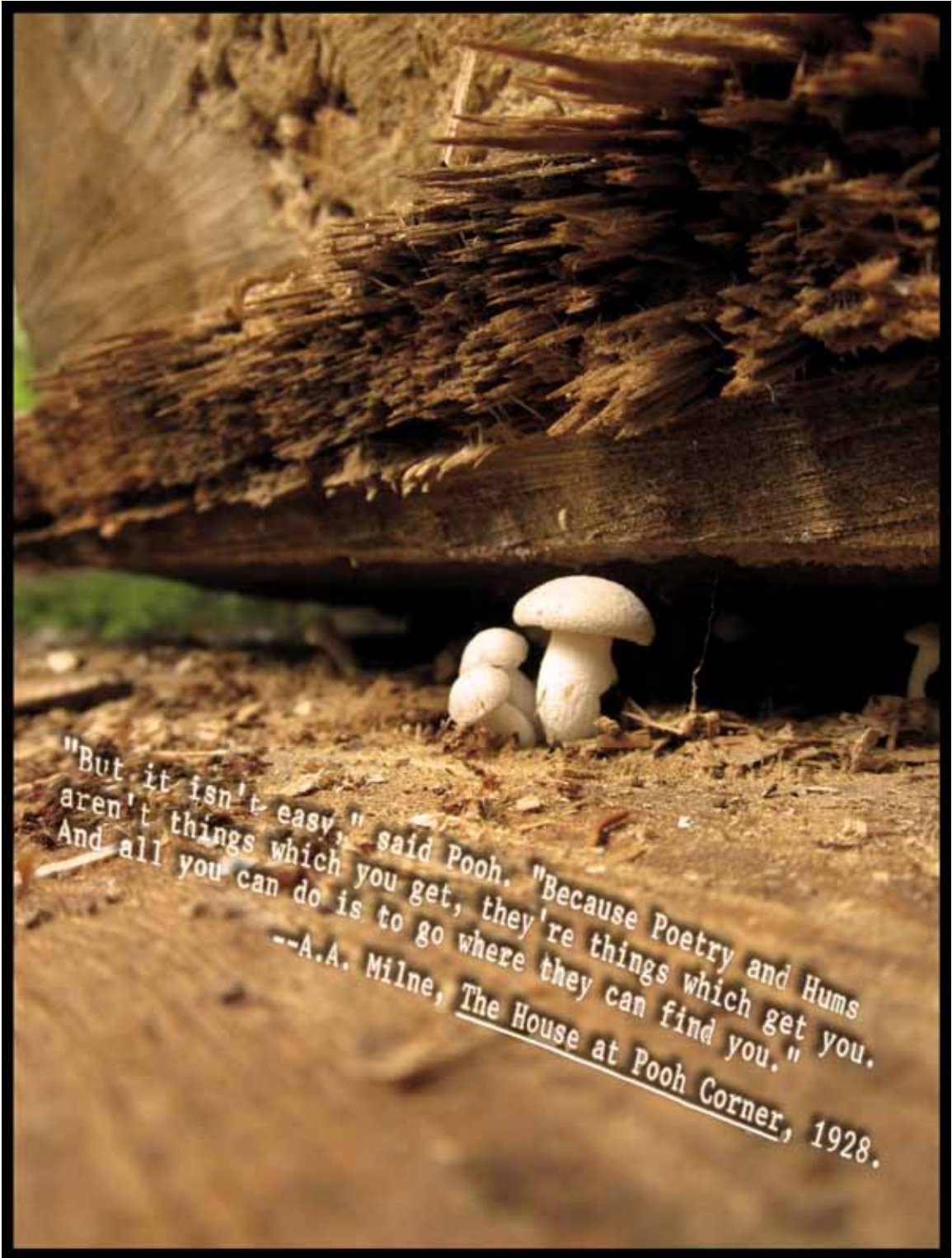


The cover of 'The Cénacle' magazine features a collage of autumn leaves in various colors (red, orange, yellow, brown) scattered over a light-colored wooden plank background. The title 'The Cénacle' is prominently displayed at the top in a stylized, outlined font. Below it, the subtitle 'Greetings from NEW ENGLAND' is written in a smaller, elegant script. At the bottom, the issue information 'NUMBER 105 | OCTOBER 2018' is printed in a simple, white, sans-serif font.

The
Cénacle

Greetings from
NEW ENGLAND

NUMBER 105 | OCTOBER 2018



October 27, 2018
9:26 p.m. Harvard Square
Smith-Caryns Center -
Welcome Pavilion ^{table by} door
Cambridge, Massachusetts

This S Notebooks piece is a kind of sequel to the one written on 5/10/2016 for Crackle 96. In that one I lamented the unexpected loss of the Au Bon Pain Cafe courtyard in Harvard Square, a courtyard whose tables I'd sat & written at since I'd moved up to Boston in 1992.

I knew that construction, that suddenly fenced-off & torn down place, would emerge in a spiced up new form in 2018, sometime. I despised this.

What had most drawn me to Harvard Square all those years, the cafe & especially its four-treed, brick-floored, low-fenced, several steps up, black tables, beautiful courtyard, was gone. I stopped coming here. I bided at a distance on the faith of their promise to make something both new & good. Waited. Read weekly email updates from the construction project.



-13-

Early September 2018, just after Labor Day, start of the Harvard University school year, Smith Campus Center opened, finally replacing Forbes Plaza.

Courtyard without fencing, steps, definition. Now a vast stretch of white tables & chairs, a row of heavy wooded chess tables, replacing the old stone ones.

Inside, a vast student/community center, with some food stands. Multiple floors, some of it open till 1 a.m. on Saturdays.

Even a glassed mezzanine that Kassi likes a corner of. She's reading there right now. I'd be outside watching this but for the nor'easter sweeping through Boston & New England this weekend.

I've sat out there, though, on a sunny day. A Saturday in September, the whole place opened only a few days. Found a table location I liked. Wrote, read, listened to music on my beloved Polly iPod. Fairly high on the juice to test all the feelzies in the devices down deep of me.



-14-

It's different, but nice. Kassi & I were here many hours today working on this new issue. She created the epigraph & Last Yawp here today. I read & edited much of this issue's contents. Now this piece before heading back home.

I'd rather have this all, than nothing, than a construction site. I'd rather be doing this here than not. The more I write here, over & over & over through time, the more I'll bond here to what's here now.

We can only move forward in time, & until that changes will accumulate memories & regrets & losses. This is a lesson that is hard to learn, to accept, without giving up something inside, some innocent unthinking faith in the power of now to mean anything later.

The art, the skill to it, ~~is~~ is to remain aife & awake & sensitive enough to keep embracing what comes while finding solace in letting go.

-15

I'm terrible at letting go, & there
is no art or craft to my efforts.

Yet here again, anew, tonight,
but what I believe most in, my
pen & paper, this piece for the new
Canada, 2 1/2 years later—

This is learning how to let go
but keep.

This is keeping my courtyard in
my heart, there, & also

this new place.

Pretty, thoughtfully made.

This is me trying. For a moment,
not terrible at it.

I hope to write countless times
from here, in this new building, &
out there, that... new courtyard.

I hope to love this place too.
I hope to believe love is endlessly
& infinitely possible.

This is me, hoping, & trying. Simple.

Ⓟ & ♥ Ⓟ 10/27/2018
Cambridge, MASS.

The
Cenacle
NUMBER 105 | OCTOBER 2018

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Cassandra Souland

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Thank you to KL, my dear friend & boss for the better part of six years. I wish for you & your family nothing but good health, long lives, & much happiness. Good luck on your new path, my friend.



See ya in the spring!

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2018

Feedback on Cenacle 104 | June 2018

From Ace Boggess:

Martina Newberry's poem "Her Face, on a Prayer Card" left me mesmerized by its thought-provoking lines and bright language. What I expected to be dark and bleak instead took such an optimistic turn that I felt physically better after reading it. Lines such as "her ideas / have become wasps, stinging, / then sleeping in the cold dark, / then waking again to sting" were so rich that the images and ideas of them caught me off guard. And I especially loved her reference to the "Priests of Positive Thinking." Gorgeous and clever.

From Charlie Beyer:

Martina Newberry has some fine words in "All Your Books." This truth goes beyond the words, which she says "means little. Almost nothing." It's OK to shut out bad writing, irrelevant words. Some people are just not worth talking to. And then in "Village Swallows from Austria (After Josef Strauss)," I love the waltz of who is watching whom. And if someone is watching from space, how silly it might all seem.

Nathan D. Horowitz: Thanks for taking me back into the jungle, the mysterious green riot all around, the dark and opaque river coming from nowhere and going nowhere. Horowitz brings the sound of life to my ears with "rapid rhythm of crickets—entomo-techno trance, world beat of a beat world—and the sudden shivery silvery sing-song . . ."

Then the great simile: "cumulous clouds rest on the horizon, like pawns in a chess game between God and the Devil." Awesome. Wonderful visions of a distant reality that remain in my heart.

From Gregory Kelly:

Nathan D. Horowitz's poem "The Feathered Sea" is gruelling but soft, terrifying but gentle, filled with emotion but then emotionless. Horowitz brings us through the terrifyingly overwhelming scenario of a loved one passing. And he does it over and over and over again. The thought of death is numbed by the repetition, and ultimately the blow is softened upon the final approach to the "feathered sea."

I never like thinking of the end of life. It's too close to home. Too raw. Too real. And yet Horowitz has the boldness to brave the naked intimate thoughts of death, how it impacts him: "From my apartment window, I watch, / writing with the brisk pencil of solitude"; "he hammers my desk. / It smashes into crystals like a geode"; "my family in broken glass. / Unfazed, my father weaves ambulance / and police sirens on a loom of insomnia."

At first, the death is ancillary, it has no real impact. But then as death repeats itself, we're brought closer and closer until we are so close that we feel our own feet plunging through the waters of the "feathered sea."

From Jimmy Heffernan:

Upon cozying up with *Cenacle* 104, I became delighted by Gregory Kelly's spare but powerful and illustrative poetry. His words conjured in me images and sensations of a sublime nature, evoking a stream-of-consciousness type effect that was both subtle and vivid. When Kelly tells us he wants "to be a being void of dark matter," we are thrust down the proverbial rabbit-hole or, better yet, into a black hole where the laws of physics cease to exist. It is those laws of physics that Mr. Kelly transcends when he paints for us using his unique and wonderful linguistic palette. *Bravo.*

From Judih Haggai:

Fall approaches and I'm rushed with emotions. Resolve to re-commit. Nostalgia for loss of summer. Sadness together with revving up energy. With these two forces, I approached *Cenacle* 104. I loved Martina Newberry's "2018." "Hell! It's been a bad year for everyone!" *Love it.*

Raymond Soulard Jr.'s review of past *Cenacle* years brought back two ku of mine written in 2011, including the line: "another chance to dance with the hummingbird." *Hmm*, I thought. An antidote to my current melancholy—opening to joy.

Leia Friedman's travel journal "Same Same Shackles, But Different" spoke with a singular voice in a totally foreign environment. From the sense-filled sugarcane juice, dark green and murky, to the smell of coconut oil under her arms in the heat of the day, I'm with her, side by side. Her look at cultural incongruencies like shirking suntanning in a climate of bright sunshine, or the Western emphasis on being trim in a land of overflowing taste sensations readily available. A very human insight into her point of view. I appreciate the honesty.

Nathan D. Horowitz's "The Feathered Sea" returns to me at the strangest times. I hear the constant re-dying of his father (my father). I thank you, Nathan, for this.

Kassi Soulard's gorgeous photography gets more evocative with each issue.

From Leia Friedman:

Nathan D. Horowitz's "The Feathered Sea" was my favorite poem from this issue. I thought John Barton's "The Millennial Artist's Omelette" was timely, with its discussion of "overthrow[ing] the Christian paradigm and replac[ing] it with something pagan."

Question: What was meant in Barton's piece by spelling *Godd* with four letters in the quote attributed to Raymond Soulard, Jr.: "Recognize *Godd* = Art = I = Art = *Godd* = I"?

Editor's Note: *The "Godd" spelling is a (somewhat) subtle reference to the four-letter spelling of this name in Hebrew (ג ד ו ה). My mother was Jewish (though I myself am more like a psychedelic pagan artist).*

From Nathan D Horowitz:

*Judih's haikus are
puffs of air that somehow hold
atmospheres of mind*

In the latest obsessively eloquent installment of "Sapphire Sins," cat owner, boyfriend, and mining criminal Charlie Beyer fights the law and the law wins. He includes a studly photo of himself at the end, fuzzy and buff, standing on a sun-dappled forest path. I am so glad I am not a girl because I would fall in love with him immediately.

In "Same Same Shackles, But Different," after a mouthwatering discussion of Vietnamese home cooking, *Cenacle* newcomer Leia Friedman delivers a hard-hitting take on women's quixotic quests for beauty in the USA and Vietnam. Same same: the unattainable nature of the standards. Different: in the USA, it's about being slim, while in Vietnam, it's about whitening the skin.

In "Why Is the Music So Haunting and Sad?" and "If You Didn't Know Me, Would You Think This Was My Face?" Ace Boggess proves once again that he is constitutionally incapable of providing direct answers to simple questions. (Perhaps this incapacity is the very cradle of poetry itself, I don't know, I skipped class that day.) Still, the poems are worth walking through—just check your expectations at the door, and be ready for non sequiturs like: "What do you wear beneath the gold party hat?" and "How do you embrace deception?" Perhaps Ace could avoid answering these questions in further poems.

