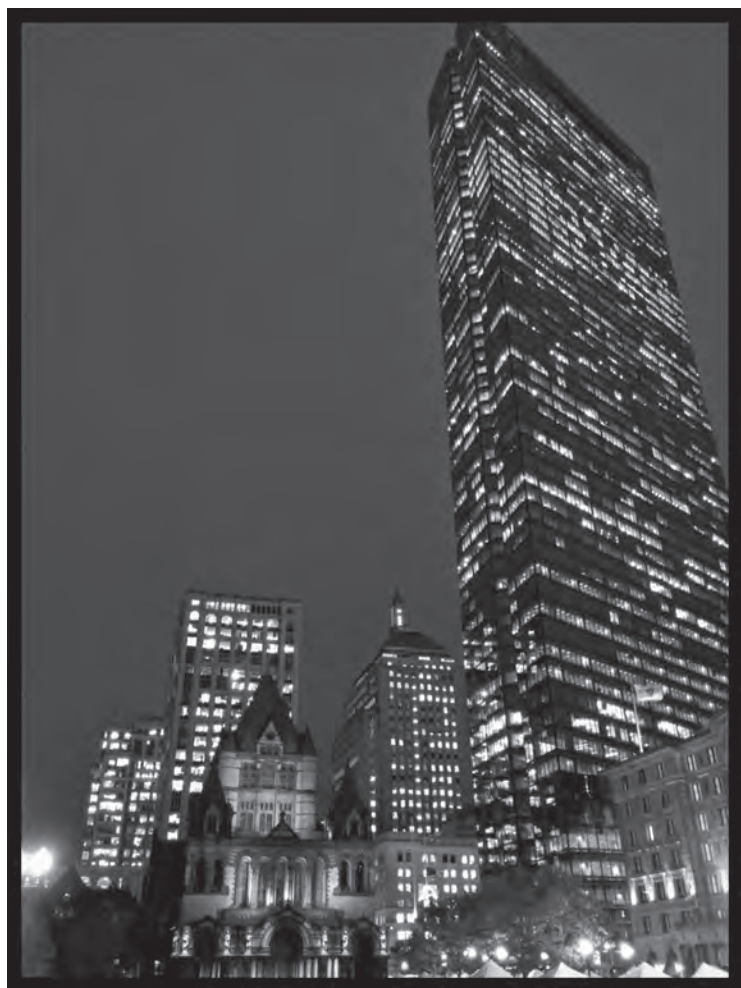
**Kassandra Soulard** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is the perfect companion to travel with through the Global Pandemic.

**Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Art is how I give of myself to, & receive happily from, this strange wide world.

**Timothy Vilgiate** lives in Austin, Texas. The radio version of *Rivers of the Mind*, an amazing work in any form, can be found online at: <https://riversofthemind.libsyn.com>.

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2025