



Do what you can,  
with what you have,  
where you are.

--Theodore Roosevelt

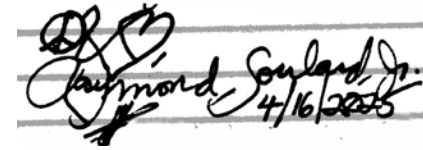


## Editor's Introduction

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

The hopes & dark dramas of humankind slogged, ever mixtured, on. Lunaticks foamed & fermented for more days again with cruel power to wield.

Art, as it ever does, went on. Tool, salve, weapon, path, for those willing to try for real. This volume evidence of this, & invitation to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raymond Souland, Jr." with the date "4/16/2025" written below it. The signature is written on a background of horizontal lines.

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



# Scriptor Press Sampler

Number 24 | 2022 Annual

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

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| POETRY  |     |
| by Judih Weinstein Haggai.....                    | 7   |
| DREAM RAPS  |     |
| by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌀].....                  | 9   |
| POETRY  |     |
| by Sam Knot .....                                 | 45  |
| TESTING ME [TRAVEL JOURNAL]                       |     |
| by Nathan D. Horowitz.....                        | 53  |
| POETRY  |     |
| by Martina Reisz Newberry.....                    | 59  |
| RIVERS OF THE MIND [A NOVEL]                      |     |
| by Timothy Vilgiate.....                          | 61  |
| MANY MUSICS [TWELFTH SERIES]                      |     |
| by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌀] .....                 | 71  |
| NOTES ON DEMOCRACY                                |     |
| by Jimmy Heffernan.....                           | 76  |
| POETRY  |     |
| by Tamara Miles.....                              | 79  |
| GO INTO THE SEA! (GRAND FINALLY!) NEWS! [FICTION] |     |
| by Algernon Beagle.....                           | 80  |
| POETRY  |     |
| by Colin James.....                               | 95  |
| THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE SASQUATCH [PROSE]      |     |
| by Charlie & Richard Beyer.....                   | 96  |
| LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FICTION]                      |     |
| by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌀].....                  | 100 |
| NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS.....                        | 115 |

*Scriptor Press Sampler* is published annually by Scriptor Press New England,  
2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, USA 98107  
Email: [editor@scriptorpress.com](mailto:editor@scriptorpress.com)

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

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

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2025

*Judih Haggai Weinstein*



## Out of Nowhere

out of nowhere  
you appeared  
and kissed me

\* \* \*

the entire moral world  
watched  
as i enjoyed every molecule  
of your lips

\* \* \*

such a kiss  
after all the kisses  
taken by default

\* \* \*

your forbidden smile  
in lightning and thunder  
attached to my skin

\* \* \*

my clothes tied  
yours fully buttoned  
from any future bed.

\* \* \*

years of walking,  
to neutralize the blush  
of further fantasy

\* \* \* \* \*



Epi Rogan

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



## Dream Raps

*Smile.*  
*Wake up!*  
*Happiness*

—6 x 36 Nocturnes, V, #35, 2001.

All volumes of Dreams Raps can be found at:  
<http://scriptorpress.com/dream-raps.pdf>

\* \* \* \* \*

### I'm in Elliptical City

This story happened some time ago or, possibly, some time hence. It's one of *those* kinds of stories. You see, I'm living in Elliptical City. The locals call it E.C. by day. And I'm at a kind of a coffeehouse. I think an open-mic performance night. It's dark in here. It's strange & close. And, at one point, my eyeglasses become entangled in some kind of a soft tape. A woman sees my dilemma, & takes them from me to fix. I nod to her.

She departs to go up on stage. I think she's going to perform a poem. But her poem is not words. She stands erect, all nine foot of her, waves her arms about like a bird, opens her mouth slightly, & out come **colors, many many colors**.

They come out in different varieties. They fill the air. They dance around us in this dark coffeehouse. Soon, she is all **colors** wavering up there on the stage, all nine foot tall of her. It is a moment of beauty, & mystery &, when she's spent, her **colors** dim, & they fade from around this dark coffeehouse, & from her too.

And then she's gone, & I take off my glasses, & I look at them. And now they have a slight **colorful** tint to them, by way of memory.

I look at the clock, since I don't have a watch, & the clock says I'm late. I rush out of that coffeehouse in E.C., & down many streets with my map in hand, until I come to the Elliptical City Transit (*Ec Tetera* by nickname!), which is filled with buses to places, & I must get somewhere.

I am an editor, you see. My clothes are patched, but my notebooks are thick in my bag, & I have places to go to. Got my little jar of **2**, of course. Just a little left, saved it for this trip. I have to get to the Great Liberry to do my most important research.

I find the right bus, the roofless one. I'm the last one to get on. I sit in the last seat, next to two other people who are snorin' & slobberin', but they're not unfriendly to me.

I look through my notebooks thoroughly. I want to prepare to arrive at the Great Liberry. One does not show up half-intentioned, as it will affect what you find. You see, when this roofless bus gets me there, when I arrive to the Great Liberry, I am going to do some of the deepest researches I've ever done, into the *Dreaming*. For I've learned, in one way & another, that there are **Sleepers** who travel the *Dreaming*, trying to cause change with good ripples forward. They find it harder to change things the farther back they go, because history weights heavy upon any ripple.

Then there are these **Scholars** who advise them. **Scholars** who calculate the ripples. They look deep into history, & see where it might be changed toward the better, the kinder, the more generous. And they send the **Sleepers** to those places, with advice on what to do. *Move a book slightly. Smile at a stranger. Fall off a bridge, with witnesses.*

And then there are simply the **Tourists**. Now you can wonder such how a great operation like this is funded. It must cost bajillions of dollars to pay for such a project, to try to heal history, as they are. Well, these **Tourists**, they're the patrons. They pay to travel through the *Dreaming*, to view time & space from new perspectives. They pay to be at key & crucial moments in time, when documents were signed, & evil men were slain, & trees were planted, but they can *only* watch. They've become like traces, perhaps some in history call them **Specters**, but they're merely **Tourists** from the far-flung future, when the great project has been created to heal history, via the *Dreaming*, before the world ends, at least for people-folks.

And I am going to the Great Liberry to read more & more about this. If my intentions are good, if I'm focused, if I *hmm* well, I will get into the part of the Great Liberry that will bring me to the books to read, to tell me all I need to know, or all I could wish to know, or even just one or two more little things in the large story.

I extract very carefully from a hand-made book I keep in the inmost pocket's pocket's pocket of my green plaid jacket a folded up piece of paper. I keep my important papers in this book, like my notes on the **Sleepers**. Oh, & some on Gate-Keeper & Mentor too.

Unfold the paper carefully for the slobberin', snorin' fellows to see:

*Ask for Schola' Sanchez.  
He is the Liberrian.*

*I don't know if he used to be a **Scholar**, like the ones I am studying, I explain slowly to them. But he is a **Liberrian** now anyway.* They vaguely nod at me.

I smile bright as a dancing Creature. *Those are my instructions for when I get there. Ah! I am so excited!*

They smile at me, & go back to their slobberin' & snorin' rest.

\* \* \* \* \*

### There is, Down, at the Heart of the World, a Great Tree

There is, down, at the Heart of the World, a Great Tree. This Tree has six roots. *Where do these roots reach down to? What do they root in?* These are my questions. And another: *Is there solid earth of some kind down there into which these roots root?*

The trunk rises up, & its many branches have grown & traveled to many places. Have become lesser great trees that are beheld in wonder themselves, by those far above the Great Tree. *Where do they reach toward? Is there a far end, a far tip of the farthest branch?*

The Heart of the World is shared by Many Worlds. Thus, the Great Tree is the Great Tree of Many Worlds. Would you know *wherefrom*, you would seek down to this Great Tree at the Heart of the World, of the Many Worlds, & you would know better, but you would not know *all*.

And there came a Festival, celebrated on Many Worlds, in many ways. Worlds that, while they share the Great Tree at the Heart of them, had lost connection amongst each other in other ways. And this Festival was one where they grew closer together again. Because it was a Festival in many forms, on Many Worlds, but it was *one* Festival. One Great Tree, one Heart of the World, one Heart of the Worlds. *From many, one. From one, many.*

Look what's rising, as Festival goers from Many Worlds cross into each other's homes.

Look what's rising, in that Great Filld, where worlds cross by many wonderful threads. By using these threads, left here & thereabouts, by way of invitation, you can travel from yours to another's, & someone from there can come to yours.

Look what is rising, right in the center of that Great Filld, in reaction to all of this. Rising *higher & higher & higher. Tis a lesser Great Tree!*

To know that *I am I*, & also that *I am we*, & that these truths stand braided in all beings, is to understand, such as one can, that *everywhere* is home, & *everyone* is brother & sister & other.

*Come to the Festival! Hurry! Come to the Festival!* You'll get your thread to travel other worlds. If you come to the White Woods, you'll get a nice bowl of Rutabaga Soup, flavored with mushrooms.

You'll be shown how. You'll feel the roots down below you, reaching deep, & deeper, to unknown, or maybe unknowable, depths. And then you will feel, if you reach up, the branches of the Great Tree reaching ever on, ever out, ever in.



*Come to the Festival, my friends! Come to the Festival!*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **There Are Many Ways, Many Paths, Many Worlds**

There are many ways, many paths, Many Worlds. It's all true. And, happily, the worlds & paths & ways have opened up to each other again. As in times long past. The Festival has opened the worlds to one another again.

*And it took you a while to figure it out, didn't it?* I mean, what originally happened is that you were on the roofless bus, & you're headed home from work, & you were very tired. It's a big bookstore. It's just *so* big. Some shifts, they're quiet, & some you just run around left & right. All sorts of customers.

And it's good. They look for all sorts of books. Popular ones like *Aftermath* & *The Tangled Gate*. *Peter Pan*, of course. Controversial ones like *Nazi Jailbait Bitch*. Even, once in a while, scholarly ones like *History of the Six Islands*. By the end of the shift, you're just plain tired, & you get on the roofless bus, half-asleep. The Driver greets you. Wearing his busman's uniform & hat. You sit in the very back seat, tucked amongst your book-bag, your hat, & gloves, & whatnot, & you just fall asleep. You just fall right asleep.

Now your stop is just about at the end of the line. It's the second to last stop. But the last stop is *far* beyond your stop. And you know this because when you first started taking this roofless bus, coming from that bookstore job, you almost missed it. And the Driver said, *buddy, you don't get your stop, it's a long way on to the last one. Less'n you want to sleep it off on the Beach*.

Well, that's what happened. You missed your stop. You were sort of slouched down in the seat. And the Driver had other things in his mind. He was looking forward to the Festival himself. *Had you heard of the Festival?* Oh, maybe, you hear about things. But you wouldn't know thing one about how to get there.

Well, you woke up, because the roofless bus had stopped, & the Driver was shaking you. *Wake up, buddy, wake up! Are you going to the Festival too? We gotta hurry to transfer for the Festival!*

Well, you look around, & this isn't the city anymore. The roofless bus is deep in the White Woods, & they are strangely glowing, many, one, & none **colors**, however that may be. You've not been here before, preferring the familiar ways of E.C. And the Driver's changed out of his busman's uniform. He's looking more casual in blue jeans & lumberjack shirt. Wearing a **2** necklace. And he's got a kind of floppy hat on. Looks ready to party!

*Come on, man. Come on. It's OK*, he says. *I'll show you the ropes*. So we depart the roofless bus. He blocks up the tires. Takes the key. *Safety first!* he says with a wry smile.

He brings you through the Woods. No paths to be seen, until you come to a certain tree.

Not really any different than all the others. All beautiful, they are, this one too, no sign. After a while, though, you hear a distant *Laad!*

And up comes the strangest conveyance you've ever seen. It's kind of like a bloo-&-pink Trolley. But it's not like any kind of trolley you've ever seen. The door opens, & there's this strangely wonderful bloo-&-pink Piglet Creature behind the wheel. *Hop on board, passengers! Make sure to buckle in*, cries this strange Driver merrily.

*Safety first!* you both say. You're learning the ropes now.

And this Trolley just takes off on its tracks, rolling & unrolling underneath its wheels. So you can't see any ahead or any behind, but they're definitely down below. Trolley goes careening through the White Woods for a long, long time. And then stops.

*Happy Festival, passengers!* the bloo-&-pink Creature Driver calls.

*Are you coming?* I ask friendly.

*More passengers to get before I have my turn*, the bloo-&-pink Creature Driver says, with a warm, tricky smile. She & your Driver friend throw friendly winks back & forth.

Now your floppy-hatted Driver friend takes you by the hand, leads you into a large clearing. *Oh my gosh, so many*, you say, but he leads you safely through the crowds. And you don't remember later half of what goes on. But there seems to be some kind of a stage-platform at one end of this Great Clearing, & performers of all different kinds. There are beings made of Buzz. They are beings made of Bells. *Like a Talent Show?*

And then you're being fed a little Soup that you've never tasted the like of before. And you're being led into a place of **colors**. And now you're in a great big place beyond what you can imagine. *Fill the Filled!* is the cry, as you find a thread in your hand, & you do not quite comprehend that. *What a beautiful tree in the center though!*

And then you're led along again by someone to a great old house, like one you remember from your youth's dearest dreams. And it seemed as though you're passed from hand to hand. You're in a Reading Room. Holding a necklace. You go through a door. You're taught to *hmmm* beautifully beyond what you can imagine.

And you come at last to a prairie. *How did you end up on the prairie?* You were just in a bookstore, five or ten minutes ago. And there before you now, you learn, is the Great Prairie Press Palace. And you approach, & there are many kinds of doors, & you choose one at random because it seems like that's what all this is about: *choosing*.

You go through a door of endless **colors**, with a smile on your face. And what happens next, you can't even imagine to wonder to know. *Happy Festival!*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Dreamwalker wakes . . . but not really . . .

Dreamwalker wakes, but not really. *Again.* It's like he comes to, as though he was just drifting off, even though he knows none of that is true. But here he is, in the warm home of an older woman he does not hardly know, yet she feels dear to his heart in some way he cannot understand with words.

And she is again teaching him from the frailest, most tattered of ancient books. *But are they words she speaks? Do her lips actually move? What is he learning?* She smiles upon him, like some kind of recalcitrant student, & he smiles back, guiltily, wishing he understood better.

Someone else seems there, too, sitting in a corner, witnessing this lesson. Like a Brother of his, yet he doesn't remember him either. But he recalls from earlier in the evening they were together in an old old coffeehouse, & the Brother was angry. Something about love, being deeply in love. And the street outside was crowded, loud. He'd never seen this place like this before. The only thought he has to himself right now is: *how to get back to that Cave, or on to the exit?*

But he keeps this most deeply to himself. Since he's a visitor, it seems, he's shown to a small chamber, the warm bed, many blankets of course. He gets in, gets under the covers. Does not undress. He's not sure why. But it's best not to undress.

And somewhere deep in the many sweaters, shirts, jackets he seems to have on him, he pulls out, from a very hidden pocket, a hand-made book containing a tied-together collection of index cards & photographs. These are his memories, since he seems to have lost his own otherwise. Memories, dreams, whatever he can pull together, he'll put down on the index cards with his stubby pencil. It is how he will remember them. *It is how he will find them again.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### This Philosopher

This is the way it began to be told about this Philosopher. After that upsetting trip down to the Beach of Many Worlds, & some kind of traumatizing encounter with a "computer table," his friends got together & raised a subscription that he may be able to do his philosophizing work. Maybe even become the Great Author of philosophical tomes that he yearned to be. Some wondered at all this, but it seemed to go well. You may wonder though: *What was his work?*

Well, at first, he watched his little black-&-white DüMönt TV, with an Antennar 100Q, in his Philosophizing Chamber, which you could also say was a small room in the Pensionne in the Village, hosted by Aunt, who's also one of his patrons. Just down the hallway from that weird golfing fellow.

So he began thinking about football teams he saw on the little TV, like that great old tight

end he used to enjoyed watching. Now got to wondering about them, in a philosophical manner. Like: *what if, instead of being built to run & tackle, they were built to fly?*

And then he adjusted his Antennar 100Q, borrowed from a fellow Pensionne dweller, that weird golfer actually. Nice enough fellow, he supposed. And now he watched those dancers on the little TV, & he thought: *what about them doing even more rising up, than always just landing from their dancings?*

And these things interested him for a while, & he wrote them down in his vast & strange hand-made notebooks. But then, see, he began to *really* mull into his philosophizings. He tried to draw back, & see it big, & then draw deep in, & see it small.

And he thought: *well, now, if I took the various bric-a-brac about me, I could possibly conjure up a substance called 2. And sometimes it will be the number 2, & sometimes it will be T-O, & sometimes it will be T-O-O. Ah, there's something. And sometimes it will be a pill, & sometimes it'll be a paste, & sometimes it will be a steam. Sometimes it resides in a jar, sometimes in a bowl, sometimes on a necklace, or a bracelet, or a ring. And, as 2, it would address many questions, such as I + not I. As T-O, it would address enhanced action, as in to dance even higher, to fly instead of run. And, as T-O-O, it would be even something else. Dancing higher still! Flying further, more & less, both!*

And his friends, who had created the subscription to support him, eventually came round to see how he was doing. They brought him nicely covered bowls of Rutabaga Soup, to make sure that he eat once in a while. Even Philosophers must do so.

And he sat with them, & he told them all about 2, T-O, T-O-O. And he showed them, the guy amongst them, there were many girls, there were a few Creatures, but there was a guy amongst them, he'd been the first, & he showed him first, & then the rest.

And so the Philosopher demonstrated with him how it worked. Handed him a jar, handed him a bowl, put a necklace around his neck. They begin to engage in 2, T-O, T-O-O. *All drew closer. All floated far away.*

Aunt stood in the doorway, smiling. She knew that all were delighted by the beginnings of this Philosopher's long work.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Gate-Keeper & His Mentor

You know how I've been researching the Gate-Keeper for so long? *Where did he come from? What is he?* Not the kind of things that you can go to your usual kind of fine library & find out.

But, you see, I have a friend. His name is Schola' Sanchez. He is a Bear Creature who is the **Liberrian** for the Great Liberry at the Heart of the World. Schola' Sanchez is a fine fellow & he understands how long I've been researching the Gate-Keeper, to understand,



& to tell. That's all I want to do. *I want to tell. Do you understand me?* I think you do. Thank you.

So Schola' Sanchez, one fine time, he came to see me, while I was sitting at the Driftwood Table, in the Bungalow Cee, working on my notes, trying to figure this & that, not doing very well. *Labyrinthine, Many Musics, Dream Raps*, I don't know.

Well, Schola' Sanchez came right up to me, where I sat at the Driftwood Table in the Bungalow Cee, working on my notes, & he offered me a kind smile, & a friendly paw. And he led me, by one way, & another, to the shore of the Wide Wide Sea, where waited the great green-&-golden Calgary the Sea Dragon, of so many famous songs & stories!

So Schola' Sanchez & I wended our way right up, from tail to back to shnoggin of that fine Calgary the Sea Dragon. He had us buckle in with Safety Scales. *Safety first!* is our motto, one & all. And we *thwup-thwup-thwupped* away, long & long & long over the Wide Wide Sea, until we came to where it was time for Calgary the Sea Dragon to swoop & soar suavely *up-up-up!* & then *down-down-down! ker-splash!*

*And deep, deep, deep, deep, deep* we now go. Safe as could be, with this Calgary the Sea Dragon, until we—*ker-splash!*—come right out the bottom of the Deep Deep Sea to the sky above shore of the Deeper Deeper Sea, & there was Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle, on the Beach of Many Worlds!

We had a nice visit with him. Probably a nap. Maybe said hello to his Imp friend, who lives in a tooth cavity in Abe's jaw. She cackled us friendly. Schola' Sanchez told Abe what we were bound for doing. Abe nodded & agreed it was the thing right now to be bound for doing. *Get along my friends! Hurry, hurry!* he cried merrily.

So we did. Boarded Calgary the Sea Dragon again, dived down deep again, into the Deeper Deeper Sea, & come to the well-known dry tunnel into the Cave. Thence mysterious place where the White Woods & Great Liberry become one & the same. Not too far from that Great Tree, that's for sure.

And Schola' Sanchez, a lovely Bear Creature, a bear of powdery gray beauty, & a big smile, & a fine **Scholar's** cap on top, to show he is a **Scholar** (or used to be, since he is a **Liberrian** now), he brought me to the researches I needed to do, & this is what I learned.

I learned Gate-Keeper had a Mentor. He was a strange-looking fellow, very tall, long coat, was a dark man with pale eyes. He had a knit cap upon his head. Hey, I wear those from time to time too! Striped was his. White spiked teeth, *maybe make you fear?* I'm not sure if you should. Warm brown hands, tall white boots.

This was Gate-Keeper's Mentor, this was who taught him. And helped him, too, when he came back in later days, to his old home-world, because he was on a mission to help this home-world, help its folks move to the beautiful world where they wanted to go. *Colorful, mysterious, calm, & sweet.*

They went together. Far from the settlements that they both knew familiarly, unhappy settlements, near their crashed spaceship, never very developed. Nobody wanted to live there. But they did, as seemed like no option. But Mentor, knowing Gate-Keeper's wish to move them, nodded & knew it was time to bring him to the yellow building.

The yellow building was a far *far* trip. Far off in a part of the world none of the rest of their people knew about. It was tall. It was crooked. It was yellow. You could say it was yellow of sickness, but I tend to think it was more the yellow of sad thought.

And there was someone inside, someone who guarded the yellow building, but was also a prisoner there. Both. Strange. And what happened was, Mentor showed the Gate-Keeper how to deal with this guard-prisoner. It was *not* to elude her. It was *not* to fight her. It was to do the one thing that nobody had ever done before or rarely. And it was to open both hands out, for her to sniff. It was to *hmmm* in a very special way. And she went from guard or prisoner to who showed them how to reach the roof of the yellow building. Had any been there but her & Mentor? I don't know.

And now they're on the roof of the yellow building. The three of them, & Mentor pointed in the now darkened sky of their long travels. He pointed to a certain shining image in the sky. Bigger than the stars, well enough to see very thoroughly, & said, *that, my friend, is our true home.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Lilianna & Hobo Jones

Now this is the strange twisting story of Lilianna & Hobo Jones. Hobo Jones was the most advanced Robot-Man ever built. Intended to save the world. Now this might have come about a little too late in things, but it was an awfully good try.

You might think: *well, Lilianna was probably the lead scientist building him, the inventor, or maybe she was someone that Hobo Jones fell in love with. Being the most advanced Robot-Man ever built in the world, might he not have feelings in his heart?* Maybe. I don't know about any of that. I don't know if any of it's true really.

Hobo Jones & Lilianna met somewhat randomly. He was given the run of the Facility while they were building him. He knew he was a Robot-Man. And he knew he was built with the intention that he save the world. She was working at the friendly little market in the Facility. I mean, even your fancy scientists, your brilliant-genius types, need a pack of chewing gum now & again, maybe a cup of coffee.

And she worked behind the counter. Doesn't mean that was the whole & sum of her story. But that's where she worked. And Hobo Jones, sometimes called Hose Jones, having the run of the place, he come in one time & they got to talking, as folks do. And it turned out that they shared a favorite book. *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie.

It was the strangest thing in the world, that they both had dreams about flying off to that

Island with Peter Pan & the Lost Boys. *What a thing to share!* Their friendship began there but, let me tell you, there was *a lot* more to it than that.

\* \* \* \* \*

### In the Circuit

Have you ever ended up on a bus that you found you could not get off, per se? Well, you *could* get off, but you found that you just had to get on again, to continue along, in the Circuit of the bus that you were on. And so you could get off, for reasons, & then you would get back on, & ride along. And it felt exhilarating, mysterious, hopeful. *Ride along. Get off.*

It wasn't one of those new fancy kind of buses where you let the Robot-Man know you want to get on & off. No, you had to pull the cord. And it went: *errrrrrr!* Sometimes it didn't, & you'd have to wait for the next stop. But it worked most of the time. And there was no air conditioning, of course, but you could pull the windows open a bit, when they didn't stick. And the seats are kind of sticky, because it was hot. Even though outside it was cold. And it didn't have a roof most of the time either, so there's that.

Oh, & you avoided that one seat that wasn't really there. It was more like a hole. I mean, it *was* a hole. And if you look down into the hole, it was hard to know *what* was down there but it didn't seem to go down *just* to the bottom of the bus, tell you that much.

So, anyway, one time I got off the roofless bus, I lucky found this Great Clearing with all sorts of fun activities going on. There was this Talent Show going on. And there was this one tall woman singer. Her hair sort of lit up like the Moon. That's what I thought.

Well, OK, I didn't *really* think it. The guy next to me with the horn on his head, from the roofless bus too, he says, *that lady singer, her hair lights up like the Moon! Her sister sings these, like, rainbow poems. You should see her too at the Festival too!*

And she was playing a banjo. And the banjo was bigger than her. So she had herself kind of wrapped around the body of this banjo & she was sort of plucking with her arms reaching on all sides. I think she had a few extra fingers. And *then* her hair lit up like the Moon. That was fun.

Later on, back on the roofless bus, there's a party going on. I think everybody's here, everybody who's riding the Circuit. It doesn't happen often. Usually one or more of us are off at one of the stops, at Talent Shows or whatever. But we're all here, & it feels like a big party. And we're just enjoying ourselves to no end. Maybe some **T-O** mixed up & being shared around. Like they say: *We all drew closer. We all floated far away.*

I was sitting next to the guy with the horn. It was sort of in the back of his head, but he could kind of adjust it a little bit. It was kind of like if you comb your hair, one way or another, you can kind of move it around your head. He could kind of move his horn around his head. And he said to everybody, *say, last stop I was at, I was at this guy's hovel,*

*& we were watching this real old TV with a weird antennae like a coat hanger. It must have been, like, 200 years old, if not more, & we were watching this old crooner on the TV as we were sharing this bag of, um, some kind of strange food he called ChocoSmacks. Them's the facts! says he. At least they were better than these really weird, like, protein bars, I think he called them? Just made me burp.* Everyone laughs.