Kassandra Soulard's quietly intense black-and-white photos murmur their visual literature on opposing pages.

From Tamara Miles:

I enjoyed the depth of feeling and imagery in Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s *Many Musics*' "Maw" and "No Final Thing to Know." I was able to transport myself to the morning retreat and "the white birches I know lessly / because I yearn them" (exquisite sound and visual effects here). I know all too well "the furies of men, / how they loving ferment the world's destruction," and I too "move / painfully among the herds of men . . ." Perhaps this is especially true when the reader is a woman among those herds.

And then: "We were man / & woman, we weren't. Like a heavy costume / we each wore." This writing asks me to go slowly, listen deeply, and I am grateful for the "moonlit nights. Close to the dying," especially as I remember my dear friend Dorothy who died in September.





From the ElectroLounge Forums

Haiku Thread

Published on electrolounge.boards.net.

Post by Raymond on Aug 7, 2018 at 8:18am

Snoopy is racing with a pumpkin
toward muted daylight and an end
to a very long dream still biting his tail

Post by Judih on Aug 7, 2018 at 10:47am

chopping vegetables
neighbor's muted kalimba
desert harmony

Post by Martina on Aug 7, 2018 at 4:29pm

The neighbor's geraniums
unremarkable flowers
don't need poems and forevers.

Post by Raymond on Aug 8, 2018 at 3:30pm

forever is time x 0
and therefore not time
trees wave, thunder rumbles

Post by Jimmy on Aug 8, 2018 at 7:33pm

it's time for canines
to take over Washington—
smarter government

Post by Raymond on Aug 10, 2018 at 1:26pm

Canines and harmony
just a wet bone away
sweet governance of the tongue

Post by Judih on Aug 11, 2018 at 12:40am

canines and jackals
prowlers of the desert
while i stargaze

Post by Raymond on Aug 11, 2018 at 11:44am

stargaze dreamgaze
ruptures in the deep
or music its countless colors

Post by Judih on Aug 11, 2018 at 11:23pm

dreamgaze dreamchant
sounds haunt, taunt, repeat
till morning escape

Post by Raymond on Aug 13, 2018 at 9:22am

Tis morning again, Monday morning, blahs
blues, greens, rains, dreams,
I'd like to read my old book in peace, please

Post by Jimmy on Sep 1, 2018 at 3:18pm

For what do you wait?
A certain shade of green, no?
Keys to the future

Post by Raymond on Sep 1, 2018 at 9:39pm

Keys to the future
Often - Also -
Fit in old keyholes - too

* * * * *



Martina Newberry



Everything

I found a letter I had begun to
write to you, dear girl,
and never finished.

It was written before there was email,
and endless writing spaces.

I wrote to you while in a staff meeting,
at the college where I worked.
In it, I said everything—

told you about a man's wrinkled collar
right in front of me, another man's worn
coat cuff, a woman 2 rows down holding
up a stiff back and attentive posture,
how I knew her and that she was bleeding
inside from a carved-up heart.

I told you about my tight shoes
and my failed diet and about fear
pulling the blankets off the night before—
leaving me too open
and too cold.

I wrote about our dry yard,
my children's school,
my wish to run away.

I said I missed you,
wished I could come there
and live near you.

All this was written on wheat-colored paper,
folded into a small square
and hidden in the toe
of a wheat-colored sock.

I never mailed it and I don't know why.

Now, I want you to have
this letter to remember that, once,
we wrote everything to each other.

We wrote until all our writing paper
was gone and we wrote on napkins,
receipts, and cigarette papers,
and on purloined memo pads,
and on the back of the odd photograph.

We wrote until we had to use blood or spit for ink.

Yes, here at last is your letter.

It is arriving late,
very late in our lives,
and it is still everything.

* * * * *



Provisional Truths

[Travel Journal]

Night rain faded out at dawn. I woke to the sound of Dave telling a dream of his to Gus and I forgot my own. This is the third time that's happened.

François is in a hammock reading a fat novel by Honoré de Balzac called *Père Goriot*. I'm in another hammock reading my surroundings. Two magenta dragonflies chase each other in the sunshine, their wings delicate sheets of glass.

François explained the difference between a *gourmet* and a *gourmand*. A gourmet likes good food and a gourmand likes lots of food. He says I'm both.

Gus is telling Dave about Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. "Our prof said a lot of the stories are about abuse of power," he says. "Gods are like high-ranking people who can do whatever they want. Even the goddesses were merciless. Artemis, the moon goddess, was takin' a bath in the woods with her nymphs. This hunter named Actaeon was out there with his dogs and by mistake he saw her naked. He stood there with his eyes poppin' out. She saw him. She was so pissed off she turned him into a stag, and his dogs turned on him and ripped him apart."

* * *

"¿Sacando chontapalo, ese Ignacio?" Joaquín asks Dave, a question that can be rendered in English as, "Does that Ignacio suck out magical sickness darts (that have been shot into a human victim by an evil shaman)?" They're talking about Ignacio Chimbo, the Quichua shaman Dave used to study with.

"Sí," Dave answers. He jumps up, heads for a puddle, grabs one of those eighteen-inch Amazonian earthworms, and forces it wriggling inside an empty plastic jug before capping up the jug. Bait.

Dave and I were talking the other day about whether we believed in *chontapalos*. We figured maybe, somehow, sufficiently focused thoughts can become physical, hard and sharp, and harm or even kill people. It could happen through a conversion of thought to energy to matter, like I was imagining that night on *yagé*. The math doesn't work out, but spirits might not do math anyway. Their physics might be based on something more like language.

The shoreline of a big brown puddle left by the rain is shining.

The sun perches like a golden songbird on top of the sky.

On the river, a boat drones past like a giant cicada.

Chickens forage in the organic trash heap.

The waves from the boat are crashing, low, rhythmical, against the riverbank.

Gus is murmuring aloud from a book of Emily Dickinson poems. "How the old mountains drip with sunset," he murmurs. "How the hemlocks burn. How the—" I don't catch the next bit—"cinder by the wizard sun. How the old steeples hand the scarlet 'til the ball is full. Have I the lip of the flamingo that I dare to tell?"

A banana plant's leaves are pagan cathedral glass shot through with wizard sunlight. Have I the quill of the flamingo that I dare to write? Just a Bic ballpoint pen made from the bodies of ancient plants—eaters of air, drinkers of light. Gus keeps murmuring Dickinson. Don Joaquín sighs, then

yawns luxuriously. I close my eyes and examine the smooth grainy orange inside my lids. Did the same one day while lying on a beach in northern California at the age of eight. Pressed my closed eyes to make everything rich, deep blue, then covered my eyes with my palms to make everything black. The black was composed of tiny multicolored grains. I realized I could never see complete blackness, even in the dark, because of these grains. I parted my lids so the sunshine bounced in off my eyelashes, prismatic fly wings. And my mom's voice called me to a picnic table for a sandwich of canned tuna fish mixed with mayonnaise and topped with slices of tomato on whole wheat bread.

“ . . . Paralyzed, with gold,” Gus concludes, and closes the book.

François puts on a pot of rice, then lies back down in his hammock with *Père Goriot*.

Gus gets up and puts on flip-flops and walks away.

Fujimori, alpha rooster, vanquisher of Samson, flaps his wings and struts.

Cuaucuillo's asleep, a shadow with a shadow in the shade.

François kicks a foot out, stretching, and the wind chime replies. The Québécois' hammock hangs from beams, the chime hangs from another beam, the beams communicate structurally among themselves.

The Swarovski crystal hanging from the western roof beam slices open sunlight and spits out rainbows.

Mark and Dave are working on crowns they'll wear during ceremonies. They've cut and split pieces of *cocowasi* wood and are now each shaving a strip of it down, to be bent into a broad, flat hoop and tied with palm fiber string. It'll either be painted or wrapped seven or eight times with a long strand of beads. An upper part will be added, three or four vertically-stacked levels of a tubular, flexible pith from inside the leaf-stem of the right species of palm.

The crowns are part of the traditional costume of Secoya men. Some of the older guys still wear them around like New Yorkers with fedoras. Crowns are good to wear during the *yagé* ceremony. Joaquín says the sky people like to see drinkers looking sharp. I think crowns also provide some psychic protection to the head they encircle, helping people stay sane during the intoxication.

I've started making a crown too. Mark and Dave are both better than I am at shaving the wood to make the hoop bend smoothly. My hoop is lumpy, and I can't muster the skill—and maybe the interest—to get it right.

“Hey, guys, it's ready,” announces François, and the rest of us salivate like Pavlov dogs. Lunch is rice with sardines, plantains, onions, cumin from a plastic bag François brought with him, and tiny, fierce chili peppers from bushes outside the hut.

* * *

Tomorrow morning at 3 a.m., we're going to drink a brew of a plant called *gonsá* to make us vomit and clean out our stomachs. I don't know what *gonsá* is and I don't much care. I trust Joaquín. I may not be able to manufacture a good crown, but if the Secoyas can drink *gonsá*, I can drink *gonsá*.

Last night, I slept only about three hours: wired on coffee from the morning, and too hot, under my dirty blanket on top of my other dirty blanket, listening to the quacking of a colony of a certain species of frog by the river. (Joaquín maintains those frogs are evil. They definitely sound like they could be, but I can't quite bring myself to believe in evil frogs.) François's orange chicken had left us all blissed out, and we stayed up late telling stories.

Let me back up. The day before yesterday we pooled our cash and bought a chicken from Maribel and killed it. François told us that after killing and plucking a chicken you should leave it alone for twenty-four hours. It won't decompose, but the meat will tenderize. So we put the dead, plucked chicken in a covered aluminum pot and hung the pot by a piece of twine from a roof beam so the ants wouldn't get into it. As it happened, they did get into it: after a while, we saw a double line going up and down the twine. But, being ants, they weren't able to carry away more than a tiny bit of the meat.

“One night on a bike trip,” Gus said, “I slept by the side of this highway in Canada. I was too close to the trucks goin’ by, and I dreamed these monstrous extraterrestrial humanoids with gigantic heads were talkin’ to me! No idea what they were saying. They’d just come toward me, growling, and then move away.”

We were sitting cross-legged on the boards of the sleeping area, gnawing sweet meat from the chicken’s bones in the dancing, lambent glow of a glassless kerosene lamp.

“I think the indigenous people would say those humanoids were real, just not in the same way as, like, this lamp is,” I said. “You can’t touch ’em, but you may be able to hear ’em and even talk to ’em. They’re truck spirits.”

“It’s true,” said Dave, flipping behind him into the darkness a drumstick he’d stripped clean. “Even machines have spirits. *Yagé* showed me that everything in the material world is reflected in the spirit world.” Where he’d thrown the bone, one of the dogs growled.

“People say *yagé* is like a teacher, I have heard,” volunteered François. We heard the bone splintering in the dog’s jaws.

“*Yagé* is the best teacher,” Dave said. “The Secoyas’ whole system of knowledge is based on *yagé* and the other plant teachers teaching ’em how to network with the forest, using all these channels of communication amongst animals and plants and spirits and elements! By the way, François, this food is friggin’ awesome. You’re a total maestro.”

Mark said, “Amen. This is great. So Don Joaquín told me the forest is full of passages to other worlds. In visions, a shaman can travel through ’em to villages where animals like wild pigs live. Over there, they look just like people. The shaman can talk to the chief and ask for some pigs to feed his family. If the chief agrees, he’ll send the pigs out through the passages in the morning to be hunted.”

“Do you believe all that?” I asked.

“It’s hard to believe, and hard not to believe,” Mark said, his eyes steady in the light of the lamp.

I nodded. “I wouldn’t put it past Ha’kë to go into another dimension and visit spirits. I’ve read a lot of stories about shamans doing stuff like that. But why doesn’t he summon wild pigs more often?”

Dave said, “Because he’s a high, proper master of the way, which means he’s not greedy. It’s something he’d only do if it was *absolutely* necessary.”

“Makes sense,” I said. “By the way, is there any more chicken?”

François poked around with the spoon. “Only the neck. You want?”

“Anybody else?” I looked around, embarrassed by my gourmand hunger. The others shook their heads. François put the curved, bony piece on my plate, then said, “Does the Secoyas believe on gods?”

As I nibble-sucked muscle morsels off vertebrae, Dave said, “Here’s what Ha’kë’s nephew Serafin told me. The Secoya gods basically go like this. First, there’s Ñañë—God the creator. He made the earth and all the creatures on it. Then he lived here for a while and let people do what they wanted. Ñañë acted like a normal person, but he sometimes busted people for doing stupid stuff.

“For a while, he was married to two sisters. Their dad didn’t like him, and tried to kill him, so Ñañë turned the guy into the first tapir!”

“How is the story?” François asked.

“Ñañë was living with these sisters and their dad. Every morning, the dad would say, ‘I’m going fishing.’ And he’d go out and come back home later with those giant earthworms. The Secoyas call those *wasí*. He’d come back and give them to his daughters to cook, saying, “Look at these delicious fish I caught.” But Ñañë, when *he* went out to fish, he brought back real fish. His wives liked that ’cause the real fish tasted better. The women’s dad got jealous. He rigged up a snare to a big, flexible tree, high enough to fling Ñañë up in the air and smash his head on the dome of Heaven. The Secoyas consider the sky to be like a dome, or the inside of an eggshell.