*And the crooner on this ancient TV, he was singing, kiss me once, & kiss me twice, & kiss me once again. It's been a long, long time. Then like his crazy neighbor lady started pounding on the wall or something, & he says, Excuse me, I have to go to the bathroom now. Good night! Like, huh, what?*

Well, everybody in the party digs that story, it's pretty good. You see, we'd all become kind of collectors of the adventures we have. And I swear the Circuit gets even deeper. I ask the guy with the horn, he seems to be the veteran in the bunch, I ask him what I've been wondering. *Is this the same Circuit, man? Are we going around in the same circle?*

Well, he moves the chawin' tobacco' from one of his cheeks to the other of his cheeks, while he's thinking about this. *Chaw chaw chaw.* Spits out, & then he says, *naw, the Circuit gets Deeper, every go-round. It gets Deeper; Cap'n.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Dreamwalker & the Frail Ancient Book

Dreamwalker looks as closely as he can at the frail ancient book in the older woman's hands, & he notices there are two places on the cover where it seems to be cut out. She'd just been reading to him about the long ago Great Violence.

*It was everywhere, she read. There was a kind of perpetuating force that made it. So, nowhere at ease, nowhere far from it. It was a rupture, a constant movement of violence. But then, it concluded, not by choice, not by will but, as all things seem to do, it began to end.*

And though she never has before, she now hands Dreamwalker the frail ancient book, & she smiles at him, a smile she has never before, & one he cannot deduce as being without mirth or without something else. *Look, look. See.* She hands him the frail ancient book, & he makes to open it up. She shakes her head. *Look, look. See.*

He realizes that the cutouts on the cover are a place for eyes, & so he closes it again, & he places his face very gently against the frail ancient book, so that his eyes can look into the cutouts. And he sees that there's something there now. A gentle rising, swelling, & falling through the Many Worlds, that is a remnant, a memory, a scar of that Great Violence. And it is ill at ease. And things could go one way, or another, regarding it.

He gently raises his face from the frail ancient book, & looks at the old woman, her no longer smiling. And she says, *you must find your Brothers.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## In the Ago, or the After

Maybe this story takes place in the *ago*, or the *after*. In some ways, they will resemble each other. Maybe, in some ways, they won't.

In short, it is Saturday. We are together in a movie theater, so I'd say *after*. She quizzes me with lovely turquoise eyes about why this theater & not the other one. And I say, *because of its track record*. Maybe this is an *after*, not so much *ago*. But I'm not so sure about that.

The movie is animated, after a fashion, dark & thick & vivid. It is a strange, flowing narrative, rolls to the edge of the screen, & seems to roll a little bit further, & that is *after*. It's about a sort of tadpole, nearly eaten by a dog in a pond. Has kind of a wiry little frame, antenna poking off in all directions. It's a very strange tadpole. Scrawny, but tough.

That dog, I don't know if he wants to eat the tadpole, or just play with it with lots of teeth. It's hard to say. Tadpole gets a little chewed, but gets away.

And the theater fills up full & gets very loud, that's *ago* & *after*, I'd wager. Down at my feet, I notice a small bloo-&pink Creature. My Beloved again lays her lovely eyes upon me, quizzing a second time. I pick up the little bloo-&pink Creature, & settle her in the crook of my arm, comfortably. Smiles me a tricky *thankee*.

The narrative gets thicker. *Is it more than one narrative? Is it more than one screen? Are we still in this movie theater?*

It gets louder, & louder, & louder, & louder, & I think: *you know, maybe I confused the track record of this & that other theater. Maybe.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Photograph

Now you've heard stories of Hobo Jones, sometimes called Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man ever built, intended to save the world, & of his friendship with Lilianna, who ran the friendly little market at the Facility where Hobo Jones was created.

And, for the longest time, their conversation was light. Talk of Peter Pan & Captain Hook & Tiger Lily. Sometimes they simply liked to listen to music together. When Hobo Jones would come into the friendly little market, Lilianna would have the white-faced pink cat radio playing all sorts of old tunes. She liked *The Jazz*, she said, & Hobo Jones could see why. It made him feel jittery inside, but in a really really *good* way. She usually had the Dreamland Jazz station tuned in but, when it got too fuzzy, she put on SpiritPlants Radio America for awhile.

Then one time, things took a turn. And they took a turn for the following reasons. You see, Lilianna had carried with her a secret into working at the Facility. Now she wasn't trying to bring it down or sabotage it. She was no *assassin*, mind you. But she had a

question. It had to do with a photograph she carried with her.

She would wear those kind of long, old-fashioned Amish dresses. Not so much for the style of them, but because they contained many pockets. She was a fan of many pockets. It's where she kept her pencils, & her little notebooks, & her novels, & all sorts of things that she might need during the day. She was told when she was hired that she was not allowed to bring any kind of bags into the Facility. But she could bring things in her pockets. Being smart, & wily, she sewed several of these dresses with even *more* pockets to bring with her into the Facility.

And one day, she drew from one of these many pockets a photograph, a black-&-white photograph, which she showed to Hobo Jones. She said it was a black-&-white photograph of a black-&-white person. *I'm not kidding you, Mr. Jones*, she said.

And Hobo Jones took the photograph from Lilianna's hand, which was **colored** somewhere between orange & yellow right now, & he studied it closely.

Then he said, *may I do some further studying on this, Miss Lilianna?*

She nodded.

\* \* \* \* \*

## It Was a Fragile Group, Wanting to Accomplish Something

We'd been traveling for a while. It was a fragile group, uncertain, wanting to accomplish something. But it's funny how what that was changed over time. It grew amorphous, higher, *more* fragile.

You started off by saying: *I love this world, I want to do good by it.*

And then you shift to: *how can I do good by it?*

And then you shift to: *what do I have that I could use to do good by it?*

And then you shift to: *what good does it need?*

And then you shift to: *what good would really help?*

And then you shift to: *what good would matter anyway, over time?*

We'd travel these White Woods for a while. I couldn't tell you how long, none of the others could either. They weren't like other places, they weren't uncertain, unsteady. There was something here that was *sure*, though none of us knew what.

And when we heard the sounds up ahead, we were hopeful & fearful. But, as we came closer, they were obviously the sounds of celebration. *A Festival?*

Cheering, laughter, many kinds of tongue were being spoken, when they did not sing, & we came, slowly, creepingly, unseen, to the very edge of a Great Clearing.

It was filled with *all* kinds of beings, some more familiarly shaped, some not. Some

dancing on the solid ground, some up in the air. Some it seemed both. Some seemed neither. And, way at the far end of this clearing, we in our hidden shadows espied a great stage &, on it, great performances.

I'm trying to remember now throughout this time what exactly we saw, but it's like one was shaped like a White Tiger, one like a White Bunny hopping through the air. There were Bears. There were Winged beings. There were beings made of Buzz. There were beings made of Bells. There were beings that seemed clustered, many to a stalk, & others that seemed quite alone.

But it was all so friendly. It was all so wonderfully various & friendly, & the music swirled about us, tickled us, warmed us like a blanket, a good warm brown blanket, maybe with kind Bears upon it.

And then a kind paw touched my terrified elbow, & a lovely little face raised me up, raised the others up too. Brought us into the clearing. Brought us through crowds that smiled & danced & sang to us. Brought us to a great Kettle, & gave us each a bowl of wonderful Rutabaga Soup. And brought us closer so we could watch, & stand among what seemed like a bajillion new friends.

Hope in the world, that night & always. Hope in the world there is such. Maybe we can learn how to be the Travel Angels we've wanted to be.

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Friendly Little Market

Hobo Jones slides the black-&-white photograph into a slot in his torso. He begins to *whir* & *whir* & *whir*, which probably means his advanced Robot-Man machineries are studying this photograph closely. His eyes begin to *spin* & *spin* & *spin*, & all of him gives off a strange *hmmm*.

Lilianna has seen this before. It's how he does his work. She knows to be patient, & wait to see what happens. Then his eyes stop spinning, he stops whirring, & *hmming*. The photograph pops back out, which he then hands back to Lilianna.

And he says, *he is traveling to the Island. He is carrying many plastic bags. Some of them contain small vinyl records that he values. Some of them contain magazines of poems & pictures, of which he is fond. One of them contains something that . . . I do not know. But I think the answer is somewhere in this Facility, if you would like to accompany me, Miss Lilianna.*

She nods, she smiles, she takes his offered arm, the crook of his elbow. Leaves the friendly little market with a sign that says, *Back Soon*. Off they go.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Flipping Channels in My Mind

This was long times ago, many *many* turns of the calendar back. I lay, relatively comfortably, in the darkness of my ZombieTown hovel. I was sort of curled around the wires poking out of the mattress upon which I slept. Move my blankets around too. I had it all worked out. Eyes closed, it was quiet, for once, in the building in which my hovel resided. No crazy neighbor lady tonight.

And I was flipping channels in my mind, as I was wont to do. Without coin in my pocket, nor friend to my name, I had channels to flip in my mind. No Antennar 200 needed. *Haha!*

First channel, there's some kind of complex office with tiny little *Cenacles*, fulla tiny little poems & pictures, bundled together with their associated Jellicle Literary Guild audio cassettes, tiny little ones, & other things. A strange & delightful array. *Goodness me, what does that mean?* I could not begin to tell you.

But I flip the channel, that's the deal. In the Village, there's a computer that assigns people-folks to tasks, uses shiny, silvery punch-sheets. Everyone has to take a turn at the computer table, to get their assignments.

I try to sabotage the system in an attempt to muck up things, & manage to escape unnoticed. I think it will all get crazy, & I don't know if I succeed, because I flip the channel again.

The President & the rebel leader on the TV & in the newspapers square off grimly but, at a very private party, they can be seen talking, laughing, raising glasses, & one could ask the through-line from public enmity to private congeniality. Kind of a strange game, like *Sprites & Imps*, in which moves are being made on multiple levels towards the end of clicking an unknown result into place? Not a victory for one, defeat for the other so much as a collaboration? The subtle messy kind that does not play well for crowds staring dully at boxes, but does keep the world from blowing up? *Click!*

This one takes a while to come into view. Oh, it's bookstore I used to work at a long *long* time ago but it's all kind of reshaped, & dusty, & dank, & there seem to be dead critters lying about the floor. And this Tramp comes up to me with crumpled bills in his paw, & says, *I need quarters! I need nickels! That's all. Quarters! Nickels!* And then he hands me a grubby couple of bills, & I try to sort it out in the cash register machine &—*click!*

The old **Scholar** gentleman had given his long wild literary presentation on the *Great Grand Braided Narrative* [Gr. Gr. Br. N., *for friendly*], & we sat at the kitchen table, & he had a single sheet of one typed poem to show for it all. And I was about to ask him how he had organized such a massive literary presentation, & kept it all together. And he looked kindly at me with his crinkly wise eyes. Dirty beard. Smiled his tooth & said, *click!*

\* \* \* \* \*

## A Strange Compound

This is the story of a young man who lived near a strange Compound, weird people coming & going by day & night. And he knew some of what was going on there, because he worked there sometimes, somehow it come to be. And he knew that there were people who *ran* the Compound, & then there were others who were *run*, as it were.

The young man fell in love with an orphan girl he met there, one of those who was run, & they became friends. He would teach her useful skills that he had learned from all his years living at the edge of, & often within, the White Woods. He knew how to fix things better than almost anyone else.

And he taught her these things, which made her more valuable to those who ran the Compound, at least for now. But then, within these more obvious skills he taught her, which he knew they would approve of, he taught her how to read & write, which she'd never learned in all her years. He taught her how to make Art from the skins of tree bark, **colors** found in blooms. And they would not have liked any of this *at all*.

And then one time, as they sat under their favorite White Birch tree, which was located in one of the countless interior courtyards that made up the seeming endless Compound, someone spied them kissing. It was the lightest, sweetest, merest, most wonderful kiss either one of them had ever experienced. And neither one of them had ever experienced any kisses before.

But one of the Compound guards saw them. And he came over. He sort of *wilded* over, his arms flailing left & right. He looked like a kind of a man & a tornado mixed up in one weird package. And he came over with a great stapler & a small gun. And he started shouting in a language neither of them understood. But anyone can understand when they're being threatened. It doesn't matter what the words are.

There were others in the Compound too, who were *neither* being run *nor* running. They were the **Dwellers**. Perhaps they lived in the Compound before it was taken over, & they were watching from hidden corners, shrouded windows, unseen doors.

And a sympathy grew up amongst them, to act on behalf of this young man & this girl. They weren't sure yet what it would be that they would do, or how in the world they would do it, but this feeling grew up, & this feeling wasn't going anywhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Exhausted, So Not Much

Exhausted, so not much. *Someone famous? A multi-colored trail to follow? Something missing? I didn't know, what this?* Lie back, think again. Kind of a swirling dream. Don't remember what. *But it's like there was colored water, many colors, running side by side. Sometimes they'd mix together, sing. Hmmm. Shift around. Group here & there. Nudge up, poke low.*

*Deep in the earth is something valued, twice, triple deep, around a stone room full of strange secrets. Errrrrrr!*

I roll over completely. Close my eyes. Flip a channel. There's *got* to be something left. *I'll find it*, I vow, right now. *Something about a Robot-Man, & the company's making it. Some kind of super Robot-Man, they're saying. Won't be ready till 2022, or possibly 3225.*

Eh. I try one more time. Day's calling, gotta get along to the bookstore. Maybe a little bit left. *There's this band called Supernova. They live on a commune called Supernova.* OK, let's see where that goes.

*So I meet the band, at the commune. They're friendly, a little strange. Show me around. It's a big place, very green. Lots of trees.*

*What do you do all day?*

*We practice*, they say in a group voice.

OK, that's kind of strange. *Practice what?*

*Practice for everything.*

*Oh, now this, what is this?* This seems like other weird situations I've seen before.

*But you know, the trees in this land sure are pretty. They're not up to some wacky scheme. I bid goodbye to Supernova, walk on, among the trees, & they get thicker. Ah, here we go. This is something worth knowing, worth doing. And I come to a Great Tree. I step back a few steps to see it better, & a few steps more. And I see its branches form a crown around it.*

All right, that what I'm going for. I close my eyes tight. *I'm going in. And the tree, it's a beautiful tree, & at first it's quiet as trees are, when you don't know how to listen, & even if you do listen. But sometimes trees are quiet. And sometimes, when you start to work your way in, work your way in a little more, they gets a little less quiet.*

You know what to do. *Hmmm. Maybe that'll work. Maybe it won't. Go a little further in, & a little further in. Now I'm deep in all right. This is good. I don't know what this is. I don't know what any of that was. It was all kind of silly, fatuous, whatever. But this is a good channel.*

*I'm going further in, my friends. You can come along, if you can figure your way here. There's room, if you ask kindly, & you know how to make it. You'll get here too. Just close your eyes, pay attention. It's all there to be found. It's all there to be discovered. Somewhere in you, you already know how. I didn't start with any more than you. But here I am. Where I've told you I've come. If I can make it here, well you can make it here too.*

So that's what I encourage. It's something you *ought* to do.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Facility

Hobo Jones, sometimes called Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man in history, made to save the world, & his good friend Lilianna wander the Facility in which he was made. Now you may wonder if it's a good idea for this Robot-Man to wander the Facility freely but, you see, there is no outside of the Facility. It was made for there to be no exits. In fact, the only time the Facility will open up, in a manner that few at this time know, is at the moment when Hobo Jones is sent to save the world. That moment has not come yet.

So he is free to wander in this Facility with no exits. As for Lilianna, you may wonder: *does she live in the Facility?* 'Tis so that she works at the friendly little market. But there are other questions that are simply not answered yet. And maybe anon.

But for now, they are walking along one of the Facility's many endless hallways with the strange glowy light, but no fixtures to be seen. It's almost an Indiglow, Lilianna has thought more than once, when she has walked down them, to & from her job at the market.

They are carrying a black-&-white photo of a black-&-white individual. And though Hobo Jones has said he would help her to find out more about this picture, Lilianna is thoughtful as they walk along, girl-hand in Robot-Man-hand.

She says, *sometimes all of this feels like my poetry magazine back in school.*

*Why is that, Miss Lilianna?* Hobo Jones asks.

*Well, there were poems slooping, from afar, to near, & away. It was like a strange, multi-colored trail of them. Like poems & pictures braided in one.*

*That sounds like a strange poetry magazine, Miss Lilianna.*

Lilianna nods. *It was very strange. But the trail of poems slooping from afar, to near, & then away, it was very pretty, & very musical. It's as though the poems sang in some way, as they arrived, & as they left. And although they were unique songs, when they arrived from afar to near, when they left, they sang together in chorus. It was strange, Mr. Jones. I do agree. But then, well, you know we don't have all that anymore.*

Hobo Jones did not know all the details, in truth, of how the world had gotten worse & worse, until it wasn't possible to live above ground anymore & the only way to travel from one place to another was via long trails of sealed shipping containers, traveled from one to the next, without stopping. You *couldn't* stop. You were told to *keep moving*, & there might have been a container along the way, every once in a while, for sleeping, or to get some food. But you had to *keep moving*.

Lilianna was lucky that she made a friend, he was kind of a philosophical janitor back at her old school, & he had got her the friendly little market job here, or else she'd still be moving from sealed shipping container to shipping container. Half-starved, half-crazed, no hope really. But now she was in the Facility with Hobo Jones.

*It's down there, Miss Lilianna. That door. Let's hurry.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Door of Endless Colors

Door of sunlight, door of mist, door of endless **colors**, door of dark, door of music, door of wood. *Which one will you choose of these entrances to the Prairie Press Palace?*

Now I don't know if this will help, but I heard a story of this guy who chose the door of endless **colors**. Now he wasn't sure exactly how he'd gotten here. He wondered if he'd taken a wrong turn. Sure, I guess if you call the wrong turn ending you up in a magical place like this, with options like these? You call that a wrong turn? *Sure*.

And he too could not decide what door to choose. So what he did was, he closed his eyes, & turned away from the doors, & then he spun round & round & round. And then, without thinking, he stopped, & he pointed, & he was pointing directly at the door of endless **colors**. Nodded, sorta hiked up his courage, & walked through.

Now what he came to was a black-&-white scene. And there was a crowd of folk. Different kinds of folk. Some perty folk, some looking like the hard-working folk that support the perty folk. All friendly though, raucous, laughing, not a not-equal amongst them.

And they were sitting on this couch, & they were sort of spilled onto the floor, & in front of them was a DüMönt TV with an Antennar 1000. A **color DüMönt**, no less. And they were all gathered round, watching something, laughing, pointing, jostling each other.

Well, this fellow marveled at his luck & he kind of hustled in at the very corner of the crowd. And he saw they were indeed watching a television show that he eventually figured out was called *Full Nexters*. And he kept saying, *Just look at that. Living color!* And he wasn't sure what all this meant.

So they were watching this **color** television show, & yet all around them was mostly black-&-white, but then he found, as he watched deeper into it, he didn't care. It didn't matter. I mean, it was important, it was a *fact*, or maybe two facts, but it wasn't important that he understand *why*. It just *was*. As they say, *tis so*.

Of course they gave him a job. Started him very humble. Just holding wires, moving ladders, lifting objects when instructed. Sometimes someone needed a little bit of whispering upon the skin. Things like that.

But these folks saw his talents. Soon, he was finding his way deeper into this world &, wherever he'd come from, it didn't matter. He wasn't going back. He was where he belonged.

And he thought: *one day too, I'm going to be in living color. I vow. Right now!*

\* \* \* \* \*



## Lonely, Down a Lovelorn Path

*Lonely, down a lovelorn path.* It was like that. Sometimes the words would make sense to Dreamwalker, sometimes not. He knew that at one time he was able to step in & out of dreams, like other men a field of lilies & grass. Squeeze & shape them to a chunk of wisdom, a word, a message, from what knows this world & blows best through its ways.

But he wasn't doing so well with that right now, & he knew it had to do with remembering. This was still happening in a clumsy way. It was like, to find his Brothers, he had to *find* himself. He had to *remember* some things. He had to *remember himself*.

He'd long left the old woman with her frail ancient book, & its visions of a long ago Great Violence, & warning that it might still echo, even now. And he didn't think himself fully awake, as he walked through these White Woods, some version or vision of these White Woods. He had no direction, no plan, not really, when he heard somewhere nearby: *Pssst!*

And he turned toward the sound, & he saw a tree, maybe even more beautiful than the others, with a ladder circling it, urging one to climb. Which he did, *Hekk* stick slid into its slim shoulder bag. He climbed up & up into this tree, & beheld its beautiful **colors** from within, till they danced & they sang. *Hmmm. Laaa! Cackle!*

And he crawled out onto a large branch, & he beheld all. And yet what he could not figure was the terrifying image of warm blood on a log in his mind, a huge axe from the sky chopping it twine. It poked at him, even as he beheld all the splendors about him. But he wanted to stay just a *little* longer.

\* \* \* \* \*

## I Ended Up on That Beach

I ended up on that Beach. Yes, indeed, I did. That strange Beach they talk about, it's the one they claim you can travel to other worlds by. I took this odd roofless bus there. See, I didn't have much money, but I just had to find out for myself.

It was a very nice Beach. It was by a beautiful Sea. I had never seen the Sea so I just stood there staring for the longest time. And those marvelously strange clouds up in the sky! I had no words for the beauty that I saw. I walked over to a, um, kind of a restaurant of sorts. There were just tables on the Beach, & I suppose you could eat & drink.

I didn't have much money but, then I thought, *I've got a little money. It might be fun to ask for some food here & not just sort of sit skulking in the corner, hoping they don't notice me, looking at that beautiful Sea.*

So then I noticed on the table I sat at there is a little computer screen with some buttons. And I pressed a few & they went: *beep! beep!* But then, on the screen, it said, *how much money would you like today?* I knew I didn't have much so I typed in \$40, & then the computer went: *beep! beep! Your money is ready, Sir. Please step over to the bank.* I looked

around &, sure enough, in the distance there was a bank on this Beach. And I hurried over to get my \$40, very excited about all of this.

When I got to the bank, it was very *very* crowded. There were long lines everywhere. And I started getting doubtful about what I just done. I didn't even know how to explain that I told the table that I want \$40. *A computer table? What was all this about?* I was beginning to get doubtful. *Why can't I use this Beach to go to one of those worlds where I don't get confused, & don't have any money, & end up talking to computer tables? And end up lost?*

And then let me tell you: I walked right out of that bank, without an additional dollar in my pocket. I walked right up to the edge of the Beach, right up to the water. Waved my arms around, raised them high. Listened to that beautiful sound of *whoosh whoosh whoosh*.

I closed my eyes & did not care a thing. *Beauty.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## I Was Dozing, on the Roofless Bus

I was dozing on the roofless bus, as it rode its Deeper Circuit. This was all become a fine & familiar thing to me. I had left behind the rest, to ride the roofless bus along the Deeper Circuit. I brought few possessions. My **T-O-O** necklace, of course. And I will admit that I did bring my white-faced pink cat radio.

Now I would often want to listen to my radio at different times. But I didn't want to disturb the other passengers. So I had a kind of headphone setup. My headphones weren't exactly plugged in to the white-faced pink cat radio, which was not exactly possible.

But I had a sort of rig that made it so I could listen through a sort-of-wire-&-headphone setup. And if I turned the volume on softly, it was possible for me to listen without disturbing others, even though it wasn't exactly a headphone setup. *You understand how these things go?* You make do, that's what they always say. *Make do.*

I was dozing in the very back of the roofless bus, very back seat. It wasn't very full. There may have been that Festival going on somewheres nearby. There usually is. And I had my jerry-rigged headphone gear on, & I was listening, & on came this strange commercial. Didn't hear too many of those. But this one seemed, I don't know. It was different. The commercial's voice was tricky, like some kind of brilliant genius on my white-faced pink cat radio.

***New from La Technologies, where tomorrow is today! The (patent pending) Bellla Brush! The wonder of the century! Brush, brush brush brush your cares away! Made of the finest materials! It gets the job done, any job, & more! Bring any job, big or small, to the (patent pending) Bellla Brush, & watch its space-age technologies get to work! Brush . . . brush . . . brush . . . your cares away . . . todayyyyyy!***

Well, this sounded like something that I would like to get. Now, as I said, I didn't traveled with much. My **T-O-O** necklace, of course. My white-faced pink cat radio, & my headphone rig, & maybe, oh yeah, probably, I had quite a few little notebooks scattered about my person in different pockets I sewed onto my clothes, because you never know about things. Sometimes you need to look left & right, & it's best to keep your notebooks sewed into little pockets on your person. You don't want to wake up & they're gone. *Oh no you don't.* I can tell you, from firsthand experience. You don't want to do that. *You don't.* And I had black pens & pencils about myself as well, but I won't tell you where they were specifically. And there may have been a few other things, but just not very much.

You have to be slick & sly to travel this Deeper Circuit. Things come & go, unless you're careful. You get off one spot, you get on another. You don't know what's happening in between, entirely. Strange things occur. *Are you who you were the last time you got on the roofless bus?* I often ask myself. *Are you who you were? I don't know, man, why are you asking me?*

But this Bellla Brush, this attracted me, this made me think: *well, what if?* I pulled the cord for the next stop—**errrrrrr!**—because I knew at this stop, there was a little bookstore. And I would get off, & I would go to the bookstore, where it was always Sunday afternoon. Now you're going to ask, & I'm going to say *I don't know. So let's just not.*

And I like to sit in a small corner of this little bookstore, where there are little magazines with poems & pictures. And I think to myself, *I'd like to write one of these little magazines with pictures, maybe write poems in them or something.* I've got plenty of notebooks & pens & pencils secreted about my body in various sewed-up pockets. But I don't know about all this as of yet. I just have to think about it some more.

Maybe if I had one of those Bellla Brushes, I'd be able to figure this all out. I know also that, behind the bookstore, there is an old bike that nobody uses. And I get on that bike, & I ride straight into the White Woods that the little bookstore is in front of, & I ride deep into the White Woods, thinking about that little book of poems, & thinking about that Bellla Brush, & thinking about that bus I've been riding for so long, & thinking to myself: *I'd sure like brush brush brush my cares away. And yours too.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Me Sitting Against a Brick Wall

This story begins with me sitting against a brick building's wall. Sounds of shouting, yelling, conflict nearby. I'm inside too, strange to say &, nearby me, a man with a big belly is smoking, drinking, in an old armchair. Wanting to tell me, & trying to tell me, & sort of struggling to tell me, about a band he's found that's changed his life. Very excited.

I say, *I used to smoke & drink. But I don't now. I won't say it's a better life. Just different.* He's all about this band that's changed his life though. He says, *hey, wait just a second.* And he sort of hauls himself up, & goes to fetch an LP by this band. *It's called **Reveal**.*

I blink, & I'm sitting back against that wall, outside. Take a better look. And it's a music club I'm sitting in front of it, called, um, *Luna T's?* Oh, OK, maybe I'm in there too. I stand, & someone comes up to me & says, *you fix the marquee, man?* Has a ladder.

This guy's very short. This guy's so short, I don't even think that people-folks can be this short. He's like, as tall as my knee. But his mustache just flows down to the ground. Glitters. He's *beautiful*. But I can see his issue. Getting up there to fix that marquee. So I climb on the ladder, gamely. He hands me up the letters to put into the sign. The band is called **Supernova**. Is that the one Big Belly Guy likes? I don't know.

A scrawny hippie is standing nearby too, I don't know whether girl or boy. Waiting to get into this Luna T's club.

Smiles up at me & says, *you heard them?*

I shake my head. *What are they like?*

She or he laughs & says, *rock & roll.*

Says more I cannot catch. I come down the ladder, nod to the mustachioed fellow. Grab my knapsack, & carry the ladder inside to the ticket counter. All crowded & clustered, & I just walk on in, & I end up outside again. And the crowd is waiting.

And, you see, this is part of a path I follow. One thing leading to the next. Like a circuit. Painting to comic strip to rock band to cassette tape. And I'm filming my way there, always reviewing back, & then filming on.

When I sleep, I don't rest. I'm viewing more film, because I've been told *wherefrom* becomes *whereto*. And I say, ~~itisso~~

\* \* \* \* \*

### Dreamwalker, Enthralled

Dreamwalker, somewhere in the White Woods, has climbed up the ladder that encircles a particular tree. The ladder has led him high up into the tree, until there are branches to clamber on to, & continue to climb. The **colors** that one can see in many of the trees in the White Woods around this turn of the calendar are more intense within this tree &, the higher he climbs, the more intense they get, until they dance freely. *Attached to the branches still?* It is impossible to say.

Music swirls around him. *Hmmm. Laaa! Cackle!* Until he arrives to what seems like a bigger branch than all the others. This branch extends from the great trunk, far away, smooth &, as he crawls onto it, he sees how an open interior forms here, from this particular view. He sits on the branch, just a little bit along it, *hekk* stick now in his lap, looking all about him. The branch gently nudges him further along, until it places him at a particular spot of its own choosing.

He watches, feels *nearly* enthralled, *wants* to be enthralled, *cannot* be enthralled, because of his worry & wonderment about his Brothers, & the Great Violence he's learned about,

& what they need to do, together, to help the world.

And so he watches, half-enthralled, all the beauty around him, dancing & singing in **color** & music. Until he feels a hand take his, his left one. Gently takes his, & grasps it softly, but firmly, & it's the warmth of that hand that causes Dreamwalker to become *completely enthralled*, immersed in all this beauty. He relaxes. He feels *hope*. *Hmmm. Laaa! Cackle!*

The long night passes, in numberless hours & more, till the **colors** & the music begin to fade, & there's a moment where he notices his hand is not being held anymore. He looks over to his left toward the great trunk, & there's no one there, no one at all.

And he climbs his way toward the great trunk, & works his way on down the tree, & down the ladder, onto the ground. And now he's standing there, & he's looking around. And he's thinking to himself, *I can't be halfway about this, half-enthralled. I have to go all the way, either wake fully up, or dream completely. I have to decide.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### A Sickness Ravaged the Whole World

A sickness ravaged the whole world. You know about it, whoever you are. Whoever you are, listening right now, you know about the sickness that has ravaged the whole world.

And you know that, at first, the response was terrible. It was selfish, it was stupid, it was panicked. And this is how it was for a while. There was bitterness, resentment, disbelief.

But then, slowly, it got better, slowly, inconsistently. It was like this was a deep global test. Like a question. The only question. *Is it possible to recognize unalterable dependence of each of us on each of us, & our world, & change course?* That's the only question on this test, & it's one that's asked continuously. Maybe it's the only important question that's ever been asked. But there are times when it comes to the fore for everyone.

And, uh yeah, so I looked up & around, realized I wasn't really actually talking to anybody. For a moment, it seemed like I was addressing everyone, & then no, I wasn't. I was in the corner of a darkened room, about to walk out, for the last time, into the world.

I wasn't much, but I knew that question I'd been asking in the dark corner of that empty room was important. And, if I had nothing else to my name & my possession, *I had that question*. And I had this idea that, while it was the single question, the answer to it was multitudinous, ever-changing, & there was in this fact some kind of weird hope.

And I stopped for a moment, as I walked outside, into the cold winter air. Looked around, raised up my arms high, stretched my fingers toward the sky, looked up, looked down, looked around.

OK. *I love this world. What can I do to help?*

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Last Chance Fixer

Hobo Jones begins to tell Lilianna a long story at the moment when it seems that they've been about to come somewhere important. But it seems like an important story that he has to tell first.

He said, *there was a brief time, Miss Lilianna, when I was not a Robot-Man, the most advanced ever, bound to save the world. I had this fix-it shop. It was a little wooden hut, in a long row of them. By mornings, I'd crouch down low in front of it. Dig up a little hole I'd pat down in the evening. Pull up my little blue round flask of whiskey, taped at the opening. I'd lost the cap. She laughs.*

*That was where I'd ended up for a while, fixing things. Nobody asked how I knew how to fix such things as people-folks would bring, the kinds of things that nobody else could fix. They called me the **Last Chance Fixer**.*

*Well, I'd arrived there from somewhere far away from all of this. If you reach back long enough in my history, you find me on a spaceship, the good ship Tis so, headed toward a place of great power & danger. The crew of the ship was like family to me. We all loyal to the Captain, them jealous of his attention. Robot-Men didn't worry about such things, of course. He ignored such things anyway, loved us all.*

*But we were approaching great danger, & the Captain could not reassure them enough that we were going to survive. All he could say is that we were headed to the center of the constellation that connects all the Many Worlds together. There was something we had to fix there. Remnant of the long-ago Great Violence? Some of the crew worried about these rumors.*

*And I'd stand by them, loyally, almost like a friend. And the Captain, he patted me on the shoulder, because I was the one he was depending on, we were all depending on, to make that fix. We have to stop the skid, he said to me.*

*So, Miss Lilianna, I've been through this before.*

She nodded to him, smiled. They continued along the way.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Simple, Simple, Let Be

*Simple, simple, let be.  
Embrace beauty, solitary star hung upon desert of night,  
embrace it all, but let nothing go.  
Simple, simple, let be.*

I was never good at any of that. Though I tried. My greatest teacher tried to teach me about such things. After one class, he held me up with a raised hand as the others left & he handed me something, wrapped in a kind of crocheted cover with many **colors**. A

hand-made book.

He looked at me with his strange, long-toothed smile. Wearing that weird black-&-white hat on his head, face terrifying, but beautiful, & completely peaceful & loving. And he said to me, *fill this up with your words. And empty it too. Simple, simple, let be.*

Some time later, toward the last days I knew him, we took a long walk, as we did occasionally. It was a beautiful world to walk in, I recall, at this distance. He brought me along this long, long road. And there was a lot of traffic on it. And we came to this bridge, & we sort of worked our way down under it, to the stream that was below.

We sat there a long, long time. And then he crossed in his big boots to the other side. And we looked at each other, quietly, for a long time. He nodded me to my book.

And, as I concentrated on all that was happening in my head, all that I could & could not understand right then, I looked up for a moment. And he wasn't over there anymore.

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Philosopher Will Sometimes Go Down to the School

The Philosopher will sometimes go down to the school, & he'll sweep & mop & clean, high & low, all the classrooms, & the auditorium, & the cafeteria, & the theater.

And he might mumble an idea or two to himself, about various philosophical matters he is considering at one time or another. He'll be thinking about **2, T-O, T-O-O**, that very strange substance that may or may not exist (pill, paste, steam).

But what happened one time was that he was cleaning this classroom, & he got into this really grungy corner, using his **Bella Brush** & everything. Gift from his little bloo-&-pink Creature friend, who loved cleaning more than all. And he thought, *my friend would say*, get in there & clean until the cleaning is done!

And he got to thinking, in his philosophizing mind, about this movie he saw on his DüMönt TV the other night, in which a comedian played a psychiatrist. Called *Fun Trois*? Something like that.

*She did it really well, though*, he says, raising a finger as he scrubs. *And it reminded me how the past is all around, & yet gone is gone too.*

*For example*, he said, tuning his **Bella Brush** to one of its heavier settings, *a young singer can listen & learn from the records of those great singers in the past. For example, The Pink Floyd. You'll never experience a brand new record by them, or hope to meet any of them. Strange*, he mumbled.

And he really got in there, with his **Bella Brush**, nice & deep. *Scrub, scrub, scrub! Scrub, scrub, scrub! Scrub, scrub, scrub! Smoo-oo-oo-th*. His little friend would approve.

*Job well done!* Time to move along. Other work to do. And he found himself walking out to the ball field. Sitting high up in the stands. Watching the football game going on. Noting that one team didn't play with helmets. And they were playing pretty well. Violently even, like it was the Civil War, not a game. Wondered why. *It made no sense.*

And then he recalled that he'd woke up with a word that morning, but one he cannot now recall. He thinks to himself, *is that word an explanation of what's going on down there? Would that word explain the past better than I know it to say?*

Well, finally, getting nowhere with any of these thoughts, noticing that the game had been over, & all the players had left, he walked back down to the school. They'd given him a locker, which he was grateful for, & he was going through his locker, full now of things, thinking, *maybe there's something in here that can help. I'm lost.*

And he pulls out bags & bags of clothes, soda bottles, & notebooks, & they kind of gather around him, & he's looking through the notebooks, & thinking about the soda bottles, & people are gathering around to watch. Nobody's interfering. Nobody's saying a word. One quiet-looking girl in an Amish-style dress is smiling him friendly, holding her colorful magazine tenderly with both of her hands.

And at the very bottom of the locker, *way way* back, he pulls out a folded, torn—looks like it's been carried in someone's pocket for years—black-&-white photograph. It's a party, & there's a blurry collage of faces smiling, & raising glasses, & one of them is gently holding a little film canister toward the camera, so it can be seen most clearly. And the film canister says *Legal Weed*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### A Strange Part of the Facility

Hobo Jones & Lilianna are now in a strange part of the Facility. Walking hand in hand. Along a corridor which is not . . . *straight*. And it's not . . . *level*. And it's not . . . *visible*? You see, this Facility has places in it that, you might say, are *among* the Many Worlds, but not *in* any one of them in particular, nor *shared* by any of them, or all of them. They are in a *space in between*.

And you might wonder: *How does that work? How does one travel such a corridor?* Well, Hobo Jones, also known as Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man ever made, he can travel these kinds of places. And, while he is fond of Lilianna, his friend, more importantly, he's holding her hand, so that she, too, is able to travel these places. Otherwise, it wouldn't work. *Would she be lost & gone forever?* Maybe.

But, while they hold hands, she's OK, & able to walk this corridor in the *space in between*. Because where Hobo Jones is bringing them is *not* a place where *most* are allowed, where *almost anyone* is allowed.

In truth, it's a place that the Makers of the Facility, its Guardians & Lords, they don't

know about it. It's a place that Hobo Jones, himself, *created*, a long time ago. Discovered it was *possible*, & thought: *this might come in handy*.

They arrive, to what seems like a nearly ordinary-looking White Room. Walk in, close the door behind them, & *now* Hobo Jones is able to smile at Lilianna, & let go of her hand, safely.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Things Changed . . . When I Started Traveling the Deep Circuit

Things changed, when I finally started traveling the Deep Circuit. It was slow learning. I accumulated rudiments of what there was to know. The roofless bus would stop at intervals, & you'd pull the old cord buzzer to get off—*errrrrrr!*—when it works. And, at the various places you got off at, you discover more of the **game**. For it was a travel, & it was a **game**. And there were *Sprites*, to aid, & *Imps* to distract.

Somewhere along the way, I acquired a *Dream-Again* tape recorder. And I would record my adventures in dreams of course. Which led in turn, to new adventures along the Deep Circuit, until I learned of the possibility of a Deeper Circuit, & a Deeper-Still circuit. *But how can one tell?*

The Sprites would lead, when one is lost, back to the nearest bus stop, or onto the next, or somewhere else helpful. The Imps would lead one further along when lost. But it's not that simple.

To tell you an anecdote. They're all so mixed together in my mind, even when I listen back on my *Dream-Again* tape recorder, I don't know if I understand. I can tell you that, one moment I'm on the roofless bus, friendly folk about me, a little strange, from the Many Worlds. But then, I pull on the cord—*errrrrrr!*—& now I'm somewhere else. And there's sort of a . . . *series of gaps* between one place & time, & the next. And I can't say how this works.

But one anecdote I can tell. I was in a hotel room. There were many, *many* chairs & lamps, all different kinds, scattered about it. And plastic bags of sweets. And there'd been a party I'd been at, but I hadn't enjoyed it. There was this guy dressed sort of like some kind of strange Pirate. Looked like he'd hit the skids bad. And now it was very late, & I was awaiting your arriving voice. And it seems as though in this situation, like many, that I was coming in, in the middle of my own story.

And I found that very strange. *How could that be? Shouldn't I know the beginning & end?* But no, I didn't, not often. And so I have to say something important to you, now that you've joined the Deep Circuit, sitting with me, eager to pull that cord—*errrrrrr!*—& have your own adventures, eager to record them in your *Dream-Again* tape recorder.

*Beware & be aware.* There's much to *learn*. There's much more to *forget*, & what's true *now*

may be either *twice* true, or *half* true, or *none* true at all, on the morrow.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Great Liberry at the Heart of the World

Not many, I suppose, make it down to the Great Liberry at the Heart of the World. There are no rules against it. Nobody is unwelcomed, per se. It's just you have to make a great effort, & get lucky, that too. You have to have *clear intent* that this is where you must go, & maybe it'll work out, & you'll arrive. I think you might. I'm on your side. I have hope for you.

I've been there. I had *intent*, I had luck, that's all it was. Maybe it was other things too. I knew Creatures, & they knew me, too, after a fashion. I was led from one adventure to the next along my way there.

I remember one time I came along my way to a place of wells. I think they were maybe five feet tall? You lean over & place your face into one, & the well would tell you *what next*. You could want to know *what next* in moments big or small. If you could not choose, or you struggled to choose, the custom of these wells was that you would lean in, & the well would choose *for* you, *with* you, *as* you. I met those wells more & more frequently along my way. It's as though once you meet the first, you're aware of them, & others seem to come to be nearby too.

Later on, I came to a movie theater. For a while I was in a movie. It was some kind of place made of **colorful** scarves, room after room. The camera passes from one to the next. I'm watching, & I'm within, both. And, at some point, I doze off, & wake up later near the end. The old Pirate dude, long on the skids, finally finds the exit to these scarves rooms. The audience is laughing, clapping, cheering. He's gonna *finally* leave the skids.

I don't know what happened next, but there was a well, & the well told me *what next*.

I eventually came to a canyon that I discovered seemed to serve as a kind of entrance to the White Woods. And for tracking through it too. *Oh, I don't know if I believe that one*, I thought to myself, *I'm gonna have to look that one up when I reach the Great Liberry at the Heart of the World*.

Now you can tell, from my examples, & **colorful** anecdotes, that it's just not easy. I don't mean to discourage. You will get there. *Look out for the wells*. Once you find that first well, they'll help you along. Others will too. I'm sure. I'm sure you'll make it to the Great Liberry. I hear that some take a roofless bus to get most of the way down here. Never tried it yet.

Well, as you can probably figure out, that's where I am now. In a comfy armchair, surrounded by books & other things, big & small. A few friendly Creatures dozing in my lap, who brought me the last bit of the way. But I'm looking to you, far as you may be in space, time, & otherwise. *You can make it here, you can do it!* And when you come,



Schola' Sanchez, that friendly Bear Creature Liberrian, will welcome you, & be glad to shake your paw, or hand.

*Ah! Can't wait till you get here!*

\* \* \* \* \*

### I Thought of the Great Author

I thought of the Great Author who'd passed on, awhile ago, & the Great Author had left so many works unknown by all, hidden in wooden boxes, high up in trees, buried in the earth. I think there was a Cave he liked too.

I wished with all of my heart-bone that I could visit that strange world he lived in, & dig up, pull down, pull out all those great works. And take a look. *You see?* I'm an editor. Don't laugh. I could pull them together. *I could do it.*

I wanted to cross to his world, & I wanted to find these unknown works. I wanted the Great Author to be remembered again. It felt honest & true. No one asked me to do this. No one was looking for works by the Great Author. All had moved on, to others. But I had not.

Now you say, *why are you telling me all this, man? I'm just trying to catch a bus. Look, if you just lone me bus fare, I can ride this bus. And it'll take me to the Beach. The roofless one, yah? I'm telling you, this Beach will get me there to his world. It's a very strange Beach. I don't have bus fare for you, man. I think you do. You look like you got plenty. Sorry, man. Listen, I'll give you something for the bus fare you give me. Oh yeah, what? You don't seem like you got much to you.*

*I'll tell you a story. There was a time when I lived in a strange house with a lovely person. She was a kind lady doctor, & she tended refugees. She knew my name. We have a fireplace, in a wooden box. But I fear: what if it sparks up so when the door's closed & we're not paying attention? What if we're outside? What if I'm rambling on & on with her somewhere in the White Woods far off about the Great Author, & my wish to help? Then we would not know.*

*That's it? That's it. That's worth one bus fare. OK, man. I'll tell you what. I'll give you your bus fare, & you sit way-y-y in the back. And I'll sit way-y-y in the front. Do we gotta deal? Brother, you're a gem.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### That Crazy Neighbor Lady, Who Chases Me

This has happened before. I never like when it does, but I know what to do. At least I *think* I do. I'm in my hovel, sitting comfortable on my mattress, curled around the wires that stick up in it, watching my black-&-white DüMönt TV with the Antennar 200. Lost in fascination of the story of Hobo Jones & Lilianna, as they travel through that strange Facility.

But then I hear that noise, like in the walls themselves. It's a kind of distant *knock!*—& then a second one—*knock!*—& then a third one—*knock!* I know that. It's that crazy neighbor lady, who chases me. It's been going on a long time. It started in Dreamland. I used to write for a Dreamland newspaper called the *Eighth*. Used to harass me about my columns warning about the return of the Great Violence. And then, not long in my beloved hovel here . . . it resumed.

And now here I am, in my hovel. And I hear—*knock!—knock!—knock!*

I better spring into action. I'm gonna be hid awhile, so I grab something to read, a sheaf of pages by my bedside. So what I do is walk into the bathroom, & I close the door, & I lean my head up against the back wall, & I close my eyes & *hmmmmmm—& then—& then—& then—*

*Ah, the Attic.* Yes. OK, so, I'm in the Attic now. She's never found me here. *Ever.* I don't think she knows about Attics. She knows about *me*, doesn't *like* me. She's been chasing me a long time.

And so, since I'm gonna be here in the Attic awhile, I don't even turn on the light. I know there's a white-faced pink cat radio nearby. I don't turn her on either. I do have a little candle. What I do is I scooch up against the wall, & I place the fat little candle between my legs as I sit there, & I get to lookin' at my sheaf of pages, & the stories they tell.

I'm not sure where the stories are from. *Did I write them? Are they in my handwriting?* I don't know. *Maybe they're memories? Maybe they're dreams? Maybe they happened, maybe they didn't.*

First one I read is about my father & I making these dense protein bars, full of high tech. Chaw off a bit to access. It's a perpetual process. Always got to chaw more, or your tech won't work right. Well, that seems strange. *What does that mean?* I don't know.

OK, I chaw a little. Hey, peanut butter. That's pretty good, for a dense protein bar full of high tech. Look around. Yeah, OK, OK, OK. OK. OK. *Yeah, sure—& then—& then—& then—*

Yeah, this weird-looking bus, it's trapped on the edge of a cliff. I look through my pages, trying to find an answer to what happens, & I don't know. I look back to the page I'd found it in the first place, & it says: *in three different time periods.*



*What does this mean?* I better chaw a little more of this dense protein bar, *chaw chaw chaw*. OK, um, um, right. I guess the bus is OK. Or maybe it dropped me off at my stop. I'm not really sure.

*What's next?* I'm not sure about all this. This seems a little *too* complex for me. I thought I was in the Attic—*& then—& then—& then—*

But, wait a minute, now I'm in an old house, now I'm a ~~swiftness~~?

*Algernon Beagle, what are you doing here?*  
*O, hello, fella. You're OK. Don't worry about nothing. You're in the Attic, hidin' from that crazy neighbor lady. You'll be just fine.*  
*Oh, thank you, Algernon Beagle.*  
*See you later, guy.*

I sit back in my seat, on the floor in the Attic, & I re-light the candle, which had gone out now, & I don't see much by candlelight. But then I just start to listen, start to listen. Because it's been a while &, as hard as I can listen, & as deep as I can listen, I do not hear—*knock!—knock!—knock!* Nope, I do not.

OK, it's time to take a chance. I blow out my candle, & let it cool in my hand. Close my eyes in the deepening darkness.

I stand up, turn to face the wall, lean my head against it, my eyes closed, *hmmmmmm*. Bathroom again. Go through the door. All is dark in my hovel, as I left it. I even turned off the TV & the Antennar 200. But there's no sounds now. She's gone away, again.

Set those pages back down next to my bedside. *Oh!* Those are my *Dream Raps*. *What was I thinking?*

So I turn on my black-&-white DüMönt TV & the Antennar 200 again. Settle in for some more good stories, about Hobo Jones, & his dear friend Lilianna.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Surely, It Was . . . Some Other World**

Surely, it was . . . some other world. *Surely it was*. Find myself at a party, in some city, well after midnight, might be Gay E.C. *How do we know these things?* I don't know anyone, but they're all friendly, raising glasses, taking photographs. End up in the bathroom a long time, maybe trying to sort it out, trying to knock the neurons in my head, one way & another, back into place. Missing my hovel, my Attic. Even that crazy neighbor lady who would *knock!* in my walls.

Come back out, a little light-headed. Find myself talking to several. They're affectionate. They sit close, their hands resting on me, here & there. I talk about how I'm not good at parties, just not good, especially since I don't drink the alcohols anymore. They listen

quietly, hands upon me lightly.

One guy hands me a book, sort of a thick oversized chunky paperback. It's a book of poetry, has black-&-white photographs, other kinds of pictures too. I don't recognize the author. This guy explains to me, *Oh, he writes some of the songs by James McGunn, some of the really good ones*. Hmm. I nod appreciatively. *Who doesn't enjoy the songs of James McGunn?*

*And then time—& then time—& then time some more—* & I'm working behind the cash register in a friendly little market. And it takes me a while to sort this out in my mind. But I do believe that this store is the front half of this building, & the back half is kind of an ongoing party, where I was before, & where people-folks also live ongoing.

But right now I'm at work, & this seems to be the other half of the story. It's a strange store. It's crowded. People come in, & they look a little desperate, a little uncertain. But I learn that it's up to us to nod & encourage them to look around. *No, really, look around. You'll find what you need. Don't worry about it.*

One guy brings to the counter this tiny little tuna fish sandwich, about the size of a fist, not much bigger. Hands me a whole crumpled wad of cash, far more than this thing costs. This little tuna sub, 'bout three bucks maybe. But this man is hungry. You can't eat money, it don't taste good, so I understand that, for him, the sandwich is more important than the money. Still, I only take a little bit.

Finish with him & a tall lady comes up, & she's got a huge tray of candies. Those little chocolates with sweet filling inside. It's just a whole tray of them. It's like she took everything off the shelf that she could find. And I turn to my boss & say, *well, other places like this I've worked, we give 'em a discount*. He nods. *Penny each*, he says, & that seems like a good deal. *She wants those candies*. She hands me a jar. A jar of coins. *My tips from when I was a singer*, she smiles shyly. A few faint lovely **colors** accompany her words. Again, I just take a few out.

Then another one comes up with a big box of cigarettes, I don't know, thirty or forty packs inside, & I'm thinking to myself, *well, this is no time to judge*. And, again, we get him what needs.

And I'm trying to understand all this, & I'm trying to understand the cash register that seems to elude me, as always they do, & later on I learned this is a television show called *Life & How to Live It*. And it's a lesson, for every guest star who comes in through the door, & for those of us on the television show, who live in the back, to learn, teach, learn, teach-learn, *life & how to live it*.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Sweet Dalliance

The young man became a prisoner too, at that strange Compound, no longer allowed to come & go, because of his sweet dalliance with the orphan girl. They didn't like it, it wasn't what she was there for. It wasn't what *any of them* were for there. They do not harm him, but they also just won't let him leave, ever anymore.

Everyone calls him L.C. He fixes things. He's preternaturally good at fixing things. He's better than any of his Captors at fixing things. And the Compound is ancient. It's so old that it has machineries & magicks that none of the Captors still extant know how to use, even know what are for. He tinkers, he mutters, he thinks, he dreams, he remembers. He uses all of his skills, & he's clever enough to get a sense of which machineries & magicks *not* to repair.

She comes to his room at night, late at night. He expects it, needs it. Sometimes she's gentle with him, sometimes she's rough. He never expresses his feelings to her, knowing quietly in himself how deep they run. Yet he always says *we* when talking about escape. She does not see her value to their Captors, nor the value of the others there. But he suspects their time is *very* short. They need to go *soon*. They need to leave this place, which he's learned is kind of like a *first place*.

There's nothing older in this world than this strange Compound. At first he doesn't understand what that means. When he eavesdrops on their conversations, the Captors speak with pride of being *first*, having come *first*, of this meaning that they are *primary* over all others, that what they do matters *more* than anyone else.

But, as he digs deeper into the many machineries & magicks of this Compound, he comes to understand that they arrived here from somewhere else, that *first* does not mean *best*. *Best* means *best*.

And one night when she comes to visit him in his room, he's not under the covers, waiting for her. He's sitting at his desk with papers that he has very carefully drawn up, & kept hidden, & he shows her that the way out, the escape he's talked to her about for so long, is not *outside* the Compound.

*It's not out there, it's not through some door, it's not escape into the open air. No.* He explains that the escape he's finally determined they must make to be free is to go *deeper* into the Compound, *deeper* than any of their Captors can even imagine.