“So Ñañë walks out the door, and heading out on his hunting and fishing trail, he steps right in the snare. It pulls *tight* around his ankle and *whips* him up in the air! Higher and higher! Until, *whoosh!*



He feels the top of his hair brush the underside of Heaven! Then he's falling, down, down, down—*boing!* He hits the end of the snare and dangles by one foot from the tree with his head hanging down!"

"Sounds like he's trapped," said Mark, scratching his chin.

"Yeah! But not for long. He's Ñañë! He summons ants and asks them to cut all his flesh off his bones and put it under the tree. They do! But his skeleton is still hanging there! He summons squirrels and has them gnaw through his ankle tendons! His bones tumble to the ground. Then he puts himself back together, and searches out his father-in-law, and transforms him into a tapir with a giant ass! The tapir struggles to walk, but he can't with that giant ass dragging on the ground. He says, 'Ñañë, would you please do something about this ass?' Ñañë grabs a bamboo knife and cuts off the giant ass and throws it into the river, where it turns into the first manatee and swims away!

"Ñañë lived on earth for a while until he got fed up with human greed, then took off for the sky, leaving the earth in the care of four celestial beings: Cancowitoyai, Wiwati, Wanteancó, and Oco Wanteancó.

"Cancowitoyai's name has three parts. *Canco* means a firefly with a white light. *Wito* is the white down of a bird or the white fluff of a plant. It symbolizes everything that's totally, totally pure! You guys remember when Doña Alicia put that fluff on us so we looked like baby birds. That was *wito*. *Yai* is jaguar. Cancowitoyai looks like a normal Secoya. He travels through the cosmos standing in a canoe that moves by itself. The constellation of the Southern Cross symbolizes his canoe. He's in charge of game animals and fish. If you see him in a vision, you can ask him to send you some animals to hunt. He also sometimes instructs shamans and gives them his special *yagé*. But he's only around in August, September, and October. The rest of the year, he's somewhere else.

"Wiwati's name means growth spirit. *Wi* is growth and *wati* is a spirit. He has four arms and only one leg. All these limbs don't have joints like human limbs. They're like the bodies of snakes. He's in charge of the growth of plants. He's the one that made the forest rise up again in that one story just by saying his name.

"Wanteancó is also called 'Yai Paj Ha'ko,' Cat People Mother. She's the jaguar spirit. She's hostile to humans for nine months out of every year, whilst in August, September, and October—that's *Cancotecawe*, the celestial season of the cicadas—she's friendly.

"Oco Wanteancó is Wanteancó's sister. Just like Wanteancó is the mother of the jaguars, Oco Wanteancó is the mother of the water jaguars. I haven't heard anything else about her. Water jaguars are jaguars who live underwater. They live in these subaquatic villages that are just like human villages and, down there, the water jaguars look human too, but when they come up to our world, they dress in jaguar tunics that turn them into big cats."

"That'd work," said Gus, nodding.

Mark said, "You said Ñañë got fed up with human greed. What happened?"

"Check it out. There was this *ginormous* tree, *way* bigger than any tree on earth now, and it was connected to the sky by a giant vine. The tree was full of water, and the water was full of fish. It had some holes in the trunk, and when people wanted to go fishing, they could climb up there.

"But some people got tired of catching the fish, 'cause it wasn't always easy, and they decided they wanted all the fish at once.

"They took stone axes and chopped the trunk all the way through, but the tree didn't fall. It was still held up by that giant vine wrapped around it, so the tree was dangling from the sky.

"They chopped through the vine, and the tree fell with a *humungous* crash! *Boom!* When it fell, the tree transformed into the Amazon River with its tributaries. All the rivers and streams that flow into the Amazon used to be branches and twigs of that giant tree."

"Speaking of water," said Gus, "anyone want some?"

We all did, and he fetched cups and the aluminum pot of drinking water.

"Ñañë figured humans were too greedy," Dave went on, "and he didn't want to live here anymore. He made an announcement: 'I'm going away! I'm leaving at midnight. Just before I leave, I'm

going to cry out: *Hooooooooo!* Any being who stays awake to hear will be immortal. When they get old, they'll be able to shed their skin and be young again.'

"But just about everybody and everything was too lazy to stay awake. They all fell asleep except a few things like the cicada, the snakes, and a few trees that shed their bark—and one old lady. She stayed up and heard Ñañë shout. Then Ñañë *zoomed* into the sky and was gone.

"A while after that, the old lady told her family she was going to visit some relatives. She went away. A few days later, a teenage girl appeared in her village and started flirting with the old woman's grandson, who was a teenager too. She moved in and became his girlfriend. But one night, when she was blowing on the fire to get it going, he was like, 'You're blowing on the fire just like my grandmother used to.'

"The girl laughed and teased him: 'That's 'cause I *am* your grandmother!' He took it as a joke, but it started him thinking.

"A few days later he was hunting in the woods and found his grandmother standing there. He ran up to her and gave her a big hug! But it was just her empty skin! It folded down over his back. He got a *crazy* shock from that, and he got sick. He had just enough strength to bring his dad to the skin, and then he died. Then his dad killed that girl, who'd been his own mom!

"So according to the Secoyas, these stories explain why God doesn't live on Earth, and why humans get old and die: because of greed and laziness." Dave leaned back and gazed around at us.

I volunteered, "The Bible says people's problems started 'cause of disobedience—Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil when they weren't supposed to."

Dave said, "Different values, right? The Judeo-Christian thing's all about obeying authority."

I said, "Yeah. But there's also things in common between the systems. Check this out. I took a class on Jewish mysticism. Professor told us this ancient esoteric tradition said King Solomon was a great magician, and one of the good things he did was go around binding demons that were making trouble for humanity. Not killing them, 'cause you can't kill spirits, but tying them up to contain their power. So one time, Joaquín was telling me some of the things shamans do. He's like, 'We bind demons.' *Amarramos demonios*. I was like, 'You bind demons?!?' He's like, 'Yeah, we bind demons.'"

Gus said, "Did he tell you how?"

I said, "No. And I don't feel I can ask him a lot of questions. I think he just wants us to look and listen." Dave nodded.

Mark said, "I don't think binding demons would be the kind of thing that there's a trick to. I think if you had to do it, if you were advanced enough, you might know what do to."

We put the plates and silverware in a pot of river water to soak until morning, then went to bed, i.e. unrolled our foam mats and sacked out on the same boards we'd been dining on.

But I couldn't sleep, so I took a candle over to the half-finished hut and started writing this journal entry, as gnats kamikaze'd the flickering flame.

Now I imagine fighting my demon. He looks just like me, but bright red. I punch him: my fist goes right through his chest. I try to bite him, but he flies down my throat and bursts out my belly. I compress him to a pellet and clench him in my fist, but he yanks my fist out to the horizon, then flies through my head like a mosquito through fog.

I didn't know if the battle's real on some level, or only symbolic, but I wish I could tie him up and seal him in a bottle with a glyph stamped in the lid so he could never torment anyone again.

Maybe he feels the same about me.

Speaking of supernatural phenomena, what does it mean that people say shamans turn into animals? I'm trying hard to figure that out. *Haciendo yai*—doing jaguar, making jaguar—is what the Secoyas call it in Spanish. Maybe a better English translation would be incarnating or performing jaguar. Maybe there's no good translation for the phenomenon in either Spanish or English. But *haciendo yai* is what Rufino said I was doing that night with Joaquín and Lázaro. I sure had no problems with demons then. Would've scared the hell out of them, roaring and pounding on the floor of the hut. Similarly

when I roared at that photojournalist. But I was a bit demonic myself then. Hmm.

Yaitarí was *haciendo yai* when Joaquín and Baltasar killed him too, but in a different way. Yaitarí sent his soul out of his body in the form of a black jaguar. Or something else happened that I don't even have a concept for. It reminds me of an old European story where one night a guy hits a black cat in the eye with a stone from a sling, and in the morning the local witch has a bandage over the same eye.

When I was here earlier, I read *The Tain*, a book of Irish legends. In one of the stories, two druids need to travel fast through the woods, so they transform into deer. In *The Yagé Drinker*, Francisco says a shaman turned into a jaguar and visited Hupo, the place where God lived on earth; upon the shaman's return, he invited other people to go with him, but warned that it would take a few days: "It was faster for me, because I went as a jaguar."

When I was *haciendo yai*, I didn't physically transform. Would I have moved faster through the forest anyway? Hell yes. My proprioception, my focus on my body, was immeasurably heightened during my jaguar trances, as if I were learning to use my body for the first time—and being introduced to a profound mystery of the mammal tribe. I bet that's how a jaguar's consciousness functions. Maximum awareness of the body and its surroundings. No energy wasted on reflection or self-consciousness. The *here-and-now* is all there is.

It's hard to know what this means, or how to fit it in with the knowledge system we're taught in the States. The so-called spirit world has a life of its own, and it's a force of nature, though its relationship to science is elusive, perhaps necessarily so. When I try to observe that relationship precisely, I'm unable to concentrate on it. My focus glides away like a firefly on a summer night.

One night on *yagé*, it became clear that the fireflies east of the hut were celestial spirits. I understood this partly because I felt I was perceiving the unfiltered truth, and partly because they appeared to be blinking in response to my thoughts. This year, I read in *The Yagé Drinker* that Francisco Payaguaje said some of the insects that appeared during the dry season *were* celestial spirits.

Yagé and the culture that surrounds it are bizarre and worthy of study, just like many other topics—lunar landings, goldfish, Swiss cheese, Surrealism. *Yagé* must feel normal enough when you grow up around it. People like Joaquín and Francisco drank it at home with their families when they were kids.

In the rainforest among indigenous people, I was searching for the roots of poetry in magical language when, suddenly, a frog quacked. The tip of this pen is a blackbird flying through unknown skies.

*Cicadas are whirring.
One of my friends is snoring.*

*A motorboat navigates upriver
in darkness.*

*Flame blown by the wind,
this crippled candle is losing wax fast.*

*Insects are biting my back.
I speak with the voice I use in dreams.*

*My ears speak through my writing hand
as a bat navigates upwind
in darkness lit by sound.*

All this music moves me.

*I stay up late watching this poem
sprout between my hands.*

*Nearby,
tree frogs are singing.*

* * * * *



Joe Ciccone**Self Portrait #1**

The fog rolls in
but this time not all romantic-like,
more like a brush fire
the kind that precedes tragedy

This place would not exist without you
nor would it go on forever
as does Jupiter's storm
and its four satellites

We are beyond the sextant
and the boxed sea clock
beyond all the slimy sea things
that slide underfoot

When my skin like the liquid lagoon
grows wet and sticky
and cold
just burn me up and pray for heaven

just know your chances of finding it
are about as good as finding
just one time
a decent pear

* * *

Muskeget Island

A place I only wish to see
in the stench and beauty

of a nightmare
with its placenta-strewn shore

and endless moanings
safe in the shallows beyond the reach

of the Great White
rolling like a slaughterhouse floor

where some fifty-thousand once-gentle
half-ton beasts mate and defecate

creep inland bearing disease
for the bird's fresh water

no longer yielding to the one man
walking its shore

testing his modern resolve
to just let things be

* * *

What More Do You Want From Me?

I mostly do the whole golden rule thing
I help others to a degree

give back nearly four cents
on each dime

How much more do you want?
I keep a roof overhead

look after my family
don't forget birthdays

and push us off the beach
when our boat runs aground

Even back in the day
I delivered most of the mail

only threw out the real junk
thought I was helping there too

I never meant to kill any cat
had my eyes on the road the whole time

It must have had a death wish
It came out from the side

I never saw it
Of course I felt bad

So what do you want from me?
I remember my father all the time

I keep him somewhere
around forty

I can't help that I get depressed
after the first day

of a vacation
Focusing is exhausting

but I don't complain
Against my better judgement

I even wrote you this
colloquial poem

with no metaphors or similes
Plus I'm always giving thanks

I'm sorry if I can't tell you
to whom

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

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

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

36 Love Epistles to What’s Lost

October 31, 2018

10:41 p.m.

Red Roof Inn – Room 416 - Armchair

New Britain, Connecticut

Been thinking about what’s lost, what this means, how to try to respond. Now this quiet, cheap, clean hotel room, an armchair, XTC’s brilliant *Apple Venus Volume 1* on my beloved Polly iPod. A list made a little while ago, in this room, getting up to 11,000 steps on my FitBit tracker, twas R.E.M.’s awesome *Document* that helped, & this list accumulating. Not complete, & what follows not everything I could say.

But some things I can say.

Learning better to let go & keep.

Here goes.

1. **Jellicle Literary Guild at Roma Restaurant**, many Saturday nights, New Britain, Connecticut, 1988-2001—Roma, your brown-panelled back dining room, where me & my brothers & a few sisters came about eight times a year to drink hard & raise hell with poetry, songs, stories, silliness; sneaking beers in by the case when poor; me most of those years on a two-hour Greyhound down from Boston; some of those years with copies of *The Cenacle* in my bag; & the last few tripping balls & couldn’t wait to be with my family, my true brothers & sisters, read my writings, hear yours, Jim’s gonna rock out on guitar; *we’re gonna change the world with our Art*; the numbers attending dwindled with the years tho I started dragging friends from Boston & elsewhere (like my Down South friend B.); & it was over in 2001, 13 years to the day, December 29; came back in 2008, in other locales, & quarterly very since. But *those nights*, your brown-panelled back dining room (now long gone). I have the recordings. Sweet secret food.
2. **Au Bon Pain Café courtyard**, countless often, Harvard Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts,



- 1992-2002, 2010-2016—Something new there now, pretty, the chess tables heavy wooden beasts in a daunting row, will outlast the nukes & the cockroaches alike; but then it was a *real* courtyard, up a couple of steps, surrounded by a low metal fence, four tall trees hung with lights, the stone chess tables nearby; I came to you steady for my first 10 years living in Boston, from my days at grad school, bookstore jobs, joblessness, in love, heartbroken, with friends, even a couple of girls; but mostly it was me writing crazy high happy at my favorite table; the Spanish guitar player crooning Clapton on the sidewalk; the big black man nearby selling his homeless newspaper; the college girl asses tick-tocking by; me filling pages, my Walkmans full of long hair hippy rock music new & old; I moved 3000 miles away for years & still dreamed of you; & returned East in part because of you; & I am so grateful I had you those years when I was beginning to become myself.
3. **Jim Burke III**, profound friend from late 1980s to 2011—when you left for the Stars, to become one, that being your belief for what death is, & I hope something like it's true; too many things to say, but at least a few here: leaving JG meetings at Roma in New Britain, drunk, high, both, laughing, speeding in your beloved Pot-Mobile, Led Zeppelin loud & glorious on the FM, & I am urging you *not* to drive on the left side of the road, & your blue eyes twinkling, agreeing reluctantly; your guitar playing to my writing, read aloud at JG & elsewhere, you just playing it, no rehearsal, no preamble, *you could just play*, compose it on the spot, brilliant yet *no no no* ego in it; you floating in the water of Walden Pond, home, utterly home, & happy. You showed me how big & beautiful & wild & weird & wonderful Art could be, *a joy medicine to share with all*.
 4. **Mimé aka Ida Cohen**, my grandmother, known most in my youth (1970s-1980s)—You brought me books. You were kind. You told funny stories about working in the thrift shop with your friend Anne. My dad loved you like I love my own mother-in-law now. You read biographies. You loved Gilbert & Sullivan light operas. You called me Raymond years before I preferred it to all. I was too young to converse with you properly, to discover who you were, not simply & passively enjoy what you were *to me*. I love biographies too, especially of writers, musicians, & artists. I've saved Gilbert & Sullivan, not yet tried. I hope I like them too.
 5. **Hartford Courant paper route**, daily, Newington, Connecticut, 1977-1983—I had one before it, for just a week, & liked doing it, liked the money, me 13 & no allowance; my dad went with me for a year or two, 5 a.m. Monday to Saturday & an hour later on Sunday, every kind of weather, a coffee & donut afterward, up on the Berlin Turnpike, Mr. Donut; eventually it was me & my shopping cart every morning, up Robbins Avenue & over to Main Street, eluding dogs, chasing missing customers to pay their bills, going into town every Saturday to pay my own bill & keep the rest; the Christmas tips I'd use for family presents; the radio show I made up in my head, *Sports Page Show*, reading the headlines to my audience & commenting, discussing the imaginary football league I wrote a newspaper about; all through high school, evil hell, & into college, but burning out, late & late again; "You're the best paper boy we've ever had, Ray, but you've been late most days for a year. We have to let you go." Every job since compared to you. Only a few as good.
 6. **Sports Page (1973-1983)**, my fictional newspaper about the Connecticut Football League—published weekly, written by hand using red mechanical lead pencils on lined sheets in 3-ring notebooks. Games won & lost by throws of two dice. Twelve town teams at the beginning; 60 toward the end. 50 games a season, 4 seasons a year! I was a star quarterback in it, won many championships. Like my paper route, college distracted me away. A salve when few others existed.
 7. **My books**, accumulated from early 1970s to 2002—left in my friend M.S.'s basement & most lost in a flooding; my many *Hardy Boys* books, boy detectives, from my Mimé, inspired me to try writing fiction; many of my *Wizard of Oz* books, much of the reason there are Bags End

- stories now; much poetry that schooled me in what possible in written music, & how deep it can go, *must go* to matter; I have books now but when what I collected & travelled with so many homes so long, so many were lost, I didn't try to replace them really. But then I do on occasion, & the seeming lost thrill rides high my heart's skies!
8. **Bauhaus Coffee**, corner of Melrose & Pine, Seattle, Washington—it was 2002 I'd guess my friend S. introduced me to this place, me newly moved temporarily into his house, transplant from the East Coast; punky place, graffiti's bathrooms, two-story-high bookcases, a mezzanine whose prow looked through tall windows in the direction of the Space Needle; KD & I lived near it 2004-2007, & visited it a couple of times after (sadly, closed down in 2013); I loved writing high & happy at you, Bauhaus, till 1 a.m., when KD & I would walk home, laughing.
 9. **Coffee Time Coffeehouse**, NW 21st Avenue, Portland, Oregon—unlike Bauhaus, not gone, tho not open late anymore; it was 2002 also I discovered this deep cavernous joint, room after room, booths, armchairs, corners, old lamps, great strange music, friendly weird folk there; brung KD there too, & we lived near it 2007-2010; so many Saturday nights writing for hours in a beloved armchair, & when in those years jobs & loves (before KD) came & went, I came to you to hide, hunker, find a new way; a friend to me, a dollar or none in my pocket.
 10. **Sheila Bunny, Blondys, Betsy Bunny Pillow**, late 1970s-early 1980s—I have most of the Bags End friends that inspire the stories, but I have none of you. You are memories I hold onto & keep fresh with new stories. But I wish I could hold your fragile forms in my hands again.
 11. **R.E.M.**, rock band from Athens, Georgia, quartet from 1980 to 1991—*You guys were my Beatles*. From 1987's *Document* to 1996's *New Adventures in Hi-Fi*, I loved your music dearly & obsessively. I bought your every new LP & saw you twice in concert. Your music made me, *makes me*, unbelievably happy. When your drummer, Bill Berry, left in 1997, for health reasons, I hung on for the five albums & 14 years that you continued as a trio. I was sad when you broke up, relieved. Sad. *Your albums are happiness*.
 12. **Long-ago family Thanksgivings**—A poor family, too large for its means, two religions, all that, yet Thanksgivings my parents cooking together, my siblings & Mimé all at one table. A cessation of ongoing unhappinesses. Proof it was possible.
 13. **My friend G.**, known about 1984 to 2004—Too much to say but a few: watching *Dr. Who* with you, *Star Trek: Next Generation*, Jim over my apartment too, all drunk, laughing; the messy pastiche-y novel we wrote some years (still in my possession somewhere); your brilliant fiction; the year you took me in from my West Coast failures, broke, heartsick, took me in, & I say tonight, years & miles away, *thank you*, you saved my life & I didn't say thank you enough. *Thank you, brother. I wish you every happiness*.
 14. **Carnal Street, ZombieTown, Mass.**, half-real & half-imagined, 1995-2002—I moved this far from Boston because I was poor, bookstore jobs paying what they do, not living on grad school loans like I had, & my path from my one room hovel to the civilization of Boston & Cambridge (via 20 minute train ride) was through an ancient cemetery where I gulped nervously & befriended the spirits there; & down Carnal Street, its old industrial buildings & unused train tracks, Italian restaurant, gun club; so many Saturday nights returning home 1 a.m., tripsmilingballs, & a stop to sit on the "60s Rock," a granite block, to write, & then across the street to Rohm Tech building's cobwebby steps, *Grateful Dead Hour* on my Walkman &, haha, walking your center line, eyes closed, to see how far I would dare, *would I fall?* I never did; that first acid trip weekend with my friend D., Sunday night return home, & walking your stretch took hours to my awed mind. You're fixed up now, a bike path, river park nearby, but ambered in my heart as that long ago cobwebby & beauteous thing.
 15. **Jackson Road, Bloomfield, Connecticut**, lived 1969-1977—I created *Sports Page* there from love of those empty lot football games we neighborhood kids played, & Oscar Madison the slob sports writer on TV's *Odd Couple*; the neighborhood kids were all black but me, & it did

- not matter for the longest time. *We were kids*. Ray, Kevin & Kimberly (twins), Lisa (their older sister), Peanut, Punkin, Terry . . . girls & boys playing together. A gang. A tribe. No money but for nickels & dimes for the Good Humor truck sometimes. When my white friends from school visited, you all looked at me weirdly. When we hit our teens, the looks never stopped. The world poisoned our gang. I lived so many years of my youth there as a fully accepted person that I no more judge people by skin color than dogs do by fur color. Only the evils of politics turns skin pigment into *us & them, better & worse*. I've never had a real neighborhood like that since.
- 16. Drinking with Buddies**, 1986-2001—Began after work nights at my first office job out of college, Lewtan Industries in Hartford, Connecticut. Bar around the corner; Budweisers; Michelobs if I felt like fancy; bitching with my boss about his boss, & uncle; continued with G. & M.B. at that old rock dive Rosie O'Gradie's in New Britain, the angel over the bar, the heaps of toys & stuff on the walls, the band room where Fang poured out psychedelic garage band brilliance on Friday & Saturday nights; those JG nights at Roma, & perilous drives home with Jim; till LSD helped me see booze as a numb, & poor one, to my old sad family times; till Burning Man Arts Festival 2001 when I turned down friendly offer of a liquored slush, & never looked back; except to recall those drunken merry faces, roaring singing crying the night, *for love, for fucking, for music, for understanding, for peace, for friendship forever*—
- 17. Tripping with my friend D.**, 1997-1998—You so brilliant, so funny, so unassuming of how you changed my life. Those visits to your house, those tabs you freely shared, mushrooms, weed; so many Dead shows we listened to; *X-Files*, *Simpsons* shared our magic space; your weird music-making on your computer, your beautiful guitar playing. You're a fine soul, no matter the pathos in your history; a good & decent man, *you saved my life, thank you*—
- 18. First Kisses**—I didn't kiss a girl till I was in my 20s, & years thereafter many arid stretches. But I did kiss some, with shock & wonder, & tonight I can say to each of you: our first kiss lingers with me more profoundly than all of the brief bliss & eventual hard shit that came after. Each one of you was, for a moment, that first kiss's moment, exactly what my life wanted to be. I've kissed KD countless times but the same wonder remains in it. Every kiss is our first. But all of you prepped me for her. So thank you for that.
- 19. Woody Allen**, his films from 1980's *Stardust Memories* to 1999's *Sweet & Lowdown*, & the earlier ones I saw on video again & again—Woody, I gave up on your films not long ago. Had a night to myself & tried three of your recent ones. *They were so bad*. I refrain from judging your personal life, since the media loves sensation & scandal, & I don't believe I'll ever be privy to the truth; but I do know that for 20 years you were *hands down* my favorite film director. *Hannah & Her Sisters*, *Deconstructing Harry*, *Sweet & Lowdown*, *Crimes & Misdemeanors*, & so many others I saw countless times. Your art, your craft, your comedies, your dramas, your love of old music. I hope one day you get that magic back again. It's possible. But thank you for your singular genius. *Thank you so much*.

* * * * *

November 1, 2018

3:40 p.m.