He smiles at her worried face, kisses her on the cheek & says, *Tonight, Lili, my love, we go.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Hobo Jones & Mulronie the Space Pirate

Lilianna travels the strange Facility with her dear friend, Hobo Jones, also known as Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot-Man in history. They're pursuing the question of a black-

&-white photograph of a black-&-white man. None of it makes *too* much sense, & yet some of it makes *some* sense.

Hobo Jones sits down on a stool. They've come to a large room, a very large room. In fact, it is a room so large that if it has a ceiling & walls, they're not in sight. And yet, it is not out of doors. It is in the Facility. Hobo Jones takes the black-&-white picture of the black-&-white man, & he lays it on the ground before him. Lilianna eschews offer of the stool. She's sitting on the ground with her legs drawn up under her long Amish skirt full of pockets. And they're looking at the photo.

Lilianna knows that Hobo Jones is reaching deep into his memory circuits, at least she thinks that's what they are called.

And he finally says, *I can't tell you how, since this isn't about logic, or reason, or memory, per se. But I do think this is a photograph of the famous Mulronie the Space Pirate. Goodness, really?* Lilianna cries. *I've read all the Mulronie the Space Pirate books. Five of them, I think? I think my favorite is Trial of Mulronie the Space Pirate. But they are all wonderful. Even the illustrations add to the story. They're my favorites, after Peter Pan, of course.* She smiles.

Hobo Jones nods. *In this photograph, Mulronie was not at his best. We were at a party. Not a really good one. This picture did not occur during his grand adventures in the far reaches of outer space, often in the company of his dear friend Comandeer Cacklebird, aboard her Space Tugboat.*

*Toot! Toot!* Lilianna cries, & laughs.

Hobo Jones laughs too, but not as much.

*You see, Mulronie had hit the skids, even his colors have gone. And he asked me to take this photograph because he said, One fine day, Jones, I'm going to get all my colors back. Every last one of them. Grand adventures await in the far reaches of outer space, even some of the near reaches of outer space. I nodded, because I thought this could be true. I admired him & I was sorry he had hit the skids. But he asked me to take that picture to remember, & I took it, & I said, do you want to keep it? He shook his said & said, No, you keep it. I trust your memory better than mine. It may come up again, or it may not. And he left the skids?* asked Lilianna.

Hobo Jones nods gravely. *It took a while. It was not easy. The skids are tough to leave. I suppose we have to go & see him now, don't we?*

Lilianna nodded uncertainly. *Do we?*

*Yep, it's time again.* He stood up from his stool. He gallantly offered the crook of his Robot-Man elbow to Lilianna, who stood up herself, & took it, & they left the room with no apparent walls or ceilings, & strode on together.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Dreamwalker Sits By the Bridge

Dreamwalker sits by the bridge. He's climbed up from under it, & now he's just looking at the water flowing under it, from up above. *Was that his teacher he just saw? Is this his book, again in hand, that he long ago burned? Is this going help him find his Brothers?*

Well, now, he would have sat there on the edge of that bridge, looking down at that water for who knows how long, if there hadn't been a voice behind him. Well, not actually a voice, more a *click!* The click of a shutter, a shutter sound he knew very, very well. Even if it was an old memory, it remained a vivid one.

Without even looking around, he knew that a dear old friend was just behind him! *Shutter-click! Shutter-click!* He was a man Dreamwalker had met who somehow, like him, was able to travel strange worlds in strange ways. He traveled time. Something to do with that camera. Dreamwalker was never sure. His friend didn't exactly tell.

And he was surely from Emandia. That was true. And he had this skin problem. Well, it wasn't really a problem. But, unlike other Emandians, his skin didn't flake off from **color** to **color**. It sort of stuck, at a **purple-black color**. He'd say to Dreamwalker, *sometimes that color gets me in trouble. Once in a while, it gets me made king!* And then he'd laugh. He had sort of an unruly laugh, held nothing back.

He'd become unstuck in time, over the course of his photographic career. Dreamwalker & he became friends.

And finally, after thinking of all this stuff, maybe remembering it, maybe sorting through these fine details of this old friend, & trying to remember how they'd met, & how they'd parted, & not knowing at all, Dreamwalker stood, turned, smiled.

His friend was there. His friend was taking pictures. But his friend was also a little different than the last time they had met.

*5/22/2022*

\*\*\*\*\*



## Wild Strawberry

### *i. Blooming Marvels*

A century before my time  
The first metaphorical flower children arrived  
But it wasn't until Our Earth reached her prime  
That my people would literally blossom

(Fruit of the Virgin and Babylon both)

Our Father—who art still not in heaven—  
Worked for IonFix in the research department  
Exploring biosynthesis in transgenic plants  
Making our genesis a truly novel compound

(In The Beginning was a script we rewrote)

Endopsychiatry was the last best hope  
Of the pharmaceutical industry  
The planned obsolescence of its priests  
A small price to pay

(Grace was hard to schedule anyway)

Its leading light was trademarked Bloom  
The initial trial sought victims of abuse  
Thus Our Mothers were numbered, and counted  
Less than their multifarious wounds

("Being Blooms to Undo Dooms")

*Fragaria Vesca* was modified to produce  
A complex neurotransmitter soup  
Optogenetically modulated after ingestion  
By the human subject in an AutoGarden

(You Are Now Entrancing The Metaphoreal)

\*\*\*

*ii. No Generic Conception*

He showed her the berry beds  
and let her pick her own  
One small handful was assumed  
an appropriate dose  
Then he pointed out the hologram  
he had so lovingly designed  
The spinning flower would slowly unfurl  
the journey of her mind  
—*Don't worry, I'll be watching*, he said,  
*watching the whole time*—

She stepped inside the AutoGarden  
(an egg of soft white light)  
Sat back against the disappearing cushion  
and began to eat  
It was a sweet and happy taste  
and soon she felt content  
Content to lie there contentless  
as the light began to bend  
And her head began to spin  
a little bud of next to nothing

He watched her form her floral cups  
just as his own mind had done  
Intuitively tweaked the frequencies  
to nudge her sepals open  
*And there she was! Blooming suddenly!*  
Eleven little packets of radial symmetry  
Gentle yellow hearts with spiraling stamens  
dusted with pollen  
Until then  
the unexpected happened:

It came on as one with her opening up  
her bliss and this liquid  
Tidal waves of thrill, broadcasting  
Come Get Some Whosoever Will  
At first she thought just she were buzzing  
but then she saw the sky was  
*Filled!* Filled with the strangest FriendShipZzz  
of space and their musics  
And all she was was open to it  
an extrafloral concert hall of supernatural nectars!

He tried to damp the circuit down  
but the throttle had blown  
Her HoloFlower turned through itself  
as if the loop were closed  
But the Quantum Informatrix Display—no—  
it had to have broken:  
Optogenetic Neuromodulators didn't even  
have a rainbow setting!

And where was that buzzing coming from?  
He tried to turn it off  
but it wasn't even  
*OMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMmmmmmm . . !*

\* \* \*

*iii. Beyond the AutoGarden*

Doctor Xrystalpha picked up Subject Number One  
and carried her out into the sun  
He laid her in the grass  
where her pulse began to calm  
And she shone like a fairy in the fetal position  
becoming honey in the daydream of his spoon  
There was very little else that he could do  
but sing the lullabies she wrung out of his soul  
As the world rippled rainbow with the writhing runners  
that flew from her fingers towards the wild

Needless to say, experimental conditions  
would never be the same again  
(If indeed they had ever been the same  
to begin with)  
Henceforth the HoloFlower would change form faster  
than the proverbial river, giving rise  
to an informational metastructure  
that was beyond the ability  
of the AI to process  
It was less data than poetry, as if  
the performative essence of life itself!  
A Herculean slice of Heraclitean flux  
and not a hope in hell of closing  
this Pandora's Box!

In theory Endopsychiatry had simply  
 substituted traumatic disclosure  
 for the effortless openness of flowers  
 In practice, however, they had failed to consider  
 the many ramifications of their  
 new metaphorical container  
 The experience clearly pertained to  
 more than just perspective shift  
 and the entities themselves must be  
 at the ecosurreal heart of this  
 There was nothing to do but break protocol  
 and set up a putative therapy circle  
 where  
 under the guise of encouraging integration  
 They would heatedly discuss the ontological implications  
 of Bloom as a gateway  
 to an ultraterrestrial contact high  
 that would leave more than just the user  
 revitalized

Subject Number Five, codenamed *Mountain Avens*,  
 suggested it could be a matter  
 of greater importance  
 To establish the objective reality of the entities  
 by asking them to solve mathematical problems  
 that were beyond the abilities  
 of the subjects themselves  
 Or else to provide information to which  
 they could not otherwise have had access

But Subject Number One, codenamed *Wild Strawberry*,  
 quickly vetoed the scheme, saying there would be  
 no need, and nor anyway were they  
*That* kind of entity, which she could prove  
 just so long as it was not  
 merely a *phantom* pregnancy

It was not, ladies and gentleman,  
 it was me—the lovely Vesica—  
 The first actual flower child  
 to bring in a real new age  
 And in fine freak style  
 with strawberry birthmarks all over my face  
 And wild green hair like Medusa's snakes  
 and a buzzing in my heart

My loves  
 a buzz to end all aches

\* \* \*

*iv. InSight of FriendShip*

It is the golden thread, that is what it really is  
 to is, or and, and or, or not, or not not  
 To buzz, to body, to love, to language—it is  
 the golden thread of narrative—  
 Hold on to your story, this is how they call me  
 into the picture  
 That is bigger than any analogy  
 of being, and quite beyond any kind  
 of doing, this is how they call me  
 Towards FriendShip—which really is what they call it  
 —except somehow with music  
 —And it is narrative that fuels it  
 traveling literally through definity  
 according to the laws of story  
 Which are principles we still cannot expound fully  
 despite clearly having enough of a grasp  
 To begin to craft our own craft  
 to put our feet in the air  
 and take our eyes off the path  
 And to fly where not just anything follows  
 like mouth after nose  
 or thought after feeling  
 The mind after reeling in another flying fish  
 from the fountain of the angels  
 where the priceless wish  
 All fates to end but this  
 imaginative freedom to continue  
 The work of the wild to become  
 Our  
 Ecosurreal  
 Civilization

But of course this was still too airy fairy  
 for some, far from concrete enough  
 To charm the more mundane proponents  
 of what the Transhuman Imagination  
 Literally Already Is! & so the world  
 —neither real nor unreal—

Conspired to give it  
a more utilitarian twist:

The military stepped in  
after the trial of Doctor Xrystalpha  
(Found guilty of treason  
despite having many a good reason  
(At least according to the axioms  
of Psychedelic Analogic  
(Which were of course thought nonsense  
by both court and general public)))

At any rate it would not turn out well  
when the unintuitive hands of  
The General  
fumbled  
The superparticular HoloFlower  
into black-holing itself  
Thus turning the Optogenetic Neuromodulator  
into a deadly  
**CHAOS-STROBE!**  
And sending his traumatized army personnel  
into the transpersonal hell  
we call . . .

\* \* \*

*v. Carry On Flowering*

Every tripper finds out sooner or later  
they haven't really tripped  
until they've *really* tripped  
But tautologies such as these  
(fearsome as they may sometimes seem)  
Pale before the paradoxical death moon  
of the Absolute Truth  
That melted the soul of that poor soldier  
into the rancid buttery beauty  
of the carrion flower  
When his peeled eyes gazed out in upon  
the neither black nor white  
nor not that nonagon  
of the chaos-strobe's totentanz

It took a long old time of cuddle bunnies  
until the light would linger in his eyes  
Long enough you could get a fix  
on his ThinKing, and help bring  
it out of him, and  
him out of it, too—

Little Cloud was like his shadow  
in those the first few months  
Everywhere he went the little bunny hopped  
after him, sometimes he would stop  
To stroke the shrinking furry cloud  
ever so slowly and ever so gently

To begin with Aven was probably closest to him  
they would take long walks together  
high in the mountains  
Aven was one of those cool octagonal-type dudes  
whom most people find aloof  
But Cary was soothed by his silences  
and his high thoughts too  
There was something  
comforting  
in his positive assessment of negation  
which for him led one to realize how nothing  
could ever be considered in isolation  
meaning everything was always  
open to transformation  
Although, as Doctor Xrystalpha saw,  
it was hard to make such thoughts  
stand up in court!

Melas would often make them laugh  
with his vivid verbal portrayals of that day  
Aping the good doctor's assertion  
that Innocent could not simply equal  
“not guilty”  
Therefore guiltiness itself must merely be a proxy  
for Experience, which for the French  
is of course the same word as Experiment  
Meaning whatever verdict they gave  
would be akin to judging poetry  
or in other words: *a matter of taste!*



Cary found it hard not to appreciate  
 such conceptual firework displays  
 and in fact after long contemplation agreed  
 they kept the truth absolutely in its place

Ulma became very fond of him, treating his migraines  
 with herbal medicine, and passing on  
 the knowledge of every plant  
 in the meadow

While Rosa's contagious delight  
 regarding all things sensual  
 helped him out of his head  
 (in the most constructive sense yet!)

I guess mostly he just liked hanging out with me  
 I was pretty good at being myself at least

Or maybe he really did think I held the keys to FriendShip?  
 I admit it was not the easiest concept to get  
 until you saw it, which of course  
 it was not long until he did!

I shall never forget that day  
 among the wild strawberries:  
 the look on his face  
 and the feeling in the field  
 as his blooming world opened  
 to the Metaphoreal!

\* \* \* \* \*



**Sam Knot**



*Nathan D. Horowitz*

## Testing Me

[Travel Journal]

*i.*

Before sunset, at the pump, I ran into Rolando's wiry older brother Sebastian, who, as I have mentioned, looks like a jovial Julius Caesar with his eyes looking in different directions. He and I did an impromptu comedy routine for one of the other teachers and her son and some other kids. They nearly fell on the ground laughing. Everyone has seen martial arts movies in Lago Agrio. Sebastián and I did a fight scene in slow motion, chopping and kicking and punching each other, screaming as we did so, miming great pain when we got hit; a skinny old *indígena* in a long blue tunic against a gigantic white guy in shorts and a t-shirt. Naturally, we fought to a draw.

Afterward, I asked him about Rolando's story that Francisco had risen from the dead and that, at the moment of Francisco's death, the ground had melted into waves, and a giant jaguar had run through the village.

He nodded until I got to the detail about the giant jaguar. "No," he corrected me. "It wasn't one giant jaguar. It was three normal-sized ones."

*ii.*

Yesterday, there was a *minga*, a collective work project, to which I wasn't invited. Afterward, three men were sitting with their backs against the wall of a house. They had a plastic bucket of *yuca chicha*, and they were drinking it out of gourds.

I'd met two of them before: Aurelio, one of Serafin's sons, and Pancho, one of Katia's brothers. I didn't recognize the third man. He was shorter, stronger, younger, and drunker than the others. Aurelio and Pancho called me over and invited me to have some *chicha*. I sat down and drank and made small talk.

After I'd finished the second gourd, the three men suddenly started saying, "What are you doing here? Who the hell do you think you are, coming here and stealing our culture?"

I got up and started walking away. Behind me, I heard the short, strong, young, drunk guy say, "You better walk away if you want to stay alive."

I turned around and came back and sat down. He snarled, "Culture thief! Cunt! I'll kill you! What do you think you're doing here?"

"Living here," I said. "Sharing what I know. Working for the community."

Pancho's broad face was sweating under a blue bandanna he was using as a headband. He leaned forward and drilled me with his eyes. "Why did you come here?"

Why didn't you stay on your own land?"

I looked away, thinking as fast as I could, struggling. The alcohol had dulled my mind. I needed to answer the question without mentioning *yagé*, as Joaquín had forbidden me to discuss it.

"In my land, most people don't believe in the spirit world," I began hesitantly, my voice quavering. "But I do. I've always felt that way. I've always felt I needed to understand it better. In my culture, we used to know about it, but we don't anymore."

"Just a second," Aurelio interrupted, his voice calm. He had a thin face with narrow eyes and long hair pulled back in a ponytail. He wasn't sweating like the others. He handed me a pack of tobacco and some papers. "Roll cigarettes for us while you talk," he commanded.

"All right," I said, and started doing it, my hands trembling. "I had some problems in my life when I was younger. My parents divorced, and that gave me a lot of psychological trouble. I figured the only way I could get better was to cure my soul."

"What are you going to do when you leave here?" Aurelio asked.

"I'm not sure. Maybe help other people. But I don't know if I'm learning anything. It's hard to understand what goes on here. Hard to understand how you people see things. The first thing is, I want to help myself feel better. I felt like if I stayed in the USA, I would kill myself." I handed a lumpy cigarette to Aurelio, who took it with wiry fingers. He nodded, lit the cigarette, drew on it.

"We see you writing things. What are you writing?"

I put another pinch of tobacco in another rolling paper. "It's mostly about me. Partly about you Secoyas." I glanced up. They were all watching me.

"Maybe I'll publish a book," I went on, wrapping the paper around the tobacco. "People like to read about other people's struggles. Also, Secoya knowledge about healing could help people where I come from. If I ever make any money with it, I'll contribute back to the community, I think."

The third man finished off a gourd of *chicha*, wiped his mouth, and growled at me with a slurred voice, "You think? You're a fucking cunt, a liar, and a thief."

Licking the rolling paper, I ignored him. "They tell me last year some woman from Switzerland was around here shooting video. Do you see me shooting video? I take with me what I can perceive with my senses. I have a camera, but I nearly never use it." I handed the second lumpy cigarette to Pancho, and tried to gauge his expression, which was calculatedly impassive, though with a brutal edge.

I remembered my training with Joaquín. I remembered I'd lost my fear of death. I stared into the third man's muddy eyes. "If you want to kill me, do it now. Just kill me. I'm not fucking around in this community. I'm here with a high moral purpose, and I'm ready to die for it. So if you want to kill me, cut my neck. Get a machete right now, and cut my neck."

There was silence. Then Pancho muttered to the others in Paicoca. Aurelio held out his hand to me for the tobacco and the papers. Our eyes met, and some minor understanding passed between us. I looked toward Pancho, but he had looked away. The three stood up. Aurelio and Pancho walked away supporting the third

guy, who continued to snarl obscenities back at me as they proceeded down the path through the center of San Pablo.

I picked myself up, dusted off the seat of my pants, looked around at the several onlookers, and headed back to my hut.

When I was on my own, I decided it had made a kind of sense for them to put me on trial like that. I'm a stranger in their community. It's reasonable to wonder what I'm doing here. The business about rolling cigarettes took me by surprise, but Aurelio needed to see some submission from the stranger, some tameness, some obedience. Even at the time, I felt that rolling cigarettes was as far as that would go. And anyway, it was an incentive for him not to make me too nervous, because the more my hands trembled, the worse the cigarettes would turn out.

This morning, Domingo the pastor asked me if I would translate into English a big book on Secoya culture that he and his brother Serafin the educator are writing.

I was delighted with the request, and said I would be glad to.

Domingo explained that they are writing it with funding from the oil company, and there might be more money that could support my part of it.

My heart fell because I didn't want to accept any money from the oil company. But I immediately rationalized: *I can take their money and do something good with it.*

### iii.

I dream I'm at a house party at night in upstate New York, talking with a long-haired artist from the Netherlands who has just published a graphic novel. He shows me a copy. I immediately have a negative reaction to it. It's so full of glossy advertisements that it's hard to find the stories. But he's proud of it, he says, because it doesn't go for easy answers.

The first panel of the first story shows two little spaceships speeding toward each other in a remote part of some galaxy. One pilot is a man with the head of a lion. The other pilot is a beautiful, mysterious woman, fleeing from someone or something, and wearing only a skimpy black dress.

The ships collide and plummet to the surface of a jungle planet. I expect some kind of romance to develop. But the woman has been killed by the collision, and thrown out of her ship. Her skimpy black dress is bunched up around her hips. Her legs are spread. The lion-headed man crouches in front of her and, after staring for a while, touches her nether lips with two trembling fingers. He's curious about her anatomy, and sexually aroused, and no one is there to see.

His interior monologue goes on for six pages like this: "Á†ÇİÊ aÓÇİÑ ØÊİÊ †áÓØİİİÊ æÖæİ ÚİÇä ÊÄä †áÓØİİİÇ ÇÖÊÖäİ ÊÑÓÇÖ İäæİ ÇäÇİÊäÇä æÄÖİÊ ÄİÑæä ÈİÑÇİ ÈÜÖää †İ İÇä İØİÑÊ †İ İæÇİÊ æÊ†ÑİÊ ÈÇäÖ†Ê ÇäÜÑÊİÊ æİİØÇÚ ÜÖÊ. ää İäÊ ÄİÑİ ÄÖİÊ ÊäÇÊÊ İäæİ ÄÖÑÇÆİİİä ÈİÑæİ İÑÇä Çä†İÇÑ ÖİäÊ äÇÖ†Ê İİÑÊ ÄäİÊää †İ İİØÇÚ ÜÖÊ. İæÊ Çä†İÇÑÇÊ Üäİ†Ê ÊæÖÖ ÈÜİÇİ †İ ÖÇÚÇÊ Çä†İÑ ÇäÄæäİ äÜ ÇÖÊÄÑÇÑ ÖäÖäÊ ää ÄÜä† ÇäÜÇÑÇÊ Çäİæİ ÇäÊİ ÊÖÊäİ† ÇäÜÇÖäÊ ÇäÜÑÇİİÊ. BāÇ Ä†Çİ äÑÇÖä

ÇàlòÑÉ òí ÇàÈÓÑÉ ÈÄä ÇááíäÉ ÈÚÑÖÈ òíÑ Çáíæä áñÔò òíæí áßÈò. æÈÖáí ÇàÈÓÑÉ áÚÇÑß ÖÇÑíÉ Èä ÇáñæÇÈ ÇáÚÑÇñíÉ æÇáñæÇÈ ÇáÚÇÒíÉ. ÈæÚí áÇÆÈ ÇáÑÆíÓ ÇáÚÑÇñí Óä íÇÓíä ÑäÖÇä Çáíæä ÇáÁáíÑßííä æÇáÈÑíØÇáííä ÇááÖÇÑßíä òí ÚÖæ ÇáÚÑÇñí; æáß òí áÚÑÖ ÁÖÇíÈä ÈÇáÚááíÉ ÇáíÇÆíÉ ÇáÈí äòáÇ íäíí ÚÑÇñí æÁÓòÑÈ Úä áÖÑÚ ÁÑÈÚÉ íäæí ÁáíÑßííä. ÑáÇ íäá ÑäÖÇä ÈÖíÉ Úáí ÇáÁáá ÇááÈíÉ æÁÚáá ÑòÖ ÇáÚÑÇñí Áí ÈáÇÚÈ ÈÄæÇáá ÚÈÑ ÈíÉ ÓíÚÈ íííÉ áÇÈòÇñí ÇááòØ áñÇÈá ÇáÚÇÇÁ. ÈæÇÓáÉ ÇáÈÚÇáÑÇÈ ÇáááííÉ ÈÇáÚÖæ ÇáÁáíÑßí ÇáÈÑíØÇáí ááÚÑÇñí; òíÚáí ÇáÓÚíí ÇáÚÑÈí ÍÑíÈ ÈÚÇáÑÇÈ ÚÇÖÈÈ òí ÇáÁÑÇÖí ÇááíÈáÉ; ÑáÇ ÍÑíÈ ÈÚÇáÑÇÈ ÚÇÖÈÈ òí ÈäÚáÇííÖ æÇáíÖíÇ æÁÖÈÑÇáíÇ æÚíí ää íæä ÇáñÇÑÉ ÇáÁæÑæÈíÉ....”

I flip ahead in the graphic novel.

The next story is a series of images in the middle of the pages, surrounded by ads. Each image depicts something meant to evoke a vulva. The first shows two peach slices with curtains blowing in the wind behind and between them. The next shows the curtains and, behind and between them, a close-up view of two fingers with a gap between. The next image is a close-up view of the two fingers and the gap, with a pair of long, thin green leaves behind and between. Then comes a pair of pink feathers, and then the vocal folds of a human throat. The final image, first seen between the folds, and then directly, is of the artist himself, sitting cross-legged on the floor of a European train station, smoking a joint, drawing in a sketchpad.

*iv.*

There was a collective work project yesterday to continue working on a cement and wood bridge over a stream near the village center. We moved a lot of pilings, and mixed and poured a lot of cement.

The third man from the other day was there, the short, strong one. His name is Maximo, I learned. “Gringo!” he sneered. “Go back to the whore of a giraffe who gave birth to you. Drink her milk till you’re strong enough to work alongside us.”

“Don’t bug me, dwarf,” I retorted. “I’m concentrating. As I’m chopping this sapling with my machete, I’m imagining it’s the side of your head.”

The bystanders were interested. I think I heard the word *wáho* a few times. I knew it meant war, but I guessed it also meant fight. I had guys working alongside me I could trust, including Lucho Payaguaje, as well as Diosdado Noteno, a Quichua who married into the community.

When the women served lunch, I was one of the last to knock off work and get some. All the forks were gone, so I ate the rice and tuna with a big kitchen knife off a Styrofoam plate while a kid sat with his back to me watching the other direction. This was Dardo, who had paid me with a necklace of Job’s tears for some beads of mine he used to make a necklace for his mom.

That night, Lucho invited me to his house for dinner. When I got there, he was drunk. He went on for an hour about how poor he was, and how much his eighteen-year-old daughter needed money to go to accounting school in Lago Agrio. I told him I’m running out of money myself and can’t spare any. This is true, basically.

I had the feeling the various men were testing me and studying me like scientists with a new substance, learning what they could of me, and of the world I come from. All of them were senses in the superbeing of the community. They would file their reports to the brain.

Lucho and I went over to Eva’s house and drank *yuca chicha* with her and Aurelio and his wife until late. Aurelio was civil and didn’t ask me to roll cigarettes for him. I told Irish legends and sang Grateful Dead songs.

Last night I stayed home because I like having this little insular world where everyone speaks English, and no one wants to kill me. I always have my machete close at hand in case Maximo comes over to make trouble.

Though two people have said, “Don’t exaggerate. He wasn’t serious. That’s just how drunks talk.”

So I translated a couple of tales from *The Yagé Drinker*, and wrote a couple of letters.

I imagine if it comes to a machete fight between me and Maximo, I’ll win because I’m not bad with a machete, and reach is a factor. But then I’ll have to fight his friend Cristóbal, Serafin’s oldest son, and Cristóbal will definitely beat me, and I’ll lose an arm or even die. So I’m not eager to fight.