On board Hartford, Connecticut-to-Boston, Massachusetts Greyhound Bus

- 20. XTC** was a rock band from Swindon, England, from 1972 to 2006—began as a kind of spastic sort-of-punk band, evolved into an amazingly fierce beautiful force of rock-n-roll. Best way to briefly describe them is to paraphrase what my old Book Exchange boss wrote on the label & taped to the store's copy of *Skylarking* (1986): "For those looking for the next Beatles, here

- they are.” I’d already found my “next” Beatles, in R.E.M., but was happy with two. Their lead singer & songwriter (for most of their songs) was Andy Partridge, a strange & brilliant man, a rare Artist able to take his listeners into the gullets & sewers of his obsessions (emotional, political, biographical, aesthetic) & gift them something of their own to take away. *Skylarking* is a wonderful introduction, though they don’t have a bad record. *Apple Venus Volume 1 & Wasp Star (Apple Venus Volume 2)* are finales to their career as amazing as The Beatles’ *Abbey Road*, The Doors’ *L.A. Woman*, & the original R.E.M. foursome’s *New Adventures in Hi-Fi*. I still wait for Andy & his mates to say, “Sod it, let’s bury our hatchets & make more music together!”
- 21. Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers**—started about 1976 in Gainesville, Florida, & ended 40 years later with Petty’s death, occurring only a week after they finished their 40th anniversary tour. Petty was the blonde maestro of impish cool, & his band have more great rock-n-roll records than some bands have great songs. Saw them a couple of times on tour, once at Great Woods Amphitheater in Mansfield, Massachusetts. I was about 9 rows from the stage. Tom an ugly motherfucker but *brilliant, funny, tender, fierce* ugly motherfucker. Their music makes me want to dance like a nut. “I don’t know, but I been told / You never slow down, you never grow old . . . ”
- 22. My friend R.A.**—We were the tightest of brothers from a long drunken night at a bookstore employees’ Xmas party, & on into the bar-crypts of Boston, back in 1993, till the juice seemed to run out about 2011. There were spats & silences along the way, just as there were epic debaucheries of poetry & red wine, dancing penniless in clubs & filching abandoned drinks; reunions on both coasts, swears of perpetual fraternity. If I knew you were reading this, I’d take a breath . . . like this one . . . & say: you are a singular man & a good one, a phenomenally gifted poet, great lover of birds & good food & dancing & sex & spirituality; I don’t know if we’ll talk again, or what we might say; regardless, & above all, you taught me about feeling *grateful* to the world for all of its wonders & weirdnesses. You hoisted me up from more than a few dark nights. You trusted me enough to introduce me to your friend D., who trusted me enough to trip with me. I wish you a long happy life. I love you.
- 23. My friend V.**—I think we got to be friends about 2002 when I moved from Seattle down to Portland. You took me into your circle when I didn’t have anyone else there. You were warm & funny & crazy smart. I wasn’t at my best, poor & heartsick, but you saw some value in me anyway. We lost touch for a few years while I was back East with my friend G., licking my heart’s wounds. But eventually KD & I were in Seattle again, then Portland, & we were reunited better than ever. The kind of nights when everything from sublime to ridiculous happens. Moved back East but we kept up our visits till not long ago. I guess that juice ran out on this too. I think you struggled with your own sense of self-worth, how what you had to offer stacked up with others. Sometimes you felt OK about this, & let it go. Sometimes it ate at you deep. I can only say to you this: worth, real worth, isn’t about money or education or fancy jobs or cars. It’s subtler than that, in how one treats others, the world, how one uses what one has to live curiously & empathetically & kindly. Letting go of the doubts, stringing together the moments of balance & beauty, that’s each & every person’s perpetual task. You do this far better than most. Take my love & best wishes with you on your rough & smooth path.
- 24. Graduate School**, New Britain, Connecticut & Boston, Massachusetts, 1987-1989, 1992-1994, 1997-1999—Got my B.A. in English at Central Connecticut State University in 1986. Work at Lewtan Industries, despite all the merry drinking, led me back to CCSU, for an M.A. in English, for a couple of years, till I burned out & dropped out. Tired of writing papers for teachers I had known too long. Another office job, an elongated failed romance, & decided *fuck Connecticut in all*, & borrowed student loan money to move to Boston in 1992. Two-year stint at Northeastern U. finished that M.A. Bookstore work, near poverty, living in

- ZombieTown, drinking & poetry with my friend R.A.; glorious nights at JG meetings down in New Britain; tripping balls with my friend D.; started *The Cenacle* in 1995; fuck payjob and poverty, & more graduate school in 1997, M.A. in Writing & Publishing at Emerson College. Never wanted to teach. Just read books & write. Be around smart funny people who weren't ignorant to the wide strange world out there. Since 2000, been a technical writer, nice living, paying back all those loans. Miss that way of life. It was not sustainable.
- 25. Bookstore Jobs**—Waldenbooks in Hartford, Connecticut for a stint in 1987 or so; Book Exchange in Plainville, Connecticut in 1988-1989; Harvard Book Store in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993-1994; Quantum Books in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994-1997; University Bookstore in Seattle, Washington, 2002; Borders Books & Café in Bellevue, Washington, 2004-2005; No Borders Free Bookstore, Black Rock City, Nevada, 1999-2009, 2016—no wonder I miss it! Like grad school, an environment of intellectual ferment & strange delight. Books attract only some of the larger population. Not a judgment but certainly true. I sold bestsellers, pornography, rare volumes, technical books, books signed by famous authors visiting for the day, tiny books, huge ones, & even printed some up & gave 'em away for free in the desert. I see bookstores closing all the time now & know for sure this is a bad thing. Cell phones won't successfully replace books long-term anymore than CDs replaced vinyl LPs. Hadn't bought a book in awhile, & no bookstores down in New Britain, save a wall of them in a Goodwill. One for me, David Mitchell's *Bone Clocks*; one for KD, *Lucy's Bones, Sacred Stones & Einstein's Brain*. It's weird & sad how I can afford them now because I no longer work in bookstores.
- 26. Hartford, Connecticut**—born there, lived there a few early years (1960s); 1981-1992, spent much time in; 1992-2002, visited occasionally, usually as part of JG trips down from Boston; 2010-present, a rare day spent walking around, remembering. Hartford in the early 1980s was old-fashioned & sweet & yet decaying; not too different from my Mimé's many years living there. Two big department stores, G. Fox & Co. & Sage-Allen. Nice library, museum, parks. Little eateries & shops. Coming there on the bus during high school hell years, I could lose myself from all-that-back-there for some hours. Hours at the library, hours walking around, books & notebooks in hand. Was it as simple as the arrival of suburban shopping malls, & the expense of downtown parking, that killed it? I don't know. Walked around it yesterday, first time in several years, & there was so little left I'd known, & what there did not spark my curiosity. I fled by bus in relief. I think some things lost are the thing itself, but sometimes it's more a time in one's life, & what the thing meant then. But sometimes it might be somewhere between the two.
- 27. Burning Man Arts Festival, Black Rock City, Nevada**, attended 1999-2009—It's still going on annually, though I've not been in a decade. Every year printed up several dozen titles, famous writers I loved, writers I knew like my friend R.A., dozen copies of each title, & trekked out to the Black Rock Desert to camp out, wither in the sun, freeze at night, bike everywhere, love the great crazy art there, & set up No Borders Free Bookstore to give out my wares. Trip 3-4 times over the course of the week, dance at the burning of the great Man at week's end. Early years barely made it year to year, so poor (living on student loans or bookstore jobs); KD went with me the last six years, & our project flourished. We drove our beloved car Sydnee, packed her full; it was amazing & haunts me to this day. Never had joined others in creating something so grand, *all about Art & Community*. Maybe I'm scared I would be disappointed in returning now, or not be up to its challenges. I don't know & don't know. Burning Man's motto is "Leave No Trace," but I feel a thousand of its traces upon me still.

* * * * *



5:37 p.m.
 South Station – Train Terminal
 Concourse table
 Boston, Massachusetts

One more location, as familiar as that Boston-Hartford Greyhound route. This concourse has changed many times since when I would visit here to write, first moved to Boston in 1992 & thereafter. To conclude . . .

- 28. Land's End Phish Chat Room** (1998-2001)—Finding others who share your passion is a precious, marvelous thing, especially when it's music, & the music is Phish & other jam bands. For all the down & dark sides of the Internet, I can say I met some amazing people in this room, discovered much great music through them, & made many friends I would camp with in person on Phish tour, & meet up with at other shows & at parties. I didn't have to explain my hippie ideals or love of psychedelics because they were with me on these. I wish I had not lost the connections but my path veered elsewhere, & Land's End was eventually gone. I still go to Phish shows when they come to Massachusetts (once every year or two), but the phamily I had for a little while is scattered. *Thank you for sharing the groove with me.* Phish, by the way, is yet another "next" Beatles for me.
- 29. Saturday Morning Cartoons**—as a kid in the 1970s, I didn't think twice about Saturday mornings. It was all about the three TV networks' cartoons from 8 a.m. to noon or so. *Bugs Bunny, Scooby Doo, Sigmund & the Sea Monsters, New Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh*—I went well past being a kid still loving these shows. Most were silly, dumb, derivative crap, like prime-time TV but, also like prime-time TV, a few, like the ones mentioned above, were great, unique, special. Nowadays there's a million TV outlets, & shows can be streamed on demand, online, etc. And that's good in its own way, of course. Variety & availability. Still, I miss when it was relatively few, & you had to be in front of your TV, on time, every Saturday morning.
- 30. My friend M.B.**, known well about 1984 to 1995—balding, moustached, bookish, guitar player & composer, poet, writer, funny as it is possible to be, in love with old books & old ideas, & yet also with hippie 1960s' music & ideals. We wrote together, drank together, smoked weed together, created zines together, walked for miles & miles around New Britain, played LPs & dreamed of golden days to come from the depths of Reagan's America. I haven't seen you in 15 years, M.B., wouldn't know how to find you. I have your writings in old *Cenacles* & the many cassettes of music collages we made together. I wonder: *what are you reading? What are you writing?* I am guessing you despise Trump & how he has ruined your beloved Republican Party. *What deep & silly thoughts are you thinking?* Thank you for those years of friendship, nights at the JG, listening to you wail on guitars with Jim. I hope you are well, brother.
- 31. My friend M.S.**, known 1987-2003—a big man, a big laugh, a warm heart, maybe the warmest, a lover of hockey, especially the Hartford Whalers; a lover of poetry & philosophy, deep esoteric spiritual thought; an amazing poet & pretty good at fiction & prose-essay too; a film geek as much as I am; ever sober yet fine & roaring with laughter when JG meetings became drunken debaucheries. Your family's apartment building's basement is where I lost most of my books in a flood, & yet all my precious notebooks were OK, & kept safe for me. I'm sorry, M.S., that when you declared yourself a woman that I did not get it. I was not supportive. I urged counseling to figure it out. I think now that you didn't need advice, or judgment; *you needed support & love.* I didn't know. I was wrong. I hope you have found what you desired, & people to support you every sure & unsure step of your way. Your great, fine spirit lingers with me. I'm glad there's more tolerance & understanding these days for how wide the range of human identity is, & how it's all valid & good.

- 32. My friend S.**, known 1999-2005—We met at Burning Man, we shared its ideals. *No Spectators. Leave No Trace.* We tripped together & laughed together, & you let me stay in your extra room that year I came out West to chase a heart's waning dream. You were smart as fuck, gifted, decent, yet haunted by your youth, the love you missed. Eventually, our paths diverged & the few lingering emails ceased. I hope with the family you & your partner have created that the deep chasms in you are filled, or more so. I hope you are somewhere tonight playing your guitar, or making someone laugh, or reading a book as fine & subtle as you are.
- 33. Barack Obama**, known at a distance, 2008-2017—The day after you won the 2008 presidential election, I was laid off from my job in Portland. You spent 8 long years trying to fix the economic meltdown you inherited on taking office, & fighting off ceaseless racist attacks on your legitimacy. Yet life for many got better off during your time in office. Though not perfect, not progressive enough, unable to trade cool reason for trench warfare with those who easily did, you moved the country & the world away from the 9/11 terror tactics of Bush. My radio show played your weekly address for 8 years, & sometime SpiritPlants Radio aired your speeches. It's centuries since Trump & his rabid dogs arrived to succeed you. A jealous, petty, inarticulate, *dumbass of a man*, he has tried to dismantles all the good you did. Some remains. Memory of how it was with you remains. He can't wipe that out by Executive Order, & it will eventually undo him. You were the first black U.S. President. That was amazing enough, something my childhood friends on Jackson Road might never imagined could happen in their lifetimes. You were a good president & are a good man. *Thank you so much.*
- 34. 1960s**—I was hardly a schoolboy when they ended, yet they have haunted my years, especially since those days with my friend M.B. in the depths of the 1980s when their colorful crazy idealism, their tragedies, their weirdnesses & hopes, were mocked by most. Cocaine & Wall Street greed offered as substitute. I know the music, the books, the films, the styles, the heroes, the villains, the thinkers, the writers. But I feel like so much time has passed they are hardly a living thing for most. Like the 1940s were for me. Heard of them, don't know a lot but that war. I'll keep you in spirit close for your live beauties in my heart. It's what I can do.
- 35. My friend B.**, known 1996-2003—fine artist, sweet friend, as Southern as Spanish moss, able to drink most guys down under. We worked on *The Cenacle* for several good years & you helped me transform it from a zine to a literary journal. You gave me my first Macintosh computer. You loved my writing & that made me feel good amidst my struggles. I don't think I thanked you enough, plainly, simply, for your good friendship, & all you taught me. *Thank you. My best wishes for your happiness.*
- 36. Myself**—We lose & gain with the years. People come & go. Gain & loss. The past accumulates while the future ever tells little or nothing. I am who I was in some ways, & not in others. I'd like back some of my idealism, but not all the raging ignorance. I'd like to become kinder & more empathetic, love who has not gone, & those to come, better, because of all those who I have known, all they've taught me, & given me. There's a line from a song by Shpongler I think of often over the years:

*Nothing lasts
But nothing is lost*

I'd like to understand that better. It feels like the kind of deep truth with bones & teeth to last. Thank you for reading this. It was a long time in coming.

* * * * *



D.C.
4170018
Boston, MA.

Judih Haggai



haiku
hidden under overgrowth
patience required

* * *

arise morning
runners, writers, dogs and birds
witness the sunrise

* * *

early morning blasts
fools and saints in headlines
here with my breathing

* * *

longer silence
sweeter meditation bell
each day more precious

* * *

bright blue sky
rustle of palm fronds
body breathes deeply

* * *

jerusalem birds
sage-filled garden
house of olives

* * *

dear october
each day a touch of cool
lingering sunshine

* * *

kibbutz dogs and cats
secret ownership
tenacious ideals

* * *

three plums in the store
only three plums and no grapes
night prayers for plums

* * *

pedal on
through the night
belief as fuel

* * *

chorus of jackals
explosions on the border
sleeping? no problem

* * *

mind plots mutiny
takeover of fingers
helpless to resist

* * * * *



Notes on Science's Progresses & Regresses

Excerpts from electrolounge.boards.net.

The Guardian reported recently that archaeologists in the Philippines have discovered a butchered rhino, alongside artifacts and tools that are human-level in sophistication, at a site that dates to approximately 700,000 years before present.¹

The tools and the pattern of bludgeoning and eating the rhino are unmistakably human, which is confounding due to the fact that, until recently, it seemed likely that our species was no older than 200,000 years old, and possibly younger. That we could have been off by over 500,000 years seems embarrassing. I find such things interesting.

If it turns out to be true that our anatomically modern species is that old, it would upend many serious ideas in modern anthropology. I guess that's what studying evolution is all about!

* * *

Archaeology can be a very fruitful discipline, but it often has very little to go on. When this is the case, a best guess can be way off. Although I have to say, being 500,000 years off on our dating of hominins is rather egregious. But in reality, the fossil record is generally far too scant to enable us to be very precise when we make our guesses. It's very difficult to reconstruct the past based upon fossils and, pertaining to the evolution of humanity and its precursors, the data just aren't sufficient.

* * *

As far as hominin evolution, the only avenue currently available to determining the facts is discovery of new fossils, and the process of carbon-dating those fossils. With radio-carbon-dating, we can determine the age of any fossil quite accurately. But having enough fossils from enough geographical locales is really the limiting factor. Counter-intuitively, we are still quite reliant on fairly primitive technology.

* * *

The problem is that most scientists, whose thought processes are steeped in atheism-materialism-determinism, don't really believe in much of anything outside of their narrow worldview. In a physics department, the concept of "mysticism" would be regarded with contempt, and is usually ridiculed. Even the smartest among us can be, and usually are, surprisingly closed-minded.

I wouldn't necessarily dismiss a person for atheism but, unfortunately, most science-minded people denounce any notion of the ineffable, the supernatural, the mystical, the religious along with it, out of hand. That could be one reason why progress in science is relatively slow these days. Almost all of the questions raised in the 20th century, especially pertaining to quantum mechanics, have gone unanswered—over almost a hundred years. And so far, there has been no bridge between the mystical and scientific, except in a few philosophical notions. Hopefully this will change.

* * *

The global population is almost eight billion now, and estimates suggest that it will go past ten billion by 2040. In all candor, my opinion is that it is too late. I believe that this whole crisis is a function of a human population that has spiraled out of control. It would be impossible to bring everyone in the world to our standard of living. And, as more are added, the potential for global standard of living increases just continues to shrink. I wish I had a solution to offer, but I don't.

The flora and fauna we see in our world are the result of millions, and in some cases billions, of years of evolution. As Rebecca Morelle points out, we have, in the last five decades, wiped out 60% of the animal and plant species that existed at the beginning of that time period.² It makes meaningful adaptation very difficult if, in a few decades, we can kill off many thousands of species that took eons to evolve. And once they're gone, they're gone forever.

Endnotes

1. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Butchered Rhino Suggests Humans Were in the Philippines 700,000 Years Ago," *The Guardian*, May 4, 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/04/butchered-rhino-suggests-humans-were-in-the-philippines-700000-years-ago>).
2. Rebecca Morelle, "World Wildlife 'Falls By 58% in 40 Years,'" *BBC*, October 27, 2016 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-37775622>).

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*“Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass.”*

—The Shins, “For Those to Come,” 2003.

xliii. Recover Something Dear

This is where I am come to, &
returned. Where I dreamed
to travel & explore, where I studied
from the Architect’s Tower, through
his great spy-glass. *This is where.*

The Tangled Gate is an ancient old
thing, more like the One Woods
themselves than crafted by men’s
tools & plans. I find myself lingering
it, passing through it a ways, then
lingering back to it.

Is it stone or very old wood or
cooled & shaped heat from the world’s
fiery heart? While gone from here
those years, a refugee from this
magickal Island, I tried to sleuth scholar’s
answers to its what & why.

Little & less. The oldest books quietly &
briefly told of a place of origins,
Woods where the world began, on an
Island more mystical than earth,
& a Gate to or from other worlds. A myth
to be little remarked, powerful old
heresy, alien & unuseful like a crag
of fallen star.

It's warm to my touch, not stone or inert wood. Like the live skin of a Beast, marked minutely with sigils & symbols, maybe an ancient tongue's most important stories. I wonder, as I sometimes do in deep dreams, what else has fallen from those far skies.

And at its great apex words I can barely see from below, but know by those spy-glass peerings, from my many dreams. Words: "*for those lost.*"

Again I pass beneath & choose to let it keep me this time. Not many steps & come to the great Fountain. Singing high its bubbling waters, compelling me near, *compelling me drink. Did I do so in those childly dreams?*

I don't recall it. I never started outside the Gate but deep within. Crackles with life, sparkling with a kind of madness, *drink, drink.*

How is it this water tastes like remembering?
Yet so. I drink with both hands. We calm.

Two paths to choose from, to left & right of this Fountain. *Which way?*

I think of the Architect, who taught me of this Gate & yet denied me waking entrance. Once I asked him how best to navigate it, since its paths shifted again & again.

He looked me dead on, as rare, his eyes a swooping stroke down my cheek, across my neck, among the more daring for attention clothes I ever wore for him.

One finger tapped his head, another his heart, a third his nose, but twice.

I think of the Pensionne, my adopted home, my dear teacher there whose nose often assessed & confirmed first & last. Miss all this fresh. Leave it again, sniff twice with this feeling, & choose left.

The familiar walls around me, twice
 my height, a dark thick mix of stones &
 vines. *Very alive*. The sky above me like
 the close, sweet, musical blue I knew
 in my dream travels here.

Something pauses me. *I am not dreaming*.
 I am *not* sure here, much as I wish
 to be. *Something*. I have my Blue Suitcase
 with me, & in it a box of colored threads
 I took from the Tower, behind a loose
 stone once hidden behind a couch.

I'd looked because he held me on that
 couch the day he sent me away,
 because it felt like beginning not ending.

His words gentle, salved my grief.
 Gestured the loose stone in the wall
 behind the couch. "That rock knows
 more of time than men can reckon."

Sang to me: "*The many kinds of time,
 oh! the binds of time! & how it looses
 to the air!*"

I return to the Fountain, kneel to
 open the Blue Suitcase, pull out the
 box of threads. Made of something
 warm like the Gate, swimming in sigils
 like the Gate. I count a dozen though
 the number is strangely uncertain
 to my summing. A legend inside. *For those lost*.

Ah beautiful. I study these threads, try to
 remember I once knew & loved this place,
 travelled it many times in dreams
 with my childly friends.

I want to remember.
I want to trust me as I did.
I want to love without caution.

Sniff twice. Select the green thread.
 The legend says of it: "*Recover something
 dear.*" I tie it to a stony hook on
 the Fountain. Begin again.

Move slowly now, learning again
 to walk here, learning new how to
 walk here. Do not feel the child
 I was nor the girl I bloomed
 nor whatever I am now, but like
 all of them. Ranging across my years
 like this a gift of the Fountain & its mad waters?

Occasionally there is a breach in the walls,
 not decay, nor time. The ruin of anger
 & blows. Yet the ground beneath my
 bare feet gentle like always, how my
 dreams remember.

I hurry. I dance. I remember a little.

I round a turn & recover something
 dear. My friends. *My friends!*
 From behind the hole in my bedchamber's wall,
 discovered only in childly dreams.

Too many to count. *Have they all come?*
 They crow & cry, squeak, jingle, click
 & howl. *Oh.*

Nothing to forgive. There never was.

* * * * *

xliv. Her Exile

There is no gap of time between
 us. Creatures do not live in the
 simple years of men, their straight
 arrow, their before & during & after.
 In dreams, this made sense, a part
 of how they live & prosper in the
 Cavern below the Tangled Gate.
 Time like the Wide, Wide Sea.

But I am not dreaming. *Is there
 anything different between us?*
 I want to ask them how they
 see me, child or woman, or the
 vague range I am feeling?

They wait. The White Bunny & her
 fellow Tenders. Three Giraffes.
 Bloo-eyed pair of Kittees. A number
 of Bears. The Turtle not a turtle.
 Even the tiny cackling pandy bear. Many more.
My friends. All of them. And yet.

I try. "I dreamed all of you back then.
 Through a hole in my bedchamber's
 wall, down a tunnel, to more tunnels &
 caves, & a great Cavern, where we
 would visit & play our games."

A few quiet sniffs. I think. *Remember.*

Human language spooked them. I tried
 to avoid it. They liked touch, dancing,
hmmmming together. Clustering up in dreams.

I try again. "I have been gone for a
 long time from this Island. Traveled
 to far places & lived years there.
 I've returned here, bid so by my
 dreams. By the Architect."

Many sniffs. They did not seem to
 like him or . . . something. He was
 like human language to them.

I look about this clearing where
 we all sit, perch, float calm
 upon the air. There's not even
 the twitching of a nose. A stray wind
 raises fur here & there, a few green spikes,
 royal purple feathers.

"I left here because there was to be
 war with the Mainland. The King
 my father was ready to return & reclaim
 his throne. It was a Kingdom he had
 founded when younger, long before me,
 with a group of men like his brothers.
 Of them, only one remained. He who had
 driven my father & his followers to
 this Island." I quiet a moment. "I knew
 there was more. But he wouldn't tell me."



The trees are bare around us, a few
fallen yet all lovely. A glint of
water in the distance. I find
this telling hard. I find it sad.

“The Architect also knew more than he
would willing tell me. I knew this
wasn’t a simple blood-feud. I knew
this Island wasn’t a defeat’s
simple exile.”

Remembering like this brings more
memories along. Strange ones.

Several Creatures have crept near to
me, better to listen, as though touch
amplifies their understanding.

I stroke, pet, smile these magickal
little beings, not animals, not people,
not quite like anything else. I don’t know why
my dreams found them, for years, or why
I remembered so well, a second life lived
at night while seeming quiet in my bed.
I don’t know what they thought I was then,
or am now, or if they knew a difference.

Speak again. “My father scared off
any Mainland invasion with his talk
of a terrible Beast in his harness, & the Gate
at his command. Made them deliver
tributes to assuage this Beast, though
the Architect told me in those last days
that the Beast did not consume them.
In truth bore them far away though
he knew not where.”

I continue my sad telling. “I’d known
this Beast as I had known all of you,
in my childly dreams. Knew what
my father the King did not, that he
was no threat. The Architect crafted a plan
to deceive the King & escape me from
the Island.”

Shake my head at my heart's old furies.
"I didn't want to leave this Island,
leave all I had known. Leave all of you
& the chance of seeing you in waking one day.
The Architect convinced me the invasion
would fail & I had to go. I fooled myself
into thinking he would come for me, that
we could be together somewhere else.
That I would convince him to return here
with me later on.

"He made no such promises. Yet here we are
again."

My mind is starting to fade now.
Remembering what happened more like
a fiction than those dreams at night then.

I want to finish. "He told me I would
be leaving on a boat come with new
tributes. Instructed my part. He took charge
at their delivery to the Gate, & thus
the Beast. I was given a black thread,
like the one in this box, & hid close by.

"When they came, I revealed & demanded
inspection. A frightened gaggle of ill-fed
dancers, with one Hero among them, easy
to spy out.

"As our soldiers watched, I knocked him
about the head, cursed, pushed him
down, & slipped him the thread. As we
tussled, him smiling & scoring a hidden stroke
of my breast, I told him to follow
the thread quickly in & out of the Gate,
& return safely, make for the boat.
The King my father watching some of their progress
from the Architect's Tower, his great spy-glass.
It had to look true.

"We sailed away unnoticed in the
darkest of night. The Hero came to
my cabin that night but my fool's heart
awaited my Architect, & used words
he'd given me to repel him if he tried."

More Creatures nearby now. *Hmmmming* to me very low & sweet. “He left a few of us stranded on another Island a few days later. Poisoned cups during a night of celebration. I was relieved though now looked to by a half dozen terrified faces.

“A boat came eventually. I told of our shipwreck. No longer a Princess from a mythical Island of pagans, I was now a traveler & scholar from far lands. My group followed me in this.”

They want me to sleep. “A little more please. Eventually, we returned to the Mainland; no victor in the war. I chose to keep my exile & disguise, even when my companions left me. I stayed in hiding so that only my Architect could find me, & choose our path on.”

I lay back now, to finish. “The Pensionne I came to, I eventually wondered if it was a last gift from the Architect. They knew me true & cared for me. I thought I’d found a new home, but maybe they were simply letting me rest, should I choose to return here. I never stopped yearning this Island, missing my father, the Architect, all of you. But for a long time I lived apart, unknowing to return. *I’d moved on. I hadn’t.*”

There’s more to tell but my exhaustion. My friends lead me slow & stumble into a deep bed of thick green ferns. I feel more fully like once I did, feel their love, so simple, so vast. I fall asleep &, mercy of mercies, I do not dream.

* * * * *

xlv. Traveling Troubadour

I wake rested in this endless bed of ferns & find most of my friends have gone for now. Creatures will come & go in whys I’ve never known.

Yet they've not all gone. Three of my
 dearest remain, & will guide me,
 my dangers their own, always, White Bunny,
 the gnattering little imp, the turtle
 who isn't a turtle.

I dawdle in their grasp & these soft
 green ferns. Wonder again how little
 I know here now. Why I returned.
A dream? That my old obsession
 summoned me, as I'd yearned, *summoned*
me return here to him?