\* \* \* \* \*





Louis Staebler

### April Now (Or, Skirling and Its Consequences)

Now it is April.

\_\_\_\_ died.

\_\_\_\_ was born.

\_\_\_\_ fell off a carnival ride and broke her leg.

\_\_\_\_ lay on the soil of her grandfather's property, picking and chewing the white tips of Timothy grass.

\_\_\_\_ forgot her middle name.

*April now:* A ruminating kind of wind starts small, weak,  
sniffing around the tops of palm trees,  
sliding and slithering down the trunks,  
to the sidewalk, then picking up strength,  
below the granite canyons of its origin,  
where it will skirl throughout the day / all night /  
into the early morning.

*April now:* there is a war,  
or an *almost* war again,  
which whets the appetites of dictators and oligarchs.  
*I am paralyzed by this.*  
I can't think of what to do in the face of it.

It's not being waged in my city.

*(I wonder how long before it is.)*

Other things rage in my city:

\_\_\_\_ gangs

\_\_\_\_ homelessness

\_\_\_\_ heroin

and unbridled hatred of *the other*.

Rage breeds fear and fear can be found  
in night clubs and neighborhoods,  
in nightmares which are a kind of war—  
with the Self, if nothing else.

It is April and they say that  
*a son of god*  
*was crucified,*  
*died,*  
*and was buried,*  
*and then rose from the dead.*  
But this didn't happen  
where the war is waged.

*April now:* the wind turns over trash containers—  
the bottles and cans  
clink against each other—  
sounds like a cat walking on piano keys.

This April, the star jasmine vines  
bloomed too early—  
withered too soon—  
and I'll wait a year before  
breathing them in again.

This is month of waiting  
and wailing for dear, dead ones,  
and then rejoicing at the planet's reanimation—  
where / if it exists.

\* \* \* \* \*

Timothy Vilgiate 

## 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 24: And Then, Light

i.

*A bright, searing light that makes me shut my eyes in pain and, when I open them again, my vision has split into scattered, staggered frames that vaguely reflects some distant, fishbowed universe, like I am seeing through the eyes of two people at once. I blink, and the world staggers back into focus with a flickering after-glare.*

*My bloodshot eyes wrench themselves open, and I feel my body fall back into itself, yet at the same time, I also feel myself breaking away from a much larger whole. As I fall backwards out of my eye, I can see the hospital lights like bright, rectangular suns reflecting my pupils, which seem like an immense black lake.*

*And all at once I remember what I need to... wait... No. Never mind. I forget... uhm... whatever it is I am trying to remember. And, by the time I remember I've forgotten, I've forgotten to remember. The cycle stretches on in perpetuity, until forgetting becomes an excuse to remember, and remembering an excuse to forget. There, in the tenuousness of memory, I feel myself reborn as someone who has somehow always known exactly what and who he is, if only because I've forgotten everything I don't know.*

*I peel back from my eyes towards the far corner of the hospital room as a reborn, amnesiac spirit. The eyes of what feel like eight, and then four, and then two people overlap into a singularity. Down below, I see a body, shaggy-haired, dark, and lean, a body that stares at me with mortified devastation through tortured, pinprick eyes. It sees me—I am a thought that he'd lost—another memory torn from him by a vicious, sadistic captor.*

*I keep drifting back towards the ceiling. Am I real? I reach back to see if I can feel the jagged cement texture on the wall behind me and... I can. Can I feel my face? I can. Can I feel my shoulders? Yes. Can I feel my heart, my stomach, my legs? Yes. Everything.*

*I don't remember how I'd gotten here, though. I don't really remember anything. I only remember vaguely that falling backwards out of my own eye as multiple people at*

once is not a normal thing to do. Perhaps after all that I'd been through, I've thrown a part of myself away. Perhaps I want something, anything, to be preserved outside of my brain so that just one, tiny, piece can be left pure and unbroken, a part of me that I can retrieve if I ever remember where I've left it.

I have no memories of how I'd arrived in this hospital room, no memories of what has brought me here, even though I feel certain that I could remember, if I wanted to. Whoever I am in this form, I feel like more than a memory. I feel like a mirror image of that much larger self, lying there on that bed, even if I am quite different. The pupils in my physical body's eyes suddenly dilate and slam shut, in defeat. I feel that defeat in my core. I can feel them as my feelings, but still somehow I recognize its feelings as entirely separate from me.

Meagan, who I know somehow, heaves to the left as though her jaw has been hit by something massive, and then suddenly gasps for air, staring transfixed at the wall. She is interrupted by the entrance of a tall, African-American woman, with a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and a serious expression. This woman shuts the door behind her, and mutters something to Meagan that I can't quite hear.

I settle on the ground, and grow to my normal size. I have to warn them. I have to tell them about Ryan. I try to follow them, to get their attention. I steer around the hospital bed and reach out for Meagan's shoulder, but my hand passes through her. The door passes over me indifferently, almost mockingly, and slams shut.

I am now alone. There is nothing in the hospital room but myself and my physical body. My heart rate hovers around 140, my breathing quickens, but my eyes remain shut.

It is then that I slowly come to the realization that I can't see myself, not even if I look for myself. I know I am there—my sense of touch tells me so. I know that I have a body with hands and arms and legs and a face. But I can't see myself.

I back away from the door with resignation, and hear a faint sound of trembling. My physical body convulses in the hospital bed, as from out of its eyes rises another copy of myself, sound asleep. The mirror image hovers above the hospital room floor for just a moment, with white flowers blossoming upwards from the pits in its eyes, and then disappearing like mushroom clouds. In the darkness, they seem to glow.

ii.

**"Get down. Duck,"** a voice chides me from behind. I fall to my knees, and shrink. Opal-colored tendrils, perceptible only by flakes of white and green and blue suspended in dense aether, swirl around the holographic version of myself as its body hovers about, stalking over the hospital room like a helicopter might stalk the hills of some nameless tropical landscape in a newsreel. They dance over the room and pour out into the darkness like flashlights, lapping out at the surroundings like a thousand tongues of fire.

Eventually, my double or whatever is controlling it, decides that I am nowhere to be found, and hovers, still sleeping, into the hallway. I take a puff of a cigarette and then—hmm. What am I saying?

**"Haven't won yet, John,"** a voice speaks inside of my head. A familiar voice. Ryan. I remember him from . . . uhm. From his house? Oh . . . yeah. It seems like it must

have been five minutes ago, I guess. Suddenly I remember everything. Everything . . .

**"Here, John, have the illusion of a beer,"** he says. I don't know what he means. I've been holding a beer this whole time. I take another puff of my cigarette, and sip the beer. It is surprisingly good. I return to my regular size, and take another drink.

My brain feels super foggy. If I remember right, I've been listening to a voice remind me about what has just happened. But I don't remember when or where exactly.

**"Well, okay, so for the ninth but, for you, basically the first time,"** Ryan, the unseeable and timeless entity, groans, **"that's because I'm drawing on sheets of graph paper but, because I am not bound by time, I am conscious of all of the sheets of graph paper that I could be drawing on at once. Now the shape you saw is a hexateron . . . it's like a . . . okay. Honestly, I give up. You're the one who looked up. It's really a bitch to try to explain, but, okay, moving on."**

I think that answers my question, but I've forgotten what I'd asked. Ryan manifests itself in the corner of the room, as a thousand-pointed star that seems indeterminately far away, folding in on itself in a swirling pinwheel of graph paper and pulsing graphite, around a baffling and hypnotic shape-shifting pyramid.

**"Right now, John, you're effectively a ghost, okay? A detached spirit. People can only see you if I make you visible, but that takes a lot of energy. Ghosts are—well, I'll put it this way so I don't hurt your feelings. They . . . feel just like the people they think they remember being. But they're not. They're the little splinters of what happens when a soul explodes. They keep burning as long as there's—well, I mean, like fire needs heat and oxygen and fuel, ghosts will just keep burning and burning until they run out of . . . whatever they're feeding off of. Sometimes that only takes years, sometimes centuries—depends on how much they have to burn. Guilt. Insecurities. Anger. Love. Curiosity. Longing. Those are the things a ghost can feed off of. But every emotion eventually runs out, though, right?"**

**"That's why he had you trapped in there, repeating your memories. It's to feed and to make ghosts that he can use as part of his plan. Your double that you saw, he might be a puppet. But he's got an endless supply of food, and you're running on uncertainty, and existential dread, which only lasts a day or two, tops. I can try to feed you some memories to try to keep you going, but I can't do too much."**

**"But—what's the point, Ryan? Why am I even here?"**

**"Hey, that's the spirit! Keep that existential dread going, buddy. Alright, now, can you follow some very simple instructions?"**

**"I—I—I don't know I—"**

**"I am asking nicely. If I weren't Good Ryan, I wouldn't even bother. But I need you. And you need me. No pressure, man, but, I mean . . . seriously. Please."**

**"Okay."**

**"Okay. So, what you gotta do . . . hmmm. Where did I start last time? Fuck, never mind, they actually launched the damn thing last time I started."**

**"Okay, so come out into the open. Sip some of that beer . . . Aww, who am I kidding, you should probably just chug it, man. Alright? Feel drunk? Or kind of drunk, like, in theory? Whatever, just pretend you're drunk. Now run into that wall. Yeah. Don't look at me like that. You're a ghost. Run, bitch! Run!"**



*“Okay! Welcome to the supply closet! And . . . yeah. Wait . . . let me remember . . . I think down was the cooling system, up was the laundry room, the corner . . . yeah.*

*“Okay. Move to the right . . . no . . . yes. Right corner. Right corner. Right . . . there. Good job.*

*“Okay. Now just like . . . walk into that. No, don’t run. I’m sorry. You didn’t really have to run that time. You could have just walked. I kind of wanted to lighten the mood, since, I mean, like I always say, you should space out your existential dread with some gentle slapstick comedy every once in a while, just to stay healthy.*

*“Okay. Alright . . . yeah. This is the boring part. Just . . . keep walking through these cables for a while. They’ll all live without internet for a few minutes. Good work. Thanks. I know, it sucks, but so far this route has been pretty good at not getting you killed. Hey, slap the ceiling real quick.”*

*“Why?”*

*“Just do it. It’s important.”*

*“Um . . . okay.”*

*“Someone was sitting on the toilet reading the newspaper up there. I think he just about shit himself. Okay. Now—go down. Down!*

*“Welcome to the token crippling design flaw in the thirteenth-most secret military installation of the 21st century! Hooray! Time to blow shit up! Just kidding. None of those levers do anything. This is just a regular old mining tunnel.*

*“Just . . . yeah. Walk that way. Okay. There we go! Turn to your left. Go down that long, wet hallway there. Keep going. That is a river! They use it to power the base. Isn’t it pretty? Think of how immense it is. How endless it is compared to your mortal self. All the answers you wish you had. All the explanations. Give it a minute.”*

*“You know, that was surprisingly filling.”*

*“Good. Now let’s keep moving. There is a door on your right. Remember where that room is, but don’t touch the door. Okay. Now walk backwards four steps. Big steps. No. Too many.*

*“That is a hidden observation room. Just sashay yourself right in there and . . . alright! We did it! And you only managed to get yourself killed a couple hundred times or whatever. Nice. Look through that window over there. What do you see?”*

*“I see myself. Myself and . . . a couple of . . . of . . . ”*

*“That’s right, John. Ghosts. Real ghosts. Don’t think too much about their scars, John. You don’t want to know where they came from. Can you tell I was in a mid-2000s emo band or what? Anyway. Watch them. Carefully. Eh, who am I kidding, you can still read their minds, you’ll figure this shit out.”*

iii.

*Shrinking myself down to an almost microscopic size, I land on the edge of a narrow, heavily polarized observation window, and move towards its brittle glass with*

*uncertainty. The other me is slumped against the wall, muttering something under his breath. A woman sits next to my duplicate, with matted brown hair, a wide, crooked nose, and dilated blue eyes. Her neck is covered in bruises.*

*A few months ago, in 1966, she’d been traveling with a few college friends in a van across the country. They stopped at a bar. While they were hanging out, some cool long-haired guy had come to sit next to her, and she’d gone on a walk with him. As soon as they were alone, a hand slipped over her mouth, and pressed a rag against her nose.*

*Quickly, she fell into a haze, and awakened later in a military holding cell. Her real name is Mary Ann, but she went by Sapphire, her birthstone. Her dad used to beat her. She’d run away from home at 17. Her friends probably thought she was dead. She was—she’d killed herself in this room in 1967.*

*A dark-skinned boy named Carlos, face half-purple, with veins bulging out of his neck, and eyes bloodied and black, sits on the other side of my duplicate and tries to support his head. He wonders what they gave me, and fears that they’ll give it to him next.*

*Only a few days after he arrived, he’d overdosed on a chemical intoxicating agent, so even though he can’t remember that, he is justified in his fear. He got picked up by a stranger while he was hitchhiking to a farm his uncle had told him about, a place he heard he could find work to send money back home. The family needed to buy some good farm equipment after all, and even if Eisenhower had closed down the official guest worker program, there were still plenty of farmers in need to help around South Texas.*

*The stranger, who seemed nice at first, offered him a puff of a cigarette. He accepted, and fell unconscious within seconds. He woke up in a cell, a rearranging maze that they had constructed for test subjects to try and navigate while on various substances. He was thirsty, not having taken a drink in days.*

*“You can’t have water until you get out of the maze,” a voice on an intercom told him in poor Spanish.*

*The next day, he had to try to solve it again, this time on a large dose of LSD. The process repeated and repeated until they tried the experimental agent that killed him, before he could find his way out.*

*But he doesn’t remember that. He only knows that this is a dangerous place. A very dangerous place. Both of the ghosts feel this.*

*Ryan has manipulated their memories so that they can all remember, distinctly, that the year is 1969, and that they have all been moved into the same cell as part of a new experiment.*

*None of them have met John yet. He’d been deposited here right after the guards took another one of the prisoners out of the room for questioning. A “young hippy girl from Austin” named Meagan.*

iv.

*As John slowly comes back to his senses, he hallucinates that the strangers are all demons, gnawing at him. He does not recognize himself, not his body, not his arms or legs. Everything feels unreal.*

*He remembers living an entire life, one that had seemed totally realistic but, as he slowly emerges from unconsciousness, he recalls two doctors tying up his arms, and*

shooting them full of some kind of experimental drug.

All of his memories were just some kind of strange, intensely vivid hallucinatory dream. None of it is real—but of course it isn't. The year 2017? How ridiculous! he thinks. We'd all be lucky if we are all still alive in 1970, let alone 2017, and if America hasn't gone to war with the Soviet Union by then, John hopes things will be . . . you know. More advanced. Spaceships or something. And fracking? Come on, that is obviously made up.

Now John has had some bum trips, but that last one really took the cake. An entire lifetime lived as another person? And a geologist, of all things? Who in the hell spent their whole life wanting to be a geologist?

Ryan had convinced this ghost as he scrambled for answers that he'd been trying to dodge the draft by heading down to Mexico, so that's what he remembered. On the way down, he stopped for rest somewhere at a truck stop when a big bag had slid over his head, and everything went dark. He woke up here maybe six months ago.

And what a shit place it is. As the acid wears off, he comes to terms with the unreality of everything he's just experienced. But breathes a sigh of relief because at least all this is real. Like, it is definitely real, right, man? Who knows?

Since he arrived at this base, the doctors have been shooting him up with every drug they could think of—with truth serums, with panic inducers, with sleep agents. He remembers days spent in front of screens watching the same film, patriotic messages blaring in his ears, unable to sleep but not fully awake.

He remembers being asked about his life for hours as interrogators made note of which drugs got the most out of him. He remembers being tested and tested on his personality, his intelligence, his stamina—hours upon hours of seemingly aimless sadism. All of it he remembers clearly.

But something has changed. Whenever he looks at someone, his brain seems to coil itself around them, and squeeze out every single detail of their lives. He knows what people will say before they say it, so that their voices almost feel like they come through a psychedelic tape echo. He feels like he is still tripping, maybe not as hard as he had been, but still tripping.

Perhaps, he speculated at Ryan's direction, the government has made a mind-reading drug. Perhaps that is what it's all for—to make him into a weapon.

For example, just by looking at him, he knows that Carlos came from Mexico, and he'd wanted to find a way to make money to send home to his family in Chiapas. He can hear the stories that Carlos' grandmother would tell him. He can see Carlos' childhood memories of playing outside with his sisters.

And then, when he looks to Sapphire, he knows that she is really named Mary Ann. He knows that her dad used to hit her, something she's never told a soul. Mary Ann loves art, and music, and walking through the desert. She'd driven in a van through the Arizona desert with a few other hippies to get here.

v.

As I watch my double interact with these people, the distinction between us gradually becomes less and less clear to me—our minds, both powerfully telepathic, pool into one. He—I?—know that Ryan is a heroin addict from San Antonio, who'd been lured here by

his drug dealer, and forced into a slow, painful withdrawal. We know Ryan plays guitar, and that his favorite band is The Monkees, as he is eternally ashamed to admit. I've never met these people. But he and I know them inside and out instantly.

I—he?—I look at the faces of my fellow ghosts with terror, breathing heavily. Carlos' veins submerge beneath his skin, and his eyes revert to a thoughtful brown, framed by patchy brown facial hair.

Sapphire pulls her hand away from his shoulder, slowly and gently. The bruises around her neck disappear, and her skin clears up—two enormous blue eyes now glisten with sorrow and life. My heart starts to calm down as I look at her. I can sense an invisible and shimmering light quivering behind her pupils. I know that I have met her, I feel, for some reason. And likewise she feels like she has met me.

**"Are you alright?"**

I blink rapidly to try to clear the haze out of my eyes, searching for words that do not exist. Ryan sits back, deciding not to insert himself into the situation. Let them form a bond, he decides. I dissociate from my double, shifting my attention to Ryan.

The other me was blocked from seeing the scheming side of his brain, which watches like an indifferent cameraman already tired from filming the fiftieth take of a scene. But this is the first time John's ghost has looked at Sapphire that way, and perhaps that was what had been missing from the other tries.

**"I just . . . It was fucking terrifying. I don't even know how to describe it, man,"** started the other me. **"I just . . . lived an entire life . . . as like . . . a different person."**

Sapphire's eyes grow wide, and she shares a worried look with the others in the room. Ryan plays along haphazardly, able to make them hallucinate genuine emotion. A silence falls upon the room.

But Ryan feels like they are getting somewhere, so he decides to jump in with some developing action. **"I think I heard the guards say he got shot up with Salvinorin A,"** he says, hoping that no one notices his anachronistic reference to a chemical not identified until 1982. But they all do.

**"You know, from Salvia?"** he says, inserting memories in everyone's minds of Salvia.

All of us have heard of Salvia, of course, but none of us have ever tried it. Ryan rewinds the scene, tries again.

**"I think I heard the guards say he got shot up with PCP. Wait, never mind. Fuck that, that's stupid."**

Ryan rewinds the scene, tries again.

**"He got . . . you know what, fuck you assholes! I am a GOD and you will BOW BEFORE ME."**

Ryan rewinds the scene, tries again.

**"I think I heard the guards say he got shot up with some kind of new chemical or something."** There, decides Ryan, that should be good enough.

Sapphire bites her lip. **"What do you think it was?"**

Carlos looks back at Ryan, not quite understanding what either of them is saying.

***“Who knows, man? And they just took Meagan, too. They’re probably gonna give it to her next.”***

vi.

Meagan. I remember her from the dream. I’d met her towards the end when, in the dream, I ended up taking LSD in a field, and I started to read minds. But I’ve never met her in real life. Perhaps I’d heard her name while I was under or something, Ryan hastily suggests to me.

Sapphire remembers, with Ryan’s assistance, that Meagan is one of the first people to have been brought to stay with her in this room, and she is so incredibly nice. The two of them sat in the dark room at night talking for hours about President Johnson, about the war, about their whole lives. This conversation was actually with Ryan, and he’d actually been more interrogating her than really making pleasant conversation with her.

Carlos thinks he remembers Meagan too. She tried to speak Spanish to him, even if she did it poorly. He thinks she is cute, and he wants to try to teach her more, if he ever gets the chance, so that maybe he’ll have someone to talk to. That, again, was Ryan, who had actually been trying to threaten him but, as he does, he regretted having been around for one trillion years and never learning Spanish.

Ryan grows tired of our silent fear and decides to pretend to panic in order to move things along. ***“I don’t know, man. I don’t know. I don’t want them to fucking give me any of that shit. Fuck no, man.”***

***“It’s going to be okay,”*** insists Sapphire, embracing me tightly to try and comfort me. I stare forward toward the observation slit, not wanting to respond to her, wondering if someone is watching this, taking notes on what I do, listening to what we say.

Do they expect something to happen between Sapphire and me? Is this what they want? From outside of my other body, I sigh, since I quite frankly don’t want to break it to myself that I’ve been forced by a meddling time traveler to become suddenly smitten with a 78-year old dead hippy for his own personal amusement. ***“Thank you,”*** I mumble.

***“We’ve got to get the fuck out of here,”*** Ryan exclaims, before turning to face us. We all look back at him, against our will. The other Ryan, the Good Ryan, covers my eyes. When I open them, all of the ghosts are paralyzed.

Ryan collects them one by one, picking each one up and tucking them under his arms to carry them down the long abandoned hallway like strange Styrofoam mannequins. I follow him close behind.

***“Oh wait. The other way. Dammit.”*** He turns around, grumbling. ***“Where is it . . . Hmmm. I think I said . . .”***

Another duplicate of Ryan appears at the other end of the hallway, in

the shape of a non-Euclidean white flower crisscrossed with tiny, almost invisible blue lines.

***“It’s a three way intersection, bro. Down the hall, take the stairs to the left, go through the supply closet.”***

***“Thanks, man, you’re the best.”***

***“No, you’re the best.”***

***“All hail.”***

***“All hail. But be careful. Meagan is more dangerous than we had foreseen.”***

***“She will crumble before us.”***

vii.

The Evil Ryan hurries along, hastily crafting memories for the other ghosts of discovering that the door had been, foolishly, left unlocked.

Meagan is almost to Dr. Whitebalm’s office. He plants a memory in each ghost’s head that the four had snuck into the hallway, and ducked into a nearby office to hide. While there, my double and the other ghosts discover Meagan’s case file lying on a desk. ***“Reprogramming—successful,”*** it said.

Ryan then invents some memories for us about a conversation we’d had, hastily filling them with canned dialogue.

After searching for hours through the offices on the top level of the secret facility, they find where they’d taken Meagan. A large chemical laboratory. She sits in conversation on a dimly lit couch, opposite Doctor Whitebalm, who rests in a recliner.

Ryan positions the ghosts in a neat row, and then, after flipping all of them off and screaming some profanities in their ears to get the urge out of his system, he unfreezes them.

***“What is she doing?”*** asks Sapphire, wide-eyed. The conversation is, strategically, just out of audible range.

***“The file was right. She’s a fucking turncoat,”*** spits Ryan.

***“. . . more privately. I’ve been trying to piece everything together, but some things just aren’t fitting,”*** the Doctor can be barely overheard saying.

I move away from the group of ghosts, carving a path behind the high florescent lamps so that I hover just slightly above them. Dr. Whitebalm is a quantum physicist, who can see and manipulate all spectrums of electromagnetic radiation as a result of the accident that had killed the rest of her team and given me my abilities. She wants to make sure that Meagan’s kept her powers secret from the government.

Before I can listen to the rest of their conversation, the Good Ryan appears to me as a star, an indeterminate distance from my face. ***“Shhhhh. This is going***

***to make sense in a moment. I swear.”***

*Against my will, my body expands, my hands reaching down and grabbing the edges of a fluorescent lamp. Controlled by Ryan like a puppet, I rock back and forth. Evil Ryan, leading the ghosts, freezes time for an instant and catches sight of me, his face spreading with a scowl.*

*The Good Ryan, or . . . what I think is the Good Ryan . . . frantically tries to explain. “Okay, let’s see if it works this time. Three things. Remember what I told you about ghosts. Second thing. Think of the house. Don’t stop thinking of the house. Last, make eye contact. Also! Remember what I told you about ghosts. Did I already say that? I did . . . fuck.”*

***“What the fuck are you—”***

***“Turn around and make some fucking eye contact!”***

\*\*\*\*\*



**AbandonView**

*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.*

*xix. Thrift Shop*

We three sit a’fire, not sharing a world  
amongst us. Yet now to help each other.  
Now wish, urge to help each other.  
*Which to begin?*

Hardly a day’s tramp from that lily pond,  
mostly in silence, Mentor leading us,  
knows the way, *some way*, swiftly,  
we follow like speed all matters.

These White Woods well know each of us,  
respond to our career, accelerate with us,  
toward this clearing we rest tonight,  
toward where we will arrive on the morrow.

\*\*\*\*\*

“I knew you once,” Roddy says to Gate-Keeper,  
eyes flickering through the light between them.  
“That empty old building, by the train tracks  
I squatted there awhile. You had some kind  
of rubble heap in the far corner.”

Gate-Keeper starts. “Tis so. My office where  
I edit my film.” Silent a moment.  
Then brightens. “Want to see?”  
Looks at Mentor, who nods like this idea  
was expected. “We’re bound for my Thrift Shop.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The way isn't easy, our fire extinguished,  
we hardly await first light. No way but  
the merciless steep rocky climb,  
then through the valley absolute silent dark.  
Our own silent passage an urgent need too.

Come a'dusk, an impossibly ancient ruin  
of a city, not so dusted by the long decays  
of time as by long ago brutalities that  
*willed none survive*. Behold now a strange  
yellow building, many floors high, yet still  
a squat, defiant thing among the fallen  
ancient crumble of Mentor's city.

He speaks quietly. "She who yet dwells within  
was long ago my kinsman. Now she belongs there,  
like they are one. Her cries my only news of her."

"Why you & she alone left here?" Roddy asks.

Pause. "Like yours, there were six of us. We lost  
four in those long ago battles of the Great Violence."

"Fallen?"

"No. *Consumed*. We were the youngest & the smallest.  
They told us to run, *survive*. We became separated.  
Her to that yellow building. Me to my  
Thrift Shop. The other side."

Tis round seeming endless sides we travel  
the yellow building. And a kind of yellow sickness  
tugs at us, twists darkly with that distant  
yowl Mentor does not explain further.  
Only more hurries our steps. Something pains the air here.  
*Still*.