Then I hear distant music, like a
 guitar strummed on the breeze, a man's
 occasional sweet voice. Tis the Traveling
 Troubadour I knew scattered many times
 back when!

My thread played out, I chance our path
 now to follow him. We move quickly
 from ferns to pathless chase.

These three know best how I would
 follow the Troubadour's music whenever
 we heard it back when. Rarely saw
 him & usually lost his music after a short
 while in pursuit.

But once. It was the last time. I'm not
 sure why he let me discover him
 as never before. I'd run as fast &
 never come close.

This time his music & voice led us
 on & on, my friends slowing for
 my steps even as I felt I was
 careening along. But his songs never
 drifted away, as usual, kept pace
 to my steps.

There is a clearing ahead we spy from
 bushes. I finger to lips hush my friends.
 Did they know him? I'd never tried
 to ask. We, I spy.

He seems a human man, big, nearly
 as big as my father, is sitting on
 the step of a small hut, strumming
 his instrument, eyes shut, a shining joy
 on his face.

Think to flee, do not, instead reveal
 myself to him, seat myself near to
 him, listen quietly his song.

Eyes sudden upon me, twinkling turquoise,
 a smile that simple glads me.

“What are you?” I ask, clumsily,
 sincerely.
 He smiles. “I was someone else
 long ago. Now I’m here. Do you play?”

Shake my head. But when he strums
 newly, my Creature friends begin
 to dance about & I join them
 as though mine own Dancing Grounds.

But not dancing for my father the King,
 nor from patterns & strange dreams.
 I dance as one partner to his music,
 spritely, happy, free. He plays & we
 all danced that day until well into
 nighttime, stars frothing into sky’s shore.

He paused in his playing after awhile
 & just gazed these many stars, a wonder
 in his eyes simple yet unknowable. Talks,
 as is rare.

“We’re from those stars. We all return
 there.”
 “This is not our native world?”
 Twinkling eyes upon me. “All is not
 as it seems.”

He plays on & on & somewhere in
 that night I slept & woke back
 in my own bedchamber, which of
 course I’d never left.

But now years later, awake in
 this Tangled Gate, I follow
 his music with near desperateness
 to hear, to talk to him.



But it fades & I cannot go fast enough
 to keep it, keep up. I finally sit
 beneath a white birch. My friends
 close to me. We wait. Hours pass
 neither day or night. I feel no
 hunger at all. Finally we nap
 lightly in a curled grasp.

The Architect walks up to me, takes
 my hand. Grim as ever but glad
 to see me. Leads me swiftly along,
 my friends close to me as ever.

We come to a black cave, silent within,
 seeming impenetrable to know.

He gestures us to enter, I stare him,
 gestures again, angrily. "Go. *Now.*"
 I want to say something to him but
 instead gather my friends & cross
 into its abyss.

Something shocking within but I wake
 unable to remember. Still beneath
 the white birch. No Architect.

I stand. Yearn the Troubadour's music
 to follow as before. Consider the collection
 of threads in the box in my Blue Suitcase.
 Choose the crimson red one. Labelled
 "*for greater understanding.*" Tie it to
 the birch's branches, & we then move
 along again.

White Bunny hurrying us.
 Imp gnattering crazily.
 Turtle is quiet, not a turtle.

We are coming to something soon,
 my bones jitter to its power.
 Very close now.

* * * * *

xlvi. For Greater Understanding

I come to you again. I remember you.
 We contrived Creatures from the air,
 like those I travel with. *I remember you now.*

The Architect told me your story, him I thought
 unknowing I dreamt you in Tangled Gate
 visits. You are far older than men,
 old as the earth. You were created
 long before men, to walk the earth.
One, none, many.

You were not given the rules by which
 to abide. A mortality. An I among
 many. You shifted, & split, & you did
 not die. And then you did. And then you lived on.

I did not know you then as such
 an immortal, untold thing. You were
 my friend, in dreams, in this Gate.
 I did not know why you came
 to me then. What I was to you.

There is a break in the wall near
 where I meet you again. Because
 we never spoke, I nod you toward it,
 & follow. There is an old log, half
 sunk in the earth. We sit. My Creature
 friends sniff once, & then doze in a
 cluster in a nearby tree's shade.

You are troubled, make me to feel
 it in you. I close my eyes, hold one
 of your great paws, listen you closer.

Danger, but not to you. To me, us,
men? I cannot understand.
 You are trying to be gentle.

I speak aloud, softly, firmly.
 "Show me what you would have
 me see. *Be not kind.*"

Suddenly, fiercely, I see. *I treble in time.*
 Tree, Tower, starcraft, but *here* in this
 Gate. I look far & see how the future
 is collapsing back. Human hands &
 faces reach back across time to salve,
 to heal the wounds *before.*

It isn't working, what dream-magicks
they try. Something familiar in this,
a knowing brushes beyond my grasp.

You cannot save this world from men
& they cannot save each other.
Something, someone else in all this,
but hid from my view, call for help.

Oh. I start awake on the ground
I've fallen. You're gone. My Creature
friends sniff me twice, & wait.

I remember something. That cave.
You were in there. The crimson
thread in my hand. *I think I know.*

* * * * *

xlvi. Reunion

I am near you, & I hesitate. We will
soon decide, & I am uncertain. Is it
braver to stay or go? Will either bring
you nearer me? You are not dreaming
this time. Soon you'll know me as
you never have.

There are many magicks in this world,
& I watch you walk among several.
Your friends gird you powerfully with
their love, their deep roots in the earth.
The cave you would enter to know better
is deep magick, & danger, but I cannot
get there, protect you from your idea
of the Beast as your friend too.

Near you, & hesitate. Follow you instead
as wind, as glare on water, as fallen
leaves, Lingering, like never before, like
the plain boy I long ago was, watching
one girl paint the air like twas
her fingers' canvas, watching another
dance vaporous among her 'witching
songs. I was humble. *I was nothing.*

Drift nearer & breathe once, twice,
 relax. Your Blue Suitcase. I affix
 myself as hummingbird, like old,
 & wait. Listen to you *hmmm* sweet
 with your friends. Music a hungry
 protecting braid they try, wish to
 return you with them.

I panic. *I can't let you go.* I begin
 to *hmmm* close to your ear, risk this.
 You distract, look around, but nothing.

But your friends sudden sniff twice,
 & I am exposed.

At the far end of history, where I landed
 in my escape, where I came from,
 escaping it too, looking for you, where
 I sent my Blue Suitcase from, to
 disrupt history, to give you & me another
 chance, there are no Creatures.
 There is no Tangled Gate. Or there
 wasn't either before I returned here.
 There was no Beast. This world
 was ending. Its many magicks
 were gone. What I do, *what we do*
now, is all for what's to come.

You look at me mutely. Beautiful,
 too beautiful. Youth's bloom powerfully
 about you, yet I reckon something
 old in your eyes, the drag of your
 years returned you here. To me.

We sit. The tiny one comes up to me,
 merrily noisy & gnattering at me in
 an ancient unknown tongue, cackles
 from lava from times fathomless.
 Sits in my hand, & I close my eyes.
 Enters my mind, pushing things around,
 re-ordering my ineffables. I cry out
 finally, & you mercy utter a word
 to retrieve her to your hand.

The long-eared one stares me
intently, & I strangely calm, lean
back, her in my lap, nearly dream.
She does not press or pry, but
salves & smooths, & I weary, &
I cannot respond, but to whimper.
Again your word retrieves. I remain crooked.

The green-shelled one does not
but sit in your lap quietly, protecting
you, guarding me away.

“I have no such friends as these,”
I finally say, more sadness than
humble truth. “I did not summon you
to harm you. *Please believe me.*”

You stand, motion me, bid your friends
wait. We walk apart from them.
You look up at the close blue sky,
your face still muted to mine.

“You asked me to find you here.”
I grimace, nod. “You’re greatly needed.”
You nod obscurely. There is a silence.
between us. We return to them.

I am no longer your teacher.

You pick up your Blue Suitcase
without a word. Your friends sniff
me follow at a distance.

I have to tell you now, whatever comes.
I know the helpless fear of ordinary men.

* * * * *

xlvi. Reveal

We walk a fair while in quiet.
To tell why I summoned her is perhaps
to tell all. And then words
run out, to let her consider & respond.

I find that I do not have artful or eloquent
ways to say these things right now.
Neither confidence nor surety
of purpose. Just a strange story. I speak.



“You are not what you seem, a Princess,
 a usual young woman. You are from
 a far far place, maybe now long gone.
 A beautiful place that decayed,
 over many millennia, until it was
 too late for those who lived there
 to save. It was called Emandia.

“You were sent here, as a child,
 to live in this world, of it,
 until one day you would decide
 to keep this place, stay here,
 or depart it, let it go dark.”

Her step is steadier but a little
 slower. She is surely listening.
 I want to tell of my part in
 this, how I built the Gate,
 how I contrived her role, how
 I had chased her so long, terrored
 sent her away from the Island,
 to protect her & the world, how
 I trembling summoned her back
 again. I want to say all this,
 but different words come. My guise
 will remain for now.

“They could not know what
 you would come to when they sent
 you off, but they gave you what powers
 they could. To dream powerfully,
 to treble in time. The Blue Suitcase
 you carry was my gift to you, given
 when you left the Island. Lined
 with power, protection.”

*It's not the moment to tell what
 I am in all this. Not yet.*
 A tightness in my chest argues this
 decision, but I talk on.

“I am learned. I see through shells,
 but I am just a man. I come from
 a time men have ruined toward
 final decay, & I will not return.”
True enough. Yet not enough. Yet I continue.

“I’ve come from beyond the Dreaming
to find you, to help you, & now,
finally, the Tangled Gate bears
our way together.”

She stops. Does not turn. Breathes
quick. Testing words. Speaks.

“What do we do?”

“Pick the next thread. They forge
our path.”

“How will I know?”

I want to assure her that she
will know, that her will & instinct,
the love of her friends, my counsel,
the deep power in the heart of
this world, will easily prove enough.
But I don’t. The only evident map
is what trails the steps we’ve taken.

What does her choice mean to this
world, to her? *Can she choose wrong?*
Does she, do these Creatures, survive
intact either way? Can worlds
with Gates built from dreams
trust these dream-stuffs to keep ever
stable in waking’s years?

I talk. “There are many threads
in your box. Choose one & we
will go.” It’s not much of an answer,
she doesn’t move, or speak,
as ever the pretty stubborn head
waiting for whatever words unsaid,
like she often did when I taught her.

Talk again. “The world is countless
mysteries to us, & yet we know
it cares for us by its own ways.
But the world belongs to something
else.

“You’d stare yourself blind into
the sun & never know, never be
sure, never be able to use for
your survival what little you
learned.” Stop there. More than
that to be said is just more words.

She nods. Turns to me & gestures
me near. Lays her Blue Suitcase
on the ground, removes from it
the box of threads.

Her Creature friends sniff me
cautious, & like this box even
less. I don't suppose they would.

She studies the threads remaining,
finger on her chin, stares a moment
into the weird blue sky here. Selects
the purple thread. "*A wish to heal,*"
says the legend. Smiles vaguely.

We stand. She hands me the end
of the thread. Shakes her head
at her friends, like an instruction?

"When you feel a tug, follow."
And then she goes.

* * * * *

xlix. The White Tiger

A turn & I have left my friends &
the Architect, the purple thread
trailing me. The path ahead falters &
I find myself climbing over debris
of vines & stones. Soon beyond the remains
of walls but the path clears again
as small stones, strange shaped,
placed at equal distances.

Then I discover who is placing them
& think me dreaming. It is the White Tiger
from the Pensionne! My friend, my
next teacher after you, Architect.
A Creature yet not like the rest then
from my dreams.

I worry this strange place will render us
strangers to each other but when you turn,
see me, approach me, bow your beautiful
striped head for my embrace—

For a moment, gone from knowing.
For a moment, simple, happy wonder.

They let me sleep many days when I arrived
 there. I had brought no treasure but was
 told the Pensionne kind to poor travelers.
 My room was small but with a tall window
 for sun & stars. They put me to work
 in the Great Garden, eventually, where
 I met you.

I found peace in the Garden, from
 the frequent talk of the distant war,
 songs I heard extolling the King my
 father as a returning hero, half a god
 in his armor. Greed everywhere for
 news of the battles, a hunger for violence
 against the zealots who had stolen
 so much. *A deviling wish to burn them all.*

The Garden my domain from before light
 to late afternoon. The many faces of the
 many blooms, the shaking leaves in
 the wind of its beautiful white birches.
 Like a music I tempted to dance, like
 the dreams of old but, tired & sad down deep,
 I refrained. I did my work tending
 this Garden. I was quiet.

Sometimes scrubbing hours in the kitchen too,
 after the dinners, the one meal of the day
 not nuts & fruits. Good work to lose
 my memories in, water's hot breath
 calming me, keeping me focussed on
 the simple task. When the war songs
 began, I would step out quietly.

Then I noticed something moving in
 the Garden, swift & white. A trace
 of blue eyes. Another time & again.
 I asked the women in the kitchen
 but they just laughed. "The White Tiger
 appears to a lucky few, young lady, like
 yourself, but never too close. Not a danger."

I hadn't felt my old curiosity in so long
 & yet now wildly so! I even dreamed
 I was back with the Architect in his
 Tower, & asked him.

Tapped his head, his heart, nose twice, but
 I stomped.

“No. Tell me.”
 “I don’t have to. He will himself.”
 “He’s not an ordinary beast?”
 “You know he’s not. He’s a Tender. Now
 you’ll be his apprentice.”
 “A Tender?”

His smile on me so warm & sweet,
 I practically swoon open, but
 then he’s gone.

How did we meet? Why did he choose me?
 The Architect’s hand in it, somehow.

His beautiful white fur with its deep
 black stripes. His electric blue eyes.
 His teachings so deep in me the passage
 of time & miles did not touch.
 Like secrets for me to keep, a protection
 on them till needed.

I began to dream again like old.
 I began to dance at dawn alone,
 those last mornings there.
 Then you came again, my Architect,
 & summoned me return you.

You feel real now as I embrace you,
 the soft growl through your perfect coat,
 the sweet crooked angle of your pink nose.
 I show you my purple thread in
 a try to explain, avoid words you spooked
 over like every Creature I’d known.

You push close to my face, make me
 look you better. Your blue eyes
 are now flecked with the same purple.
 We will go together again, like old.
 Maybe your teachings will reveal?

* * * * *



l. We Ride

Creatures are humble, sweet, & wise.
 They know the world's secrets as plain
 as men know how to breathe, eat, sleep,
 They do not possess things, or each other,
 as men do.
 They are of this world as men are of
 their passions, memories, fears.

In my childly dreams they taught me
 of how the world was to them, ways
 which stayed in me even unto
 my travels far from those dreams
 & this Island. My White Tiger teacher
 gave my roving tangled grown mind
 better knowing of what I'd been carrying
 so long.

The *hmmming* is like the world's first tongue,
 before dressed in the party & poverty
 of language. For direction, for calming,
 for sharing the down deep of being,
 sole being, shared being, whether how
 men think in *time* or as Creatures think
 in *space*.

Sniffing is alert focus for mapping out
 safety, danger, sharing this back &
 forth. Somehow Creatures sniffed me
 friendly & my Architect not. The Queen
 had warned me sniff the intent of men
 near me but was this the same?

Creatures cluster for warmth, comfort,
 to share dreaming, to tender, protect.
 These things are for *survival*. Creatures
 are not lapdogs, parrots scolding in
 cages, kittens mewing in a basket.
 Clustering is affection & purpose both.

I wondered if they ate & did not know
 until my White Tiger brought
 me to a strangely *hmmming* clearing
 deep in the One Woods up the
 brown hills from the Garden, a great
 clearing where was a great kettle
 of marvelous soup, dishes & spoons
 stacked next to it. I did not eat
 again for days, & even then only
 by habit.

We *hmmm'd*, we sniffed, we clustered,
 we dreamed in colors so thorough twas
 like the whole world really a
 dream of colors, shifting, moving,
 delicious as that soup, world
 a colorful dream of *hmmming* soup,
 to be sniffed, enjoyed close, *obbbh*—

My childly dreams of what lay behind
 the hole in my bedchamber's wall
 woke softly with me, a knowing that
I'd been there again; that it was
 real, at least to me, & dreams were
 how I was able to visit there.
 Able to be with all of them again.

The beautiful White Bunny who
 could hop whatever far she chose.
 The tiny cackling imp who was like
 a merry chip from the world's first days.
 The turtle not a turtle who could not
 tell me in words what he really was.

The Great Cavern was where they
 lived, where our games & songs &
 clustered dreamings. They felt safe
 there, & warm, & we often found
 our way to the branches of the
 Great Tree in its center, or among
 its vast roots which ran to shadowy
 lower places.

Clustered, *hmmming*, soft fur, many
 colors, games so simple in dreams
 yet I could not untangle to explain
 by daylight's duller hours.

It was the White Tiger who later gave
 more bone & sinew to these sweetly
 recalled childly blurrings. He learned
 me slowly how linear my mind thought,
 how simple my hardest questions.
 He slowed & cohered with me.
 Finding him recovered me to myself.
 He was why the Architect led me
 to the Pensionne.

Now here, this Island home of mine
 returned, the Creatures rediscovered,
 & here my White Tiger friend & I pushing
 stones into place, restoring paths
 to a great length of the Tangled Gate.

The Architect's strange story of my
 origins in the stars. *What of
 this?* I'm but a strange, slight girl
 on a mad career.

Sometimes we separate & work
 at different paths, & I worry
 he'll be gone like he never was.
 But he finds me, head down for embrace,
 blue eyes flicking purple, & we go on.

Eventually come again to the One Woods,
 it is never far from here, & we walk side by side
 through its great trees. My purple thread
 running low, & I have to decide:
return, tug & wait, or go on?

When I reach the end, we stop.
 I think of my Architect, & my
 dear friends back there. Love them,
 adore him. Sniff twice, & look at
 my tender friend. *Really look.*
 His fur a wildly bright white,
 his stripes a moonless night's dark.

White & black. *Like my threads?*
 He rears back & roars with wonderful joy.

I tie the purple thread to a low
 tree branch. Half bury the box of
 threads among the stones at the tree's
 base. Tug. I hope my clue is
 clear to them.

My White Tiger bows low that
 I may mount him & ride. Now we
 can go at his pace, which as swift
 as the White Bunny's. *We ride.*

The swifter we go, the blurrier
 the landscape, & I seem to see
 other things. Outlines of strange
 buildings, vehicles. I look up &
 there are metallic crafts endlessly
 shifting form. Familiar without memory.

I feel purpose without words.
 A sense of hurry.
 Stronger than ever, *a wish to heal.*

Clustering blur of colors, sniffs,
hmmmming, dreams. A world
 without words. Without difference.
Passions, memories, fears.

Then out of the One Woods, up over
 a hill & there below a place I should
 know but don't quite. Several buildings close
 together among wide fields, but these
 buildings look half fallen, deserted.

My friend slows his pace, becomes
 almost hesitant. Sniffs twice. *Abh.*

I pat him quick, he kneels &
 dismounts me. We are here.
I am here, again. Somewhere, again.

He does not go further. I wouldn't
 let him. We embrace & I see
 his eyes again are their own summery
 blue. I turn & continue my path
 as he silently bounds away.

* * * * *

li. Entering Clover-dale

Alone, I approach. No threads, no teachers.
 The main building, the smaller one
 flipped over behind it. The tilted glassless
 barn nearby. Overgrown brown fields.
 Looks magic-less. Isn't. Isn't by far.

Here I am again, entering the main building, its
 exterior walls painted a terrified red,
 now as dryly crumbling as these steps are.
 Release to the earth as my bare feet
 touch them. But there is no real give
 in this place, no release in its tight,
 furious heart.

I enter the first room, dank & cluttered,
 filled with kitchenware, weapons, books,
 a tilting feeling that, long ago, packing &
 flight from here interrupted by deth,
 or despair. No need to sniff here.
 The crush of old air shoves me
 slowly forward. I come with new hours.
New hours aren't wanted here.

The next room shines with many reflections,
 mirrors, dirty pools of silver, warped &
 unknown instruments. An unseen light
 on these shows me as a child, a crone,
 a Queen, a beggar, a barebacked dancer,
 a Creature like my many friends, even
 something like a Beast. Me a Beast?
 These are my discarded lives, my refused
 choices, my missed chances. How I didn't
 live, how I won't die.

The Beast I linger to study, take her calm
 for my clue. She won't let me stay
 long, touches within me a panic like
 the building's old brutaled walls.

I pass on. The air becomes outdoors,
 chilled, & I find myself in a featureless
 desert slashed by the sun's winter heat.
 I walk & walk the hard, dry, cracked
 surface, long in approaching an exit,
 a door in sight. Hurry.

But first a hut, & within sits a small,
 exotic man. Old as deserts.

He totters out, makes to bow me like
 a servant. I shake my head, touch
 his small shoulder. His smile sweet,
 warm, green, fertile, like the
 Wide Wide Sea no matter whatever here
 appears to be. I feel in him the same
 calm power as my Beastly image.
 He is here for me, I am his effect.

Then he laughs, braying with delight,
 & begins to gnatter like my imp friend.

Not thinking, not feeling, not sniffing
 this time, I gnatter in return, high &
 low click-clicks & noise-noises. A kind
 of strange play, but I knew that.
 A kind of song too? The more we gnatter,
 the more we treble in time, & see this
 desert as long ago watery basin, as
 far hence filled with starcraft.

Then the push, something in this,
 he doesn't know, nothing here knows,
I must move on. World compels me.

“But what am I to do?” I suddenly
 say in my own tongue. A slight careening
 girl again. “Who am I to heal?”

The little man smiles his beautiful
 toothless smile, & motions me
 reck that door beyond his shack.

“Just play through, my friend,”
 he whispers. “Find the Carnival
 Room as you did. *Go now, Princess.*”



* * * * *

Ace Boggess



“What Is Hope to You?”

—*religious pamphlet*

fire-red
photoluminescent letters

blink

from rectangular
EXIT signs

above the prison doors

* * *

“Are You Telling Me to Go and Be Silent Because Now—Day is Coming?”

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1891)

Too many vile things on Earth for us to want to save it.

Breathing is like walking barefoot over the glass factory floor:

you think you're safe, but in back of your mind, a doubt.

We whisper about parents, lovers, drug addiction, ghosts.

How many nights have you cried on my shoulder

while the pissed-off moon glared down? How many

sunrises have we shared? Just one? Not even then.

* * *

“How Does One Not Come Apart?”

—question asked by *Andrea Fekete*

Husks of locusts litter the mulch: cinematic.
Yesterday, I saw a vine—leafy,
emerald, full—snake past my window
as though winged Quetzalcoat
carried elsewhere like a bullet train.
A gray squirrel ate a slice of pizza
while standing on the lowest branch of an oak,
the triangular meal resembling a guillotine’s blade.
That squirrel stuffed its cheeks,
forgetting how a few months earlier
the world came apart beneath two feet of winter.
It’s little things that melt the gold
to stitch our broken pieces into place.

* * * * *





Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

Black Holes

“Black hole sun, won’t you come, won’t you come?”
—Soundgarden, 1994

My father’s adoptive birth certificate was not registered until 1944. He was born in 1942, but adopted within three or four months, so I wondered about the long delay. When I did some research, I learned that, during the 1940s, America had a birth certificate crisis. We couldn’t keep up, with a war going on and all. Researcher Shane Landrum has explained in “Undocumented Citizens: The Crisis of U.S. Birth Certificates, 1940-1945” that, in 1945, “it wasn’t uncommon for a child’s birth not to get recorded by state offices.”

This was especially true for rural people, and people of color, who were often underserved or ignored by health officials. In August of 1942 alone, over 34,000 people were trying to get birth data. We were in a mess. Defense workers were required to show proof of citizenship, and some could not. Landrum reports that Alabama’s registration office had a “two-month backlog of work,” with clerks working non-stop.

It wasn’t just the war. States were using birth certificates to advance “racial bureaucracy.” A Japanese man who had been born in Oakland faced so much harassment that he had plastic surgery to appear more white, and altered his birth certificate so that it showed a name that was not Japanese. Anti-immigrant feeling drove the demand for proof of citizenship. Native Americans were also subject to these demands and unable to produce records.

In addition, the military did not want to support the children of women who could not produce both proof of marriage and of birth record. “Increasingly,” writes Landrum, “thinking about birth certificates became a mother’s job, part of how she secured her children’s birthright as citizens.”

It was also not uncommon for what was put on the official record about somebody’s birth to be misleading or incomplete, even when that person wasn’t adopted; or for there to be births that even people in a person’s family never knew about.

Recently, I found out that my grandfather had twins with someone else than my grandmother, while they were married; and although some people in the family knew about it, I never did. There were rumors, yes, but I didn’t even know those until I was an adult, and my cousin Marlon started talking about how his father hated Papa, and how we probably had cousins all over town. Even then, I wasn’t quite sure whether that was an exaggeration.

This is the same grandfather, Oscar Moon, who wrote the beautiful love letter to my grandmother that gave me the title for this memoir. I believe Papa loved Granny as much as he could love anyone—they were married for over fifty years, until she died, but clearly he had other desires that he followed as well. The fact that he had other children does not devastate me, though of course it was terribly painful to his wife. I would like to meet my unknown cousins.

However, I am far more troubled to learn that Papa was physically and verbally abusive to Granny to the point that she left him at one point and went to live with her sister Lola. I learned this

from my cousin (first cousin once removed), Lola's daughter Dot, who said Papa beat Granny around like a rag doll. She said he also once paraded the twins into Granny's house, with their baskets full of candy, when the other children did not receive the same treatment.

I'm still absorbing this news and coming to terms with it, as the Oscar Moon I recall was nearly always kind, loving, funny. It's shocking to learn he was violent with my precious grandmother. Lola's husband threatened his life if he ever came into their house, but then Granny went back to Papa. It's a thing that some of us today cannot understand, but it was not uncommon. She must have loved him, and she had thirteen children with him. It was hard to give up the life she knew and her marriage. She was religious, and probably believed that divorce was unacceptable.

My mother never said a word about any of this to me. When I asked her once why my Uncle Dexter hated Papa, she said quietly, "Daddy did things that would have hurt Mama if she had known about them." I wonder if Mama even let herself believe or remember the truth of what happened, given her vague response.

I read in *The Atlantic* recently that black holes have been caught in the act of cosmic