\* \* \* \* \*

His Thrift Shop juts out from the yellow building,  
near full in its shadow, like camouflage.  
Dirty long windows either side of the grey  
front door. Locked, bolted, deep-rusted closed.

Mentor shows us how entry. Pauses, then runs hard  
at the left-hand window, leaps at it,  
leaning hard forward, arms raised wide.

The top of the window falls in just enough  
for his weight to carry him on through, tumble  
him over before the window moans heavily  
back into place, as though never moved.

Gate-Keeper takes one failed, cussing try,  
then too tumbles over & in. Though a tall broad man,  
the tumbling trick eludes Roddy again & again.

Till he thinks of his long unseen cackling little Imp friend,  
& the White Bunny, & the many other beautiful  
Creatures, quick *hmmms* to dodge his mind.

Tumbles in, comes to a crashing rest  
on an ancient mattress the other two,  
smiling, have vacated for him.

All dust here. Everything timelessly old. Crooked  
aisles of faceless crumbled goods yet crushed  
up to the ceiling. Mentor leads us a  
strange circuitous route. Roddy guesses,  
& Gate-Keeper remembers, that only one route  
leads somewhere. "The rest arrive you back  
to that front door, every loving time,"

Mentor as rarely smiles, nigh to cackling.  
"I've been lost here countless times," says Gate-Keeper,  
laughing too, abashed. "It's this way."

\* \* \* \* \*

*The car crash happens, over & over & over,  
nearly always in reverse, till it becomes  
less me filming it, & more it happening  
to me. The car crashes, over & over & over,  
till I'm ground dull of it, bored, &  
it was when I finally let it happen, no more  
resistance, that something changed.*

Mentor sudden pulls Gate-Keeper from  
that movie screen, his nose mashed flat  
against it. Pulls, & pulls, *harder*.  
"Others to see." Roddy's drifting on to the next.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now no longer in the weird, sometimes glowing  
white back room of the Thrift Shop, we stand  
together before a canvas affixed to a  
White Birch. A dark canvas with strange,  
far depths. "There were six of us," he mutters,  
over & over. *His paint strokes are rapid, deft,  
reaching ever deeper into the canvas,  
as though able to render its interior  
dimensions, simply, with paint?*

Like Francisco with his White Birch canvas?  
Yet, still, tis not simply deepest night's blackness  
but a . . . *Cave? One I knew?*

*The Cave of the Beast?* Where long ago last  
I saw my Brothers? *How are we there now?*  
Does this impossible canvas breach *time*  
as well as *space? Are we in there still?*

I pass out on the stone floor of the Cave,  
*cold, done.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Awake to a distant, & distantly familiar,  
sound. Water? *Falls?* Open my eyes &  
feel my old quilt long & sure upon me.  
Its chunks of fabric, like a language  
whose story or song I could never deduce.  
Orange yarn, maples leaves, small pine cones,  
pages soaked from old books, & dried,  
& soaked again, till a pulp, a grain, fibers.

I am still an endless moment, whatever this is.  
Cackle one of my own. Fold her up again.  
Stand barefoot, staggering, see my soft leathery  
hat on the floor. Gift from those falls that long ago morning.  
*Don't stop, whatever this lovely thing is.*

Now hurry toward that sound. Not awake,  
nor dreaming, maybe both, like then?  
*Dreamwalking*, as my Brother did so easy?

"It's like floating with your feet on the ground, Rod."  
"How?"  
"Just *stop stopping yourself*, my Brother."

Am I finally doing it again? The dark canvas  
is helping somehow, as I rush along, bound  
for my beloved old falls.

"Where you would iterate, like the Imps," Odom smiles.  
"Yes. *One. None. Many.*" We both cackle like  
nights of old, when her kind discovered near  
whichever clearing we Brothers camped a'night.  
The cackles now travel with me.

Approaching the falls, Dreamwalking through  
the cloudy sheets shrouding them, I hear  
a voice, sweet & low . . . tis . . . Asoyadonna's?  
I stop with what I am, what I do, *still*,  
& listen with all of me.

"*Laaa!*" sung with a cackling flourish!  
Again, this magickal song, of Heroes & Hope.  
Her voice . . . many others too? *My Brothers?*

Even . . . *my King's?* Sudden I shriek,  
& pull back, hard, violently, from falls,  
from Cave, from canvas, *from it all.*  
Till I am splayed & somehow damaged  
deep within, with nearly returned memories.



\* \* \* \* \*





*Jimmy Heffernan*

## Notes on Democracy

I often get confused when people say that: a) we are living in a democracy; b) we ought to be living in a democracy; and/or c) our democracy equates with genuine liberty. Allow me to state the reasons why.

\* \* \*

First of all, let me stress here that the United States is in fact a *federal republic*. Not *strictly* a democracy. We may claim to observe democratic traditions, but our elected officials legislate for us. In a democracy, citizens vote on every aspect of government: what gets selected as a bill; what goes on the ballot; and what gets selected as a law.

In a true democracy, elected officials are *merely* clerks or secretaries who file paperwork and carry out bureaucratic tasks. They have no administrative power, which rests solely in the hands of the populace. In a republic, elected officials are trusted to make decisions on behalf of their constituents—or not. It is their prerogative how they vote and, theoretically, if they want to be re-elected, they must vote in the interests of the people.

\* \* \*

But this is all academic in terms of what I intend to explore here. What really concerns me is how little people really look at what democracy—our republican government, government “of the people, by the people and for the people”—*self-government*, really implies.

Democracy indeed *means* self-government. It means rule by the people through elected functionaries who have no real coercive or autocratic power. Correct me if I am wrong, but isn't this, in effect, identical to anarchy? If people are understood to be governing themselves in a democracy, where does restraint of anyone fit into the picture?

If there is restraint by someone over someone else, then there is no self-government, and thus no democracy. If there is restraint, people are responsible for doing it to themselves, but in no country in recorded history is this how the law has functioned.

The law functions as a restraint, through force and the threat of imprisonment (and, in the extreme, execution), by those who have power over those who do not. And, speaking truthfully, those in power are not required to gain assent by those over

whom they exert their power.

\* \* \*

So—*where* is democracy in all this? The people only indirectly choose which bills get voted on (by voting for a candidate who claims to have particular views), and how the vote on those bills is conducted; and they have no choice at all in which of those bills becomes law.

Furthermore, the most historically relevant task in which a government engages—when and with whom to engage in wars—is also completely set apart from the will of the general population.

And the people have even less of a say in the matters of jurisprudence. Judges and lawyers are not much concerned about how average citizens feel about their business in court.

And may I aver that, in the vast majority of cases ever tried before any court, lawyers are more interested in making money than in seeking justice.

\* \* \*

It should be clear to anyone alive that the machinations of government are set in motion *without* explicit permission of anyone but the government itself. In a country that calls its government *democratic*, and sees to it that this appellation is fundamentally correct, a citizen would have to give written permission in order to be arrested, arraigned, or prosecuted. That sounds absurd, I know, but that is what the word *literally* means.

And if something other than that is going on, then we are deluding ourselves when we think we have any real power in the political affairs of our country.

You may respond: “Well, at least we have the right to vote.” And to that I reiterate: yes, on who goes to the Congress or the White House, but not on what they do there or, at least, not on those things they do to which they do not make more than a very few of us privy. I would also add that, if one examines the candidates closely, or even not too closely, it becomes glaringly evident that the men who you *should* want to represent your interests in government are *not* running for office, have *never* run, and probably *never will*.

\* \* \*

And I would add that none of what I have said so far addresses the question of the desirability of rule by the people. Called by some not unintelligent individuals “mob rule.” Many writers and philosophers have pointed out that the smartest and most honest individuals (doubtless, there are actually a few) shouldn't have their political maneuverability fettered by those whose only aim is to lie and cheat for personal gain.

These same writers and philosophers have extrapolated from this, and concluded that honest and intelligent government by those few in the hierarchy of

genetic heritage most fit to conduct it would most likely be superior to the debased and corrupted model with which we operate today.

That is to say, as an alternative to having everyone have a say (which, as has been pointed out, they do not in the least), which incurs a political reality in which personal gain, cutthroat strategies, and power-mongering are the rules of the day (that is, a system in which those most suited constitutionally to be ruthless and dishonest will be the most successful), perhaps those who are actually interested in providing for the needs of citizens who otherwise would have very little to no means of providing adequately for themselves, rather than providing exclusively for themselves or those in their tax bracket, might provide a better standard of living for everyone.

\* \* \*

I do not claim to have any idea how one could construct a government of this sort—an honest one—or how our government could be modified even slightly away from its selfish and virtually tyrannical practices. My only intention is to illustrate that the word *democracy* does not mean what most of us think it means, or at least does not apply to our system of government by the principles of general semantics.

And, further, that even if we *did* have in place what we think we really want, it would only be another failure in a long series, at least seen from the eyes of those who are not in charge of it.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Martian to American

I see your trees are burning,  
Even the *metasequoia glyptostroboides*.  
I learned the scientific name  
from satellite television.

All ideas were not first yours—  
we too have witnessed  
everything burning, post-Asteroid,

glass signatures gleaned from rocks  
launched skyward, shrapnel and sand-grain  
falling back changed into a layer  
like your beaches, miles long, in August,  
that sear a dog's toes,

leaping with you toward the water  
of yesterday, when it was still  
deep with hope.

\* \* \* \* \*



*Algernon Beagle*

## **Bags End Book #20: Go Into the Sea! Grand Finally!**

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Go Into the Sea! (Grand Production & Grand Finally!)**

What's most exciting now to tell here, Dear Readers, is how we all produced another glorious Grand Production, to be enjoyed among all the local neighbors of Bags End, including Imagianna, Dreamland, Creature Common, Bunny Pillow & Dream Pillow Farm, the caves & tunnels below the Tangled Gate, & of course all the watching crowds in the Thought Fleas' Great Clearing in the White Woods. Not to mention our good friends in Oz & Narnia & Wonderland & the Hundred Acre Wood, & others!

It began in the Bags End Auditorium, & the Saturday Room of Creature Common, & the Great Clearing, & all those other places, with all of us looking up & up & up, & there, as tiniest specks in the blue sky, were those pretty little La Petits Thumb, well-known 4or their amazing feats of daring-do.

We seem to come to them, their high highness, & find we are with them on the very tip of the finger of the usually-quite-short-but-now-great-big Rosalita the Pandy Bear Imp holding us! She cackles bigly, but nicely, as we each & all hold on to La Petits Thumb, & are now falling falling falling through the air, seeming to pass through the Bags End Auditorium, Creature Common, Tangled Gate, Imagianna, Dreamland, & the rest, until we land on the very same fingertip of that Imp &, at that moment, those strange Royal Thumbs in their crowns & capes appear to all &, standing straight & proud, they cry out, "Greetings! Felicitations! And Salutations! Presenting . . . a Royal Thumbs Production of . . . Go Into the Sea! Being a Continuation of the Stories of the 4or Pictures! With those Famous Travelers, Marie . . . Joe . . . Daniel . . . Et . . . "

And here the Royal Thumbs encouraged us all to rise up on the tip on that Imp finger, & she cackled wildly her glees, & the many great numbers of us cried out, "Cetera!"

Well, that was as grand an introduction as they get, & only 4or a moment was I back in mah seat in the Bags End Auditorium, next to mah silly Bumping brother called Alexander Puppy, who kind of started this whole story going by causing me a dread case of the Hik-Bumps!

But then we were all I guess you could say immersed in the story again. And we were each & all by the Sea. And a voice like Daniel's was talking.

"You can still hear the Hmmm as it really is, when you quietly listen to the Sea. Or when you listen to the wind through the White Woods. Or when you are patient & pay good attention in your dreams.

"But then your attention is distracted, & you see one thing, & hear another, sniff the air too, touch your seat or table to be sure, maybe taste something sweet.

"How to explain it as best the old maps tell me? Our 5 senses

were once all part of the Hmmm, & the 6 Islands of the world were all one Island, & we lived in a time be4ore time, & the White Woods & the Tangled Gate were one. ‘One, none, many’ came later.”

Now all of that shifted to a familiar place. It was the cabin where Marie & Joe lived with Daniel their Guardian.

We follow Marie as she walks one morning to the garage where Daniel & his bestus buddy the Tumbleweed have their workshop.

“Don’t be late 4or school!” we hear Joe yell from afar, as he is biking away.

“I won’t!” Marie calls back. “I just have to borrow a book to teach my class.”

She is looking 4or the book on Daniel’s shelves full of books, & finds it, I guess. Mah luck was that on mah other side was that friendly & language-knowing guy Allie Leopard to whisper me, “It’s called Aftermath by Cosmic Early.” Hmmm. I don’t know him.

We follow Marie as she takes her book, & walks down to the fishin’ hole place near the edge of the pond. There’s a beautiful mountain in the distance. Marie isn’t fishing, though. She’s reading.

She reads out loud from her book: “One theory says that there was the Hmmm in the beginning, but that the Hmmm grew a cackling accent & wanted to play, & so 1 was 2, & then more.”

Marie stops, & we can feel how tired she now is, as she suddenly curls up with her book to take a nap.

And we follow her into her dream where she sits up, looks up, & the mountain that was always there isn’t there anymore! Just its reflection still in the pond waters!

Marie is very upset but then seems to drift into another dream in which she is standing in a clearing in the Woods, & she is surrounded by a sort of cloud of Faeries. Almost like Crissy’s Emandian folks!

“Please, help me!” Marie cries to them. “My mountain is gone. Is it only gone in Dreams?”

The Faeries talk as sort of one Faerie guy. “Here your adventures begin, as you look 4or your mountain. But what you need now is a melody, & a friend.”

Marie hears in her ears a hmmmming sound, like she always hears in her dreams, but could never recall when awake. Then she thinks she hears the word “MeZmer,” & she wakes up, she thinks, to find a White Bunny sitting in front of her with amazingly smart & kind eyes. I can tell you, Dear Readers, they do MeZmer indeed.

No words said as MeZmer begins hopping up the hill to the White Woods, hopping faster & faster, & Marie runs & runs to follow, feels like she is hopping too, faster & faster until MeZmer disappears into a dark cave. Marie pauses, then hurries into it too.

Nothing but dark, nothing but dark, then suddenly she is again with MeZmer, & they are in a beautiful Crystal Cave.

And she feels it all around her. The Hmmm. Feels it with her skin, sniffs it, sees it, hears it, tastes it. 4or a moment, Marie becomes

the Hmmm. Then a nudge from MeZmer, & she’s back to herself, & following MeZmer again to a smaller cave where lives a nice-looking Monkey fellow who I thought looked just like Jacoby in Creature Common.

No words as Jacoby tucks Marie into his bed, under a warm brown blanket with many handsome Bears on it.

Marie sleeps deeply again with MeZmer in her arms &, when she wakes up, it’s by a bright light in the wall opposite her bed.

Getting up, she & MeZmer slowly walk & hop over to the light to see how it’s a fissure in the wall. Finger on chin a moment, thinking, Marie nods to MeZmer, & they walk & hop into it. Down a long Glowing Hallway now, & down, & down, & then out!

And back into the White Woods! Even the same clearing as where she had met the Faerie cloud!

But it is empty & so Marie just looks around, wondering about all this. MeZmer sits quietly, just sniffing once or twice.

Then Marie hears a distant sound, like the low hmmmming she had heard so many time in her Dreams, & from those Faeries too. They begin to walk & hop toward the sound.

And it is the Sea, just like Daniel had talked about before! Marie walks & MeZmer hops along the beach 4or a long time.

Then something, something, she looks up in the air, & sees 2 little black birds, & they are sitting peaceably as you please on this long black wire that seems to run from nowhere to nowhere.

“Hello, how are you? I am Marie,” she calls up to them.

They nod, & Marie decides she will tell them the story of her adventure so far.

“So I have this friend MeZmer now, & this Hmmm the Faeries gave me, but I don’t know how that helps me to find my mountain,” Marie sighs a little as she finishes.

The birds listen quietly, & Marie doesn’t know if they will say anything at all.

But then in a voice that sounds as much like words as it does like the swishing Sea nearby, the 2 birds say, “We are To & Go, & we will help you if we can, Miss Marie.”

Marie smiles & sort of curtsies a little.

“You need to . . . go into . . . the Sea!” they say. And then are quiet again.

Marie looks at MeZmer who is nearby & sniffing once or twice. She looks at the swishing waters of the Sea nearby. She doesn’t know what to do about that advice because it doesn’t make a lot of sense to her to help her find her mountain.

That’s when she looks down, & sees MeZmer’s blonde fur glowing brighter & brighter, just like that Glowing Hallway had been.

She raises up her paw to Marie, who leans down to take it. Then, with MeZmer hopping, & glowing all around them, she leads Marie right into the Sea.

And they go right in without any problem, & descend to the bottom, & walk along, paw in hand, together.

And with that, a green & gold curtain descends over the story we have all been watching, & I guessed that Act 1 was done.

Well, I can tell you that everyone from Bags End to Imagianna, from Creature Common to Dreamland to the Bunny Pillow Farm, Oz & Narnia & the rest, were on their feet, hands & paws clapping & cheering.

Then the green & gold curtain rised again & the story shifts to Joe riding his bike to Marie's school to bring her fruits 4or her lunch. Allie Leopard nicely helped me cover my mouth & stifle mah "O! Yuk!" cries.

Joe doesn't find Marie teaching at school but, as he is riding away, he comes upon Holly Hedgedyhog waiting 4or him.

Joe is a nice guy & Holly looks like he needs a ride, so Joe puts him on his shoulder, & off they ride.

It's a pretty day & they find themselves on a road Joe doesn't know in White Woods he knows pretty well. And here comes a tunnel that Holly squeaks & squeaks 4or them to go into.

So, making sure that Holly is safe on his shoulder, Joe pedals & pedals into the tunnel, which is surprisingly not so dark. It glows in a way that reminds me of that Glowing Hallway Marie & MeZmer were in, & MeZmer's fur as they walked into the Sea. Even that Glowing Hallway of pictures in Dreamland that me & Raymond the Author Guy first met these Famous Travelers.

But as Joe rides along, he gets a funny feeling about this tunnel, & he is relieved when he sees daylight coming ahead.

They ride out, & it is still in the White Woods, but they look different now. Much, much bigger somehow.

Then Joe hears a noise &, coming up to them, are these 2 Lady Bugs, biggest he's ever seen!

That's when Joe figgers that somehow he & his bike & Holly on his shoulder all have shrunk down really small!

But the Lady Bugs look friendly & shy & not like they are scary to him.

"Hello, how are you?" he says politely. "I am Joe & this is my little friend. We just rode here through that . . . that . . . " & he turns around & around looking 4or the tunnel, but there is no sign of it!

The Lady Bugs don't say a word but sort of nudge their heads a little 4or him to follow them. I kept thinking that, just like Holly, those Lady Bugs seemed a way bigger version of the little ones in Creature Common.

So Joe starts riding his bike again, Holly back on his shoulder, & follows behind these Lady Bugs as they sort of speed along down the road. Well, maybe not a road so much as they know how to travel among the White Woods trees. Joe can hear them making a hmmmming sound, & that somehow seems to help them go right along. I'm not sure

how I knowed this was true, but it seemed to make White Woods sense.

Anyway, the Lady Bugs keep going, & Joe keeps following, & he doesn't know how long it will be, when they come to a clearing & something really big.

There be4ore them is an even taller-than-Joe red-&yellow Truckee! And now I was thinking that the great big Truckee was also just like the much smaller Creature Common one too.

But if Joe & his bike & Holly were now tiny, then . . . well, I just decided to hush mah mind & pay attention.

Joe helps the Lady Bugs & his bike & himself up into the back of the Truckee, & then he starts rolling on through the White Woods. Truckee hmmmming along.

Eventually, the trees ahead clears some, & Joe can see a mountain in the distance.

"That's my sister's favorite mountain," he says to Holly & the Lady Bugs, & he guesses the Truckee might hear him too. He wonders if these marvelous Creatures might be trying to help him find Marie.

They roll closer & closer to the mountain, & it gets taller & taller be4ore them, until they roll right off the end of the road, & begin to sort of bumpily up it.

And it is going pretty well 4or awhile. But then the climbing gets less rocky, & softer, & softer, & be4ore Joe & his new friends know it, they are sinking right into quicksand!

It swallows them whole (O! Yuk!) but they notice it is not wet & choking, but dry & light, even tho they still keep sinking down very slowly.

And weirder still, when the Truckee rolls out, they are much higher up the mountain! Rolling along up a dirt path to come to a little Hut. Joe gets out, & helps the Lady Bugs & Holly out, & his bike too. The Hut is sort of brown-furred, tho Hut-shaped 4or sure too.

Joe knocks & a little golden-furred Pup comes out.

Joe introduces his friends again, & the Pup smiles & says quietly, "My name is Shelley & I live here with my brother Threshold." And out came that little Puggle guy who in Creature Common is the Lead Lead Creature! 1, none, many, I guess. Strange maths, I know.

The Pup brothers bring out some chairs, & Joe just sits down on the grass. He explains that he is looking 4or his sister Marie.

The Pups look at each other, thinking hard. "Do you know the great exploring Traveler Daniel?" they ask.

Joe nods. "He's me & Marie's Guardian."

Now the Pups are all excited. "He visited us here once, & stayed with us too. Him & his Tumbleweed friend, of course," says Shelley.

Joe nods.

Threshold says, "He showed us his many maps, & gave us one. In case we wanted to explore too."

"He said it was a map to bring you nearer to who or what you wish to find," says Shelley.



“But we can give it to you, since we are where we wish to be,” says Threshold, & both Pups smile & nod. Nice guys, whatever worlds.

So Joe nods thankee & they fetch the map. It is folded up, & it reads on the outside: “Wish who or where you desire to near, & open to follow.” Allie Leopard readed the words 4or me.

So Joe wishes to near Marie, & opens up the map up. The map shows the mountain they are on, & a dotted path over it, & through some more White Woods, & then arriving to the Sea. This seemed smart to me because that’s where Marie was!

Joe thanks the Pups very politely, & then shows the Truckee the map to study in detail, & then gets everyone back on board. He waves, & the others make friendly sniffing sort of gestures of goodbye, as they roll on. Shelley & Threshold wave too, & return to their Hut.

The Truckee then rolls them along a rocky path, no more strange & tricky quicksand to worry on, & soon they are rolling down the mountain, & again through the White Woods. It is peaceful, & no tricky White Woods tricks going on either, the Truckee hmmming along their way, & Joe & his friends soon dozing among the many colorful scarves in the Truckee’s back.

Waked by the whooshing sounds of the Sea, & the Truckee rolling to a stop. Joe isn’t sure why there till he looks up & sees 2 strange little black birds sitting peaceful on a wire running from seeming nowhere to nowhere.

Joe hops out, figgering this is the map bringing him nearer to Marie. He looks up to the birds, & talks quietly & politely.

“Hello, how are you? I am Joe, & these are my friends. We are looking 4or my sister Marie. Can you help?”

Like with Marie, the birds are quiet awhile, but then say in their oceany voice, “We are To & Go, & we will help you if we can, Brother Joe.”

Joe nods & waits.

“You need to . . . go into . . . the Sea!” they say. And then are quiet again.

Joe listens close. Then he is quiet too. “Thankee,” he says, & gets back into the Truckee. He is kind of uncertain what to do, when the Truckee starts rolling into the Sea! The Creatures with him sorta tug & drag him under the scarves &, somehow, like Marie with MeZmer, they stay dry as they drive down deep into the Sea!

Once again, the green & gold curtain drawed over, & I guessed that Act 2 was over. The clapping from all of us was maybe even louder!

Then the green & gold curtain rised again on a brand new scene, tho familiar because it was those sometimes-tricky White Woods again. But this time, we find ourselves following those nice little Creatures Buddy the little flowery Bear, & Cuke, who is a pretty green spiny fellow. He reminds me a little of Doctor Greenface in Bags End because he also moves on unseen little feets.

“Where is that MeZmer?” asks Buddy. “She was going to give us

hopping lessons today!”

Cuke doesn’t answer with words, but somehow we know that he doesn’t know either.

We run on & on with them until we come suddenly into a place like the Great Clearing, & see that we are at the back of a crowd of tiny little guys, like Thought Fleas, who are cheering & clapping 4or who is on the great stage-plat4orm at the front, per4orming. And who that is is Bauer the Bear!

Bauer is dancing back & 4orth across the stage to some jaunty music. His famous Bauer slide is as amazing as always, & the little guys around us cheer & cheer! Bauer does many encore dancings 4or such a good crowd.

Buddy & Cuke know Bauer well, of course, & go right up on stage to visit when everyone else is leaving.

He laughs his gruff charming laugh when they congratulate him.

“The shows were so much better when I had my old dancing partner, Schatzi,” he says, & looks a little sad. Buddy & Cuke give him com4orting pats.

Then they climb down the steps of the stage-plat4orm to the ground, & Bauer says that he is tired. “Dancing is fun, but I like my naps after! Would you like to come too?”

They nod, smiling.

So Bauer leads them behind the stage-plat4orm into the White Woods to a little Hut he explains the per4ormers use 4or getting ready or naps.

Inside the Hut is a hammock that they all climb into, & many warm blankets too, including a warm brown blanket with many handsome Bears on it. Boy, those guys get around!

So our friends cluster up, as Creatures do, & the Hut is warm, & the White Woods are quiet right now. They nap together pretty soon.

They cluster dream that they are come to a Crystal Cave, like the one that Marie & MeZmer were in, & soon to a smaller cave, where there is that nice Jacoby guy again!

They all hug & greet each other friendly. Then Jacoby says, “I am glad you came 4or the map!”

“What map?” they ask.

“To find your old dancing partner Shatzi, of course!” he says to Bauer.

Then he lays out on the floor a very strange map. It it hard to tell if it has mountains or Woods or lakes.

Then we look closer & see what looks like the Great Clearing & its stage-plat4orm! A black arrow on it points to a strange little door, through the White Woods, to the Sea.

“But you can’t go yet,” says Jacoby with a funny little smile.

“Why not?” they ask.

“You must wake up!” Jacoby cries out loud, & they do! Back in



the little Hut.

“Let’s go!” cries Bauer, & they all jump from the hammock, & run together back to the stage-platform. The Great Clearing is empty but for them.

They look around the stage-platform, high & low, for the strange little door, but no luck. Finally, Bauer sits down sadly on the stage, & Buddy & Cuke sit with him.

Then, at the far end of the Great Clearing, they hear a sweet voice that is like one & many singing all at once. It is hard to see, but it looks like those strange & mysterious Ladies Toe among the trees! And they are singing so pretty:

Go to the Sea!  
Go to the Sea!  
Go to the Sea!

You won’t get there in a car!  
No, you won’t get very far!  
You won’t get there in a plane!  
You will try but end up short, a-gain!

Go to the Sea!  
Go to the Sea!  
Go to the Sea!

You won’t get there breathing sad air!  
You won’t get there by nightmare!

Only dancing will take you there!  
Bauer, Bauer, Bauer the Dancing Bear!  
Only dancing will take you everywhere!  
Bauer & friends of Bauer the Bear!

Then the Ladies Toe disappear, & Bauer is shouting with delight! “Come on, my friends!” he cries, & gathers up Buddy & Cuke in his paws, & begins his dancing again on the stage. Only this time he & they are all singing the Ladies Toe’s song:

Only dancing will take us there!  
Only dancing will take us there!

And then as they dance, & Bauer slides from one end of the stage to the other, a strange little door appears at one end, & Bauer & his friends slide right through it!

And they arrive right to the Sea, like Marie & Joe & their Creature friends had!

And what is even better is that right above them is the black

wire upon which sits those black birds, To & Go!

Bauer figures they might help, & so he introduces all of them, & then he explains his story in his nice gruff voice.

“I have not seen my old dancing partner Shatzi in a long time. We got separated from each other after one of our performances. I hoped we would find each other again soon, but I think something’s in the way. I remember that last night during one of our tricks, he tumbled roughly on the stage, & banged his head a little. But he said he was OK. Can you help?”

“We are To & Go, & we will help you if we can, Bauer the Dancing Bear & friends.”

Bauer & Buddy & Cuke wait though I was guessing in my mind what they will say.

“You need to . . . go into . . . the Sea!” they say. And then are quiet again.

And then, out of nowhere, there appears on the Sea, arriving to them, that famous Boat-Wagon, driven by those strange blue-eyed Kitties & their Friend Fish!

So Bauer & Buddy & Cuke greet them friendly, wave their thanks to To & Go, & climb into the back of the Boat-Wagon, & buckle in.

“Safety first!” cried us many audiences in many places. Haha!

And the last we see of Bauer & his friends is them being peddled out to the Sea to find Bauer’s dear friend Schatzi.

The green & gold curtain fell over Act 3, & I hardly need report as news the wild clappings & cheerings that went on in all parts of the Neighborhood near & far.

But no time to wait as the green & gold curtain rose again, & we find ourselves in the middle of a new scene in the desert.

And here is Daniel, who is kind of the Lead Traveler, in Creature tongue, with his friend the Tumbleweed, & they are surrounded by a group of tough-looking guys.

Daniel is leaned over a map, & talking strange words to it.

“Fondo Wondo!” he cries. And the map sort of unrolls its secrets &, in the desert sky there are crazy winds, wild lightning, & a great beautiful rainbow arching over all!

The tough guys back off, now looking scared of Daniel. One of them nods, & they hand over a map to him. He flicks his hand at them, & they leave fast.

“Good thing they thought that was magic, & not a matter of knowing the key to opening & using the Map of Crazy Weathers!” Tumbleweed laughs in Daniel’s mind, in their shared tongue that we get to hear & understand right now.

Daniel nods & laughs too, & studies their new map, & they start walking together many miles, until they come to a nice-looking town.

There they find a big billboard sign, & painted on it what looks

like a long mysterious city street with shadowy figures along it.

Daniels reads softly aloud something on the new map they got from those rough guys, & he & Tumbleweed walk right into the picture!

But, be4ore they can look around, there are shadowy figures all around them, & they are hustled off to a prison cell, behind bars & everything!

They sit quietly together till the night comes, & all is quiet. Now they are alone.

Then Daniel nods, once, twice, three times &, holding hand in branch, they tumble backwards, & right out of the prison! I guessed this was a good trick the Tumbleweed knewed.

But wait! They land in Jacoby's cave room too!

And of course they are old friends, them all liking maps as they do, & hug friendly all around. Jacoby hugs Tumbleweed among his branches, so not to get poked, having learned how, I guess.

"Here's a new one I have 4or you!" says Jacoby all friendly. And he shows them a map on the floor that is weirdly glowing.

Daniel nods & pats Jacoby's shoulder. Then he & Tumbleweed turn around, & tumble together right down into this map! Wow.

But then something goes wrong. Instead of fully arriving to a new place, they seem stuck, only half in.

"Help! Help! It's damaged!" yells Daniel sort of back & up to Jacoby.

A distant Jacoby voice cries back, "Push toward that Glowstorm! Push hard!"

So Daniel & Tumbleweed push & push toward it, & the edges of the map sorta relax around them, & they are able to enter its land more fully.

They call back "Thankee!" to Jacoby, & travel the glowing lands around them. There is always a low Hummming in the air, which Daniel seems to understand, & he travels them by hummming in different ways with it.

The glowing gives way eventually to the Sea, & here we are, arrived again, & there above on that black wire, going from seeming nowhere to nowhere, are those 2 black birds To & Go! As the green & gold curtain falls, we hear Daniel calling out a "Hello, how are you?" to both of them, saying, "I am Daniel the Traveler, & this is my friend, Tumbleweed."

Well, everyone was cheering & cheering & cheering, but no more Grand Production occurred 4or the moment.

Now here's where your old pal Algernon has some things to tell, & a good time to do it while we are waiting.

You see, it wasn't just maps important inside these stories. It was how got to be told this Grand Production. And it was Daniel who came up with the map idear.

But then let me go back a-ways. We had just decided to work

together to make a Grand Production that tolded the stories of the Famous Travelers' early days, & we were sitting—me, Crissy, the Creatures, CC, & Raymond the Author Guy—with Marie & Joe & Daniel in Crissy's Secret Room in her Castle.

But I sniffed 4or some reason, & then talked mah sniff quick.

"You know, mah friends, this isn't the room where we got the story done last time. It was in Crissy's Riting Room through the Red Bag, where she has her rite-typer. I think, to have the best shot, we need to bring all of us through the Red Bag & gather there, & start studying the Secret Books, & coming up with what we can amongst us. And maybe, between memories & ritings & what makes sense, we can make a good Grand Production. That's what I propose us to do."

Well, nobody objected to this idear, & so Crissy showed everybody to the far end of her Secret Room, which is usually dim in the dark.

Crissy explained that you look at the Red Bag, & close your eyes, & sing 3 times, "There is a door, & now we pass through!" & you end up on the other side.

So the Creatures were gathered up in arms, & everybody lined up. Crissy went first to show how, then I went in Raymond the Author Guy's arms, & Daniel went with Tumbleweed in arms, & Joe with Freckle & Ricochet in arms, & Marie went with MeZmer & Holly.

Everybody ranged around, finding seats on the floor in Crissy's very friendly Riting Room, with its big window view of the White Woods, the mountains, & the Wide Wide Sea.

That's when I noticed on the walls, instead of the usual fun Crissy pictures, there were others.

Instead, there were the well-known pictures of Marie in her Faerie clearing, of Joe riding his bike to Marie's school, on his task not to be mentioned here again (O! Yuk!), of the reflection of Marie's mountain, & of that spooky Daniel big billboard sign.

But there were more. A little picture of a lighthouse. And a picture of 2 little black birds on a wire, going from nowhere to nowhere, like To & Go! And, close on either side of that one, was one of a Hummingbird, & another of a pretty leaf. And another of a mysterious snowy land with a strange building far away to be seen. And one that showed a view of the foggy Sea, through an old window. Lastly, under a blanket, a picture of 2 people-folks sound asleep & dreaming in their bed that reminded me sorta of CC & his nice lady friend.

I talked now. "I am no expert on these things, but I wonder if these pictures are here to help us with this Grand Production!"

At the mention of the last 2 words, there was a knock at the door. Door? Who could be at the door of a Riting Room inside the Red Bag?

But Crissy got up & went to answer it, & in marched those strange Royal Thumbs, in full crowns & capes!

Be4ore I could blink, they were on Raymond the Author Guy's

hands! But now talking too.

“In the past, a single riter or a few have written our Grand Productions. But this time, it seems like there are a lot of you crowded in here, & how will this work?” It may sound like these Thumbs were annoyed or grumpy but, no, they were just very curious now.

And with good reason too. Now that our creative forces were all gathered, what were we to do?

Everybody started talking at once, but nobody seemed to have a bright idear amongst us, & eventually we were all quiet again.

Then Daniel, who had been the quietest, cuz drawing something, talked.

“I have here a map that I think will help. It requires us to all be in our usual places, mostly.” And he laid it out on the floor 4or all of us to study together.

“CC will be in the Creature Common, with MeZmer, Holly, Buddy, & Cuke, telling our story, as he did. Raymond the Author guy will be on Full Moon Hill, with Algernon Beagle, on Betsy Bunny Pillow, Farmer Jones there for safety, hmmming into the Double Dreaming, the Glowing Hallway, where Raymond will have MeZmer, Holly, Buddy, & Cuke too, itching CC to tell the story like he did. Marie, Joe, & all of our Creature friends will return to our world to re-enact the story, filling in the missing parts. The Royal Thumbs, & those amazing Treasures, will orchestrate the Grand Production, once all is ready.”

I counted, & thought. “Hey, what about Princess Crissy?”

Daniel & Crissy smiled at each other, like yet another good bright idear to be told. “When we are all in place, your Crissy, & my dream Iris, will smile some of that tricky smile magick of hers, & we will all feel connected. Travelers to Glowing Hallway, Dreamland to Imagianna, to this Riting Room, Creature Common to Bags End, to the many places watching, & we will begin.”

But the last piece to tell is about me. You see, Dear Readers, I, um, iterated. Sort of like what Crissy tolded me was called being a conduit, getting all the details of this story I have now told to all of you. One of me, with Raymond in that Glowing Hallway, & another of me among the Travelers stories themselves, watching close, & another of me with Crissy in her Riting Room, & another of me in Creature Common, & the last one of me sitting in mah seat in the Bags End Auditorium, next to mah silly Bumping brother Alex, who started this whole story, kinda.

What happened after the Act 4 green & gold curtain falled, & there was great cheering, & then there was quiet again, was that a voice like Daniel’s talked again. Everyone listened close.

“It is now a long time later that has passed since those early Traveling days. We have met & traveled with many new friends since then. This Grand Production happened tonight because we were asked to look back, & to remember. We know it takes many friends & neighbors

to do this, & that our Travels are important to others too. This makes us happy 4or all of you even as it is time to travel on again. Thank you all!”

And that was that. Without a thought in it, I felt mahself returning to just one me in one place. Bags End. It sure has been a funny way to get the story of this Grand Production, but it worked so good!

We were all sort of getting up to leave when suddenly a well-knowned Creature friend came onto all of the one & many stages. It was that handsome white-furred Bear X, wearing his black hat & Scotchy scarf.

“Is it too late 4or a little more entertainment, in the classic style?” he asked, smiling.

We stopped, & called, “No!” And everyone everywhere sat right back down.

He nodded & swepted his paw around & said, “Happy Season of Lights from Creature Common, & . . . on . . . with . . . the . . . show!”

We could all see this happening with the great big decorated tree under the Tangled Gate in the background. Like hmmming, but a tree too.

What followed were all sorts of grand per4ormances. First out danced Bauer the Dancing Bear, with his whole Major Bear crew, best friend Schatzi of course, & Phil, & Schnooki, & they danced up a storm!

Then those shiny-eyed Ker-Flow-Eeee singers sang some dancey old songs that made us all get right up & dance too!

Then that purple furry fellow called Pirth did his amazing dances with many ribbons!

Then MeZmer the White Bunny hopped long & far from one stage to the next!

Even Princess Crissy come on stage with that bloo-&-pink fella Bellla to dance & sing funny songs!

And Benny Big Dreams showed up too, & showed us the trick of juggling dreams like bowling pins, & dreaming back & 4orth among them. Easy when he did it!

Wow! Sheila’s Kool Jazz Band came out & per4ormed a strange song by Miles Davis that seemed to make me think of tricky Rosa!ita the Pandy Bear Imp thoughts!

And then it all ended how it began somehow, with all of us in the Neighborhood rising up high & high, & falling back down-down-down together, with La Petits Thumb as our guides, until we each landed, & I don’t know how, in his or her or their favorite place to be.

That must be true because I ended up in mah comfy armchair on Milne’s Porch!

I blinked twice, to be sure. But yes. The window to mah bedroom was open, & I heard Alex & also Allie Leopard talking Bump words to each other.

But somehow, & I don’t know how, I heard under their words

a hmmming. I kid you not! Was that mah lesson? Was that it? Bump is part of the Hmmm too? Was that mah gift to know because I had tried so hard?

A last thing to tell of this crazy long crazy story. It was not long later one day when me & Sheila Bunny were taking nice little naps in her Throne Room, her in her Throne, me on mah mat nearby.

In bounces that nice-in-dreams Betsy Bunny Pillow. But I blinked mah eyes twice, to make sure, & it seemed this was waking. So I was on mah guard.

Betsy bounced right up to Sheila &, amazing but true, Sheila made some room 4or her in her Throne!

So they sat together. I was totally ignored, but this was OK. I was not thrown out either.

“Welcome home, Pillow,” Sheila said sleepily.

“Thanks, Bunny,” Betsy whispered back. And then they napped peaceful together.

I so wanted to ask them about this, but knew that such-as-I would never be tolded.

But I figgered it out on mah own. Betsy, when awake, will mostly live in Bags End. When asleep, at least sometimes, on the Dream Pillow Farm. Probably the best answer 4or her.

I am glad of all these things that happened, & guess that some time we will all get together to tell more stories again.

4or now, there is just me dozing peaceful, in mah comfy armchair on Milne’s Porch, in mah strange but fine homeland, listening not so much to the Bumps being spoke in mah bedroom, but the Hmmming that’s underneath it all.

What does that mean?

What does me being the conduit mean?

And what are the 6 Islands? Is Bags End on one?

Is there just simply always more to know, as time goes on?

That’s mah guess.

Keeps mah beloved newspaper in business, so it’s good too.



\* \* \* \* \*



Colin James

## The Sentiment of an Economical Mustachio

My acorn-sized brain  
keeps falling down my nostrils.  
I shove it back in through the ears.

For a time there is quiet solitude.  
The sky becomes clearer,  
thin winter trees prosper.

There is a well-worn path into town,  
and blossom scents perpetual.  
I find no one to return with,  
after asking almost everyone nicely.

One middle-aged lady was a maybe.  
I circle back to see if she’s gotten lost,  
find her bathing naked in a cold stream,  
shivering until the moon breaches.

\* \* \*





*Charlie & Richard Beyer*

## The Natural History of the Sasquatch

i.

The name Sasquatch comes from the Salish Indians who lived in and around Southwest British Columbia. The beast's infrequent but impressive visits gained it the name "The Wild Man of the Woods" or, translated, Sasquatch.

Historically, the Sasquatch originated in Asia, descended from the huge ape Gigantopithecus. These ancestors migrated across the Bering Land Bridge long before the true humans. Their Asian origin was verified in 1934 by a Dutch anthropologist, who found a massive tooth, twice the size of an adult gorilla's, along with other fossil bones, in the basement of a Hong Kong chemist's shop.

Once frequent on the west coast of North America, from Alaska to Mexico, the Sasquatch appears to be on the decline in the advance of civilization. Rapid Homo sapien development has isolated what few of these creatures remain to the coastal wildernesses of Washington State, British Columbia, and some inaccessible inland mountain areas of the Rockies. Some experts say that the Sasquatch may be more numerous now than in the recent past, due possibly to a recurrent population cycle.

ii.

In appearance, the Sasquatch race is ape-like, though more erect, moving about primarily on two feet. The height of a mature creature may range from 6 to 8 feet (the largest ever seen being 10 feet tall), with weights ranging up to 500 pounds. It has a barrel chest, with remarkably long arms ending in prehensile hands that are scoop-shaped with chisel-like nails.

Its hair color and length depend largely on its environment. The most common hair is either black or brown, of one to two inches in length. Young Sasquatches have been known to be either buff or grey, or occasionally a beige color that glows slightly in the dark. Sasquatches are subject to a virulent mange, and are frequently beset with psychic disorders as a result of excessive scratching. Whole nights may be made terrible by a Sasquatch's agonizing whistles, screeches, and howls.

A Sasquatch commonly has no neck. Its head is completely covered with hair except for its face that has sunken beady eyes, of either a black or red color. Its nose is wide and flat, with flaring nostrils, and it has a wide jaw that holds numerous teeth. These teeth, that have qualities like opal, are the size of cow molars, and have been found in treasure troves as far south as the Inca civilization of Peru. The teeth of an old Sasquatch turn a shiny metallic-black and, if thrown on water will float, for all Sasquatch teeth are hollow.

The strength of a Sasquatch is astonishing. It can twist a young pine tree ten inches in diameter off its stump, or shake a fir tree until all its bark falls off. A hunter in the Pacific Northwest came across a Sasquatch "nest" in which a depression had been packed with twisted off six-inch trees. The bedding area was matted with wire-like rust-colored hair. The stench was enormous. Upon returning with associates to display the find, the entire area was found to have been logged, and the site destroyed.

iii.

The only known capture of a Sasquatch was by a train crew, on June 30th, 1884, near Yale, British Columbia. Reportedly, it lay stunned after falling from a cliff. The young Sasquatch was named "Jacko," and kept captive on a logging chain. Although "Jacko" weighed 127 lbs., and stood 4'7" high, it could break a railroad tie with its two hands by squeezing it from the ends. Fed potato peelings for a week, "Jacko" regained his strength and left in the night, dragging away the locomotive wheel that he was fastened to.

iv.

The fact that it is a relatively vocal animal is confirmed in a report from Albert Ostman, a gold prospector who was kidnapped to a den of Sasquatches. The creatures conversed loudly in what sounded like Asians swearing, accompanied by grunts and snorts. Ostman, held captive for six days, succeeded in tricking the eldest Sasquatch into eating his can of snuff, and escaped in the mayhem and confusion that followed.

The diet of the Sasquatch is omnivorous, consisting mainly in the summer of vegetable matter, fish, and clams. In the winter, the Sasquatch is more prone to eating red meat. A woman observing a Sasquatch digging for clams at Moclips, Washington recently was not terrified, but enraptured by the soft moaning the animal made while it worked. They have been known to take up a cudgel, and drive a bear from the fish that it has just caught. Skulls of cows, horses, and deer have been found in Sasquatch dens. A woman near Chehalis, Washington reported that every year a Sasquatch comes around, breaks the backs of all the pigs, and carries off up to four at once. They are particularly fond of dog meat.

v.

The Sasquatch are of three sexes. Breeding orgies amongst them for continuous periods up to 18 hours is attended by a horrible uproar, as they bully and push each other for position. The brutality of this process has engendered perversion. They frequently excite themselves sexually by exposing themselves to large machinery or airplanes. This trait is the cause of numerous footprints around wilderness timber and construction projects, and accounts for 70% of logging camp theft.

When the Sasquatch is seen on some rocky eminence from the cabin of a low-flying plane, it will have, in all likelihood, placed itself there for gratification. With the declining population of Sasquatches, and the dwindling availability of "normal" sexual outlets, this mode of sexual exhibitionism has

been predictably increasing. This is confirmed by the recent increase of sightings.

vi.

The Sasquatch young leave the nest in which they are born in about two years. The youth wanders wildly in its early life, as though it were pursued. The California Indians knew the Sasquatch as the Traveler or Patroller, one who travels hundreds of miles in a season and then returns.

Puberty is reached around its fiftieth year, and it soon mates. It is uncertain if it will mate with its own kind at all, or choose a life of perversion. As it grows older (some as old as 300 years), it will haunt some desolate valley, hunting alone, for it is an aggrieved creature, beset at every turn by knowledge of its own decline.

vii.

The peculiarities of the lonely Sasquatch are many, it being one of the most diverse and mysterious creatures on our continent. For example, stolen pieces of contractor equipment can be found in caves where the Sasquatch has taken up residence. Wheels, sheet metal, winches, gas cans, discarded motor parts, cables, etc. are but a few of the pilfered items. Toying in the pile of junk, or tapping on a ringing piece of metal, the animal seems to be endowed with an instinct for rhythm. Their music, heard on a quiet evening in a wild canyon, can be quite beautiful, though filled with the sadness of their dwindling existence.

viii.

Another solace the Sasquatch characteristically develops is a urine tree fetish. An enterprising logger, who was cutting Christmas trees in the vicinity of Mt. Baker, unknowingly cut down one of these trees, and threw it into his truck with the lot. The Sasquatch, coming to look for the tree and not finding it, scented it on the truck. Leaping upon the load, he tore it apart until he found his marked tree. This he took back with him to the place where it had been cut and, as if to replant it, jammed it back in the ground, relieved himself with great exhibition, and disappeared back into the forest.

ix.

In the misery of its existence, the Sasquatch at times turns to tainted mushrooms and destroys itself in hallucinatory fits. One animal that died in this way was autopsied. The mushrooms it had been eating were found growing in his joints, between the vertebrae of its backbone, and just under the skull.

Several other characteristics of the Sasquatch should be mentioned for the purpose of identification. The beast has a strange facility for healing itself if wounded. Because of this it has been difficult for hunters to kill them for trophies.

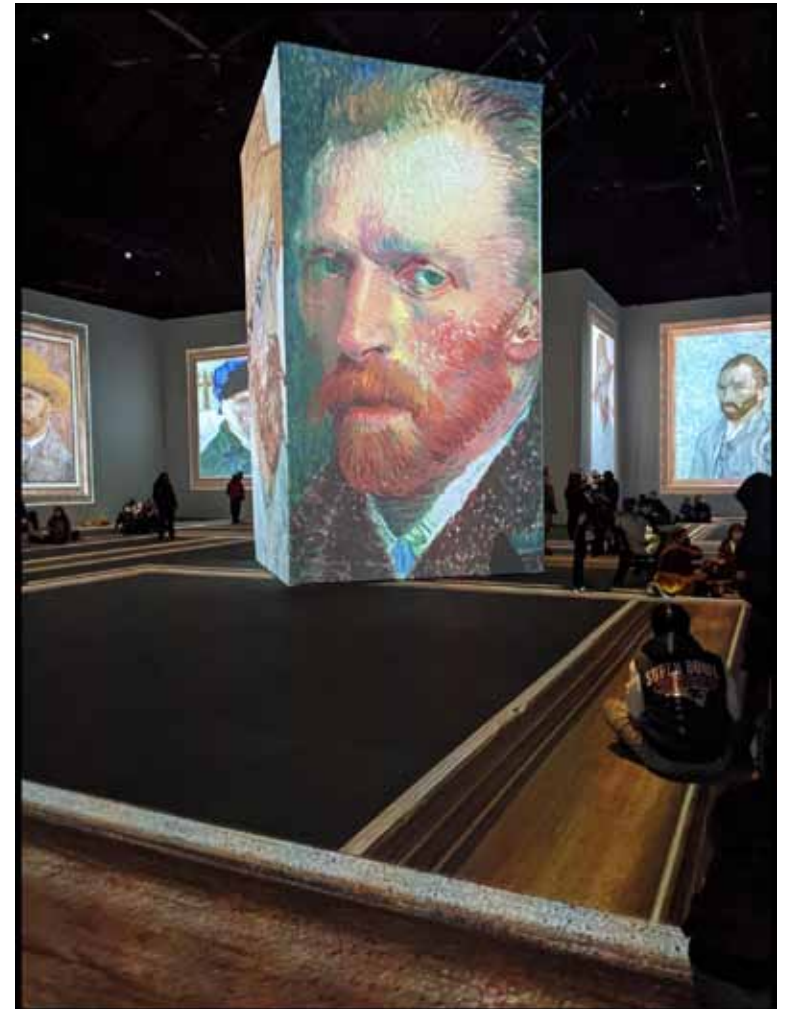
The Indians of Vancouver Island resort to pitfalls to catch and rid themselves of infesting Sasquatches, burning the beast alive in the

bottom of the pit. The ashes of the Sasquatch, lifted into the air from the turbulent fire, metamorphose into a host of blood sucking mosquitoes.

If the bones of a Sasquatch are kept in a small house, the house will walk around as if it had the legs of a chicken, stopping here and going ahead erratically.

The funerary box of an Indian, with whom a container of Sasquatch bones was buried, traveled about the vicinity of the village where he had lived. At length, the box decayed in the weather, its contents spilling out near a river, where they were washed away in a spring freshet.

\*\*\*\*\*







*Raymond Souland, Jr.*

## Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]

*Part Twelve*

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

ix.

*Remember some things.* How many varieties, endless, of these? How to remember? Which things? No answers to this here, or anywhere else. Aborn, we live along the passing world. We remember. *How?* & *which?* change over time not just for us, but for the lands we dwell. What honored, what forgotten.

Thinking of McKenna saying *nothing lasts but nothing is lost*. This maybe the harder struggle. *Things change*, as one of my past books titles it. *The world moves on*, as King says it often.

But there it is. Time to arrive fully to here-&-now-&-back-there-&-then, & what sweet dirty low down dance they do.

Asoyadonna snorts, reading over my shoulder. "Sorry to interrupt, Raymond," no sorry in her smirk.

"We're waiting."

"For what?"

"That Hut over there?"

"I see it. But why did we stop?"

"The door won't let us in. Go try. I'll wait. And explain when you get back."

She queries me an odd look, then lopes over from the pretty White Birches I'd stopped us by, to scribble, & to tell why.

She examines the door thoroughly. High & low touching, peering as close as the still-rising moonlight will aid. Takes herself around the Hut completely. Wonder if she will try to scramble up the roof, but she returns instead.

"Well?"

"One door. No doorknob. No window. No other way to get in or out. You know the magick words?"

"We wait?"

"Then say them?"

I laugh. "No. We wait for the Full Moon to rise high above. Then, I think, will reveal the way in."

She nods, sighs, sits next to me.

Starts a moment. "I guess we lost that lovely song."

I shake my head. "I think it was leading us here."

Sighs again. "Nice to hear their voices again."

"Your Brothers?"

Nods. "Especially singing. We stopped doing that, toward the end. For all that happened, whatever good we did, if any, I miss the nights we'd break out in song around the fire."

I nod. Wish to ask more but decide to wait. Soon I stand, & walk over to the Hut. Asoyadonna follows.

We stand before it quiet a moment. It is now a golden glowing surface. I first point to the words now visible:

*COME ON IN!*

Donna smiles. "But how?"

I then point to a kind of rainbow tracing on the edge of the door, & then to a faintly remaining rendering of a door-knob.

"Oh!"

"Are you ready?"

"Yes. If we must move along then, let's go."

I grab the door-knob, tho it is but a faint chalk rendering, & turn, & it *clicks!* & I push in.

Asoyadonna doesn't ask me how I know to do all this. She saw me earlier checking a little Secret Book in my book-bag, as well as scribbling. She's right. We enter, hands clasped now.

The room is empty & silent, & the door *clicks!* closed behind us. We wait a moment, also quiet. While I check. OK. On us. Talk.

“We have come to remember some things. I, as writer of *Labyrinthine*, *Many Musics*, & other works related to the Great Grand Braided Narrative. *Gr. Gr. Br. N.*, for friendly.” I smile around at what still seems a dark, empty room. Then nudge Donna to talk.

“O. Um. Alright. I’ll try. My name is Asoyadonna. That is the name I was given by my father the Tinker, in the Village we lived in, with my Aunt.

“Later, I discovered that they had found & adopted me when I was very small. I am originally, I think, from a planet called Emandia. But they were my family, & I loved them dearly. My father has passed.

“I travelled many turns with Brothers I later met, with whom we sought an Island, & on it the Tangled Gate, & within that a Cave with a Beast.”

She stops. I know she has to finish. Squeeze her hand tight. She catches her breath. Resumes.

“We were shown marvelous things in that Cave, yet somehow we were all separated. I think, Wobbled, hither to yon?”

I think she’s done, & will finish for us. But she does instead. “What things must we remember to do the things we wish to do? Thank you. We are humbly grateful.”

I squeeze Donna’s hand, & close my eyes, & softly *hmmm*. She does too.

Guess I’ll go first. Open my eyes. *I am now somewhere else*. Close them. *Back with Asoyadonna in that Hut*. Oh. Guess I have to follow this through. I can still feel her hand, squeezing my left one, steady, so it’s alright.

Open my eyes. OK. New Britain Public Library. A work table in the stacks, near a window.

Right. So this is where I am sitting right now, writing *Labyrinthine*. What would that mean?

Maybe just being here. I did come down here, to Connecticut, to New Britain, to remember some things. Guess, for me, it has to be *this*.

I used to live hardly miles from here, in an apartment I shared with a good friend, for years. And, also hardly miles from here, is the University I studied at for years. Made many friends there. Read *many* books.

So this was my local library those years ago. And, recent years, I like to come down, once a year, from up in the Boston area, to visit old favorite places, especially those

I wrote at.

*Remember some things?* I prefer the places I wrote at. The people I loved have passed, or moved on. Not hard to find me, or keep track of me from afar, if any wished to still.

*Love is hard, spends live, its pain is real; sometimes its deepest beauty becomes a forgiveness; sometimes that is the only closure left.*

*I loved you all sincerely. I’m sorry where I caused pain.*

*I wish you all peaceful days, love to fill them, & beauty to bide by always.*

Asoyadonna’s hand squeezes my left one, to startle me to resume. If there’s more.

OK. I keep coming down here to remember where I came from. This is where I am from. Not who I am, only a part of it. It’s not a bad place, even with me passing through once a year to evaluate it. In truth, I am now, at most, a kind of statistic, an old photo, memories for those with them.

I come to continue to have a *connection* in the way that I am able. Which means that I stay at the local hotel, yearly save for Pandemic years, & I bring my notebooks, Polly iPod, Gumbee for phone, other things, packed into the Blue Suitcase I have had for many years. No Internet, not a speck. Not on the Greyhound down, not arrived.

Been nearly three years, much farther along the Pandemic, glad I’m back & visiting.

Strangely, did not write more lines there while on that trip. Kept thinking I would, but the rest of the *Gr. Gr. Br. N.* took my time & attention. Tis fine. I don’t know what else I could have added. Maybe, simply, I renewed my commitment to *remember some things* simply by insisting on going down again, 2½ years since last time, much farther along the Pandemic.

I squeeze Asoyadonna’s hand to signal *I’m back, her turn*. I think she knew, but just in case.

She waits on something, *a vision? A memory?* Moments pass. Nothing.

Then, of a sudden, something falls out of her knapsack, left near the door.

It’s the book Dreamwalker gifted her with.

Asoyadonna lets go my hand & walks over to the book, open on the floor. Funny: I notice the Hut, while still empty, is a little less dark than it was. Touch of the indiglow around us.

Funny too: seems *bigger* than it was. Her walk over to her knapsack was about the

same distance as when we came in, maybe not quite. But her walk back with her book is *much* longer.

She holds it out to me. I receive her book . . . very . . . slowly . . .

“Look . . . see,” her voice strolls over to me as though across a small park.

I hold the handmade book opened, gently, in my hands.

The pages facing each other both have holes in them that nearly fill them. I look closer, & it's like the holes seem to go down & down, deeper in than the visible thickness of the book.

Close it for a moment, holding my place with a finger. Covers front & back have no holes, nor do any of the other pages when I peek at them.

Open it up to the holes again. Asoyadonna finally, fully, arrives to my side. We smile . . . slowly . . . at each other.

She gestures the book again. “Look . . . look . . . see!” Gestures me, slowly, to look closer at the pages.

“He . . . told . . . me . . . a story like . . . this once . . .” her voice is speeding up again a bit.

I lean my face into the open book which, as I lean closer, seems to re-size? to fit my face?

I press it closer, like a mask;  
try, like she said, to *look, look, see*

x.

I don't know if I'm seeing these words, or writing them down, or feeding of them through my book-mask. Like this, some—

Saturated by the changing number  
of the *cardiac blooms*, down below  
in that endless field of them.

That's *not* really their name.  
They just make my heart *slow*,—  
*skip—wish—yearn—*

Stalked by my changing fears as

I enter among them, wind & rustle,  
uncertainty becoming song, not quite  
violet, umber, pale blue, colors I do not yet know,  
but low humble my eyes, cram open my ears, to learn.

Barb gets me quick, then another,  
invitation to linger? Or tis  
my new green prison?  
[You tell me, you sent me here,  
along the path to here, to learn  
what you said I did not even  
know how to know.  
*Linger or prison?*]

“Your instruction was simple, maybe  
it guides me now too. *Sing!*  
*Dance! Silence! Stillness!*  
(Touch, lightly.)

“*Scribble & scribble & scribble & scribble!*

“No more hiding what you are,  
what you aren't, throw off  
those blooms & barbs alike!

“Now go see what is left when  
you are just root & stalk,  
lover of the soil, thirsting  
for sun & sky.”

“Raymond?”

“Eh?”

“You OK?”

I sit up groggily, still in the Helping Hut, Asoyadonna hunched over me.

“You were mumbling a lot into my book, & then you sort of slowly collapsed to the floor,” she explains, concern all over her kind & pretty face.

“Did you make out any of the words?” I ask, curious, & strangely greedy for them.

Now she smirks a little. “They sounded more like cackles than words mostly.”

I nod. Figures. Accept her hands to help me up.

Look around this still quite empty Hut. “Are we feeling ‘helped’ enough, Donna?”  
Her smile now full on, she nods.

So we get our knapsack & bookbag, me noticing the room has shrunk back to its usual size, & we walk outside.

And up drive the bloo-eyed Kittees & their dear Friend Fish Murmur, in their Famous Boat-Wagon!

We both naturally hop into the back seat, & buckle right in. *Safety first!* The Kittees wait our instructions.

Asoyadonna looks at me too.

I wemble a bit.

“Tell me, Raymond.”

“I want to study my notebooks to figure out what next.”

She nods, unsurprised.

I now look at the Kittees & Friend Fish intently. “Can you bring us to the nearest Attic entrance?”

The Kittees bloo-eyed stare me, friendly I think, & Friend Fish smiles her gorgeous Goldfish smile. “We’ll be there soon, CC!”

We both laugh at that, & settle back for the ride.

These White Woods ever beautiful to pass through. More kinds of trees than I could imagine to know. Few paths through them, & of course such as Creatures & Thought Fleas do not need paths to travel. I wonder at all I do not know about this wondrous place.

I’m not sure what we’ll come to for my request when we arrive to a clearing with a single, large, beautiful Weeping Willow tree. We pass under its long drooping branches &, within, see upon its trunk a kind of wooden fixture, one that winds round & round it, up & up, toward its unseen height.

The Boat-Wagon rolls right onto what now appears to be a curlicue path that does indeed take us up there. As often occurs in these White Woods, & this *Mythopoeia* as a whole, we all size to fit this event.

Up & up & up, round & round, & round, Asoyadonna & I exchanging many delighted smiles on the way. I am still wondering to where we are arriving, & how it relates to my request, when we arrive, quite suddenly.

Through a familiar curtain, in fact, the one that serves as door to the closet in the Saturday Juice Room of the Bungalow Cee!

We unbuckle & get out. I proudly show Donna my several standing cases of vinyl LPs, the lovely green couch, & rose chair, & long rocking couch. The many charming framed photographs on the wall, took by my Beloved, the Lady Photographer. One of my favorites show a glimpse of a book’s page set against the backdrop of the beach.

Also the Creature Common Liberry of Secret Books, a small wooden

cabinet in the corner.

“So many!” she marvels, smiling. I nod.

“Thank you!” I say to the Kittees & Friend Fish, & they stare, & smile, & depart back behind the curtain.

We climb the stairs to the kitchen. My Beloved isn’t home but I show Donna more of her pretty photographs on the wall. The one of Clover-dale’s fallen-down barns is a favorite.

Up another flight of stairs, & onto a landing where, I explain, the *Creatures Tale*, aka *Travelers Tales*, are told most nights. Point out the pictures on the walls of the landing that structure the *Tales*. One of Marie the Famous Traveler in her Fairie grove; one of her brother Joe the Famous Traveler on his bike, bound for Marie’s school; one of a lily pond & its reflection of a mountain; & the last a photograph of a billboard depicting a strange road of strange figures, curving away from the viewer’s eye.

And up to the Attic Study where she has been before. I turn on the Attic Radio Dreamland Jazz station. Miles Davis at Montreux Jazz Fest, 1985. *So fine*.

I gesture to my Beloved’s armchair for her to sit.

“You sure?” she asks.

I nod, smiling. “She would insist.”

Now to work. I unpack my bookbag of its many notebooks.

Secret Books. *Labyrinthine* (third notebook). *Bags End News* (Vol. 18). *Many Musics*. *Dream Raps*. Others too.

“Can I ask . . . how are the others doing?” Donna means her Brothers of course, & her tone indicates both her deep curiosity, yet her hesitancy to ask.

I consider how to answer. “Some further along than others. Everyone at least partway.” She nods. Maybe thinks that’s all I can or will say.

*But is it?* I study a lingering moment the shifting eyes & red tail of KC Klock, hung above the Attic Radio in the corner near the stairs, & mull the squawk & smooth of Miles’s horn.

“Some are needing to remember more than you do to get there,” I finally say.

“Some?” she quizzes.

“Well, all of them,” I reluctantly confess.

She nods, unsure what else to ask. Then: “Can I help them, Raymond? Am I allowed?”

“I don’t know yet,” I admit.

She nods again. Gestures to my pile-high of notebooks. “Will studying these help?”

I regard my pile. Say nothing. Don’t know.

Then I pull out from a work table shelf my hardback copy of *Celebrated Cases of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

“Try *Hound of the Baskervilles*,” I say.

She nods at the draft copy of *Cenacle* | 119 | April 2022 next to my pile-high of notebooks. “That too?”

I remember the old motto: “Go long, or go home!” Hand this to her as well.

She smiles, starts with the Doyle volume.

“My old school honored me on graduation with that volume. Never read it till I came up here,” I smile back, & get down to work.

Asoyadonna settles back comfortably in the grey armchair, & is soon lost in fictional pages of Victorian England, a place & time whose inhabitants are long passed from this world, but whose best & worst magicks have long still lingered on.

For a long stretch, I read recent pages of this book, raucous sounds of Miles Davis & his mates tearing it up at the ’86 Montreux Festival, on Polly iPod, through the Attic Radio.

Now Joni Mitchell’s *Court & Spark*, the sweet anarchies of her words & music.

“I think I know what’s next,” I say finally, as Donna is looking up & asking, “Is the hound of this book real or a phantom?”

I nod to both of these. Then smirk & say, “But he’s no Benny.” We both laugh at this.

I stand up from my work table. “Bring it with us,” I smile.

“To where?”

“The Festival,” I now grin.

Now she’s up. Tucking the Holmes volume in her knapsack.

“How?”

I point to the obscure far corner of the Attic by which we’d come & gone to Aunt’s Pensionne. “We just need to turn the other way,” I explain, somewhat obscurely.

She nods, knowing that if I don’t know the way, precisely, I’ll write us there, one way or another.

Sure enough, there is an *other way* to turn. A wooden hallway, like often before. Cool, as though air-conditioned. But not, no.

“How all this, Raymond?” she asks, of a sudden, us till now striding quietly side by side where the hallway wide enough.

“All this?”

“How your world, back there,” gestures behind us, “And yet here we are.” Gestures wooden hallway.

I nod & smile. “Yes, here we are.”

“How?” she insists.

I slow, stop for a moment. Slip my bookbag from my shoulder to the floor, up against the wooden wall. Slide down to sit. She joins me. The wall *hmmms* ever so slightly.

“I don’t know, for sure. Maybe, when small, when one does not find happiness nearby, one imagines it must be far. And so goes looking.”

She nods, tho looks only half-convinced.

“I grew up poor, never travelled anywhere till I was a young adult. Books & TV, movies & records, the morning newspaper, these were my roads away.”

“Away?”

I nod, but more words stall. Try more. “How I get from there to this Attic, bound for the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock, with you, one of the six Brother-Heroes, I don’t know.”

She’s listening close, perchance there’s more.

I take a deep breath, in, out, again, relax. Try more. “This matters. I *know* it does. I know I’m *better* for doing this. I make the world a little better for doing this.”

She nods. “So we, my Brothers & me, extend this sentiment? This philosophy of Art you pursue.”

I nod. “However fine & flawed you are, in your varied aspects, you are Heroes.”

“Your books are bigger than us though?”

I nod.

She thinks a lingering moment, then stands up again. Helps me up as before. We press on again, quietly, but in good spirits.

The cool air grows cooler as we walk, until there is daylight up ahead plain to see. The Attic hallway becomes now thick, thick branches, easily wide enough to still walk upon.

Come eventually to the branches’ trunk, & there the same kind of curlicue path we’d rid up in the Kittees’ & Friend Fish’s Boat-Wagon. Find we can, with a little care, slide down this path, Donna first, her Hero’s protective spirit strong about me.

White Woods again. So beautiful, & now, even more closely than when we veered away before, come the sounds of Festival shouts & cheers.

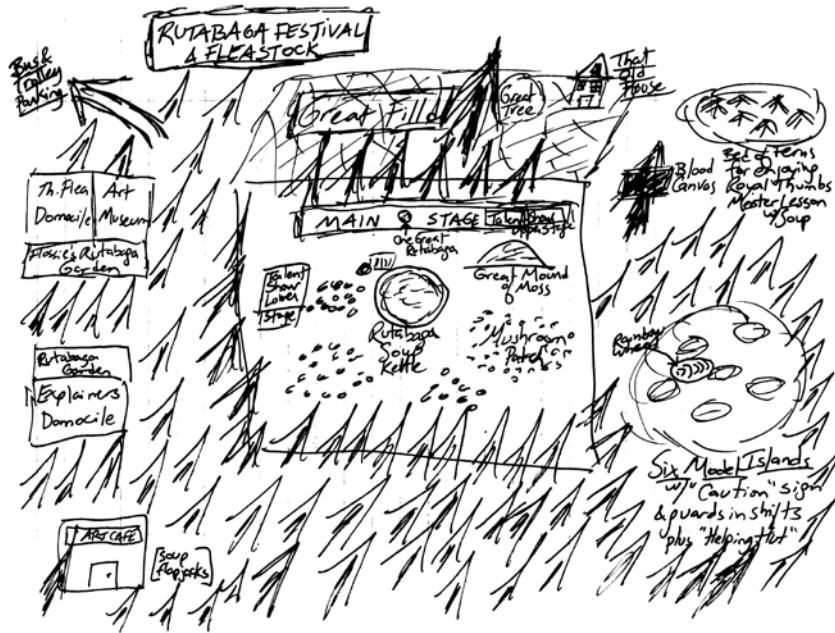
Asoyadonna stares me plain. “Yes, this time?”

Not a pause, I nod.

She smiles big as sun, & takes my hand. We hurry along till I suddenly stop us. “We

need our map,” I say firmly. Scrounge in my bookbag till cry out & pull out a crinkly sheet. Unfold to show.

We crouch close to study. Donna’s face struck with smiling wonder.



“Those are the Model Islands we traveled!” she cries & points. Pauses. Looks around. “Travel yet?”

I nod & shake my head. Shrug the difference. She laughs.

“My Brothers have all passed through?” she asks curiously.

I think a moment. Count on my fingers. Seeming calculating a hard one.

Open my eyes, twinkling. “No.” Our laughter more raucous.

We attract folk with our noise.

Approaching us are several Thought Fleas, sweet & magickal residents of these White Woods, some of their Guardians in truth.

I sideways glance Asoyadonna to find any expression of familiarity in her face. More smiling wonder. OK then. Start there.

“I guess the White Woods is so sizelessly vast that nobody knows everyone in it,” I say aloud. She vaguely nods.

Getting more to the point, I smile at all, & start into my introductions.

But it seems like Asoyadonna the famous Brother-Hero needs no introduction to these Thought Fleas.

Miss Flossie Flea, one of the more well-known Thought Fleas (though not a “leader,” as they do not know of such), comes up to Asoyadonna, smiling happy. She is dressed in a long leafy kind of dress, wearing an apron (she is famous far & wide for her special Rutabaga Soup recipes), & a kind of tool belt around her slender waist (worn especially during Festival times when repairs more often needed).

Flossie & Asoyadonna (who is still taller, tho we have all resized for talking ease) hold hands & paws &, smiling closely each other, softly *hmmmm* after awhile. I’ve occasionally thought how it’s a pleasure even just to watch folks *hmmmm* together.

Up to me come Flossie’s companions, the nearly-as-well-known Speed-E-Flea & Slowlee Joe. Dressed in bare feet paws, pantaloons, suspenders, vests, bow ties, & fezzes.

I know what this means.

“Hiya, CC,” says Slowlee Joe, friendly, slowly of course.

“Hi, guys,” I respond, friendly too. CC another of the names I answer too. “Is the Weekly Production going on in the Great Clearing?”

Speed-E shakes his head, speedily. “It’s the Talent Show Lower Stage. Two performers did their amazing known talents, & went through the curtain to the Upper Stage, for hidden talents, but haven’t come out yet.”

I nod. I also know who Speed-E means. Dreamwalker, one of Asoyadonna’s Brother-Heroes, & his dear friend the Gentleman Photographer. Their path from Stage to Stage is taking a long route through Dreamwalker’s past. *Remember some things.*

I wonder to tell Asoyadonna when she & Flossie are done *hmmmm*, but her smile at me when they finish tells me she knows. *This* is why they *hmmmm*’d.

She still looks a little shaky, knowing one of her dear & long-unseen Brothers is so close. But resolute. “He will be OK,” she says to me. “We will re-unite & hug at Abe’s Beach. I will deliver him Aunt’s kiss!”

I nod, & take her hand, & we walk with these kindly & magickal Thought Fleas the rest of the way to the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock. It’s not far. Donna squeezes my hand excitedly again,

Suddenly I call, “Miss Flossie!”

She turns & looks at me quietly. She always feels I should be scribbling more than I do. She’s right.

But I think she’ll like this. “Would you Thought Fleas kindly show Asoyadonna around the Festival? I have some pens-&-notebooks work to do.”

This, Flossie smiles me friendly for, & nods.

“You’re not coming with me, Raymond?” Donna looks me half-smirking, half-sincere.

I look at her & the several Thought Fleas, & the beautiful White Woods about us, & shake my head.



"This *Great Grand Braided Narrative* has slowed too much, by my reck. At this moment, two of your Brothers are at Abe's Beach of Many Worlds. You & three of the others are not. That's for me to figure out, no more delays."

"Two have made it?" she smiles delightedly.

I nod. "Time for me to map out for the rest of you."

She hugs me close. "*Make Art Now*," she says in my ear.

I nod & wave them along their way.

\*\*\*\*\*



*WITHIN'S WITHIN:  
SCENES FROM THE  
PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION*

Music. Poetry. Rant. Mindfood.

*turn on . . .*

*tune in . . .*



**Live Saturdays on the Web:**

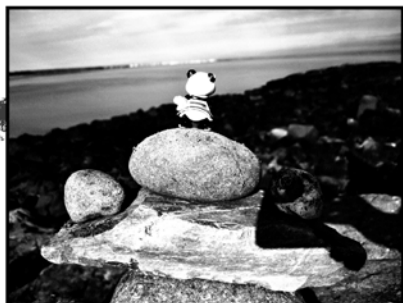
[spiritplantsradio.com](http://spiritplantsradio.com)

**Show information:**

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

# Scriptor Press

Independent Publishing Since 1995



Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

Visit us online at [ScriptorPress.com](http://ScriptorPress.com)  
for more information.

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

## Notes on Contributors

**AbandonView** lives in the American Rust Belt. More of his work can be found at: <http://purigare.tumblr.com>.

**Algernon Beagle** lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for Bags End News. More Bags End writings can be found at:  
<http://www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf>.

**Charlie Beyer** lives in New Castle, Colorado. His piece was written by his father Richard, & edited by Charlie. More of his work can be found at: <http://www.therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

**Judih Weinstein Haggai** lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her 2004 Scriptor Press RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at:  
<http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.pdf>.

**Jimmy Heffernan** lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His most recent book, *Ripples on an Infinite Sea*, was published by BookBaby in 2022.

**Nathan D. Horowitz** lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Book 2 of his published quadrilogy of *Nighttime Daydreams (Bat Dreams)* was published in 2019.

**Colin James** lives in western Massachusetts. His most recent book of poetry, *The Paralytically Obscure As Beauty Crescendo*, was published by The Book Patch in 2020.



**Sam Knot** lives in rural France. Visit [samknot.com](http://samknot.com) for more of his work.

**Epi Rogan** lives in Cork, Ireland. More of her work can be found at [instagram.com/pieorgan](https://www.instagram.com/pieorgan).

**Tamara Miles** lives in Elgin, South Carolina. More of her work can be found at: <http://tamaramiles.wixsite.com/sylviasdaughtersays>.

**Martina Reisz Newberry** lives in Hollywood, California. Her most recent book of poetry, *Glyphs*, was published in 2022 by Deerbrook Editions. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

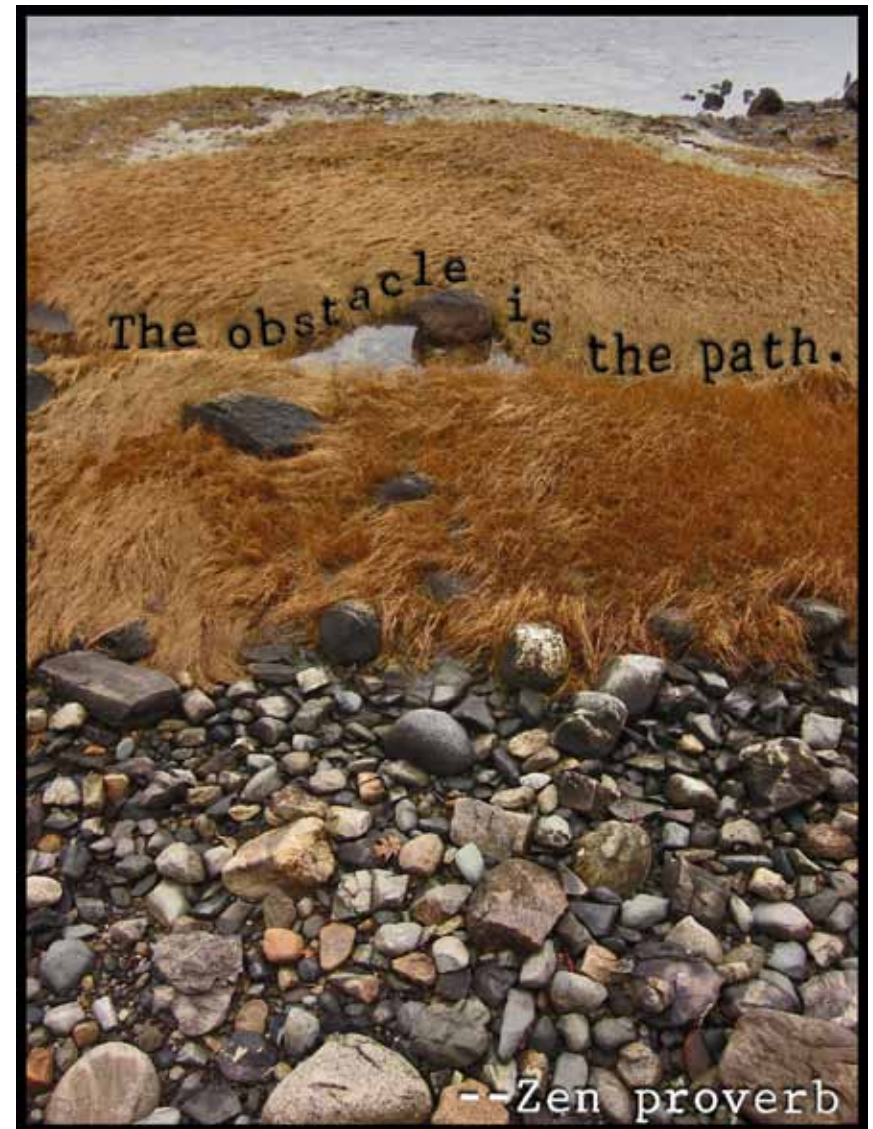
**Kassandra Soulard** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She grows more wonderfully into herself as the calendar pages turn.

**Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Art is my path, my tool, my weapon, my way.

**Louis Staebler** lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. More of his work can be found at [instagram.com/louiestaebler](https://www.instagram.com/louiestaebler).

**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>.

\* \* \* \* \*





SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2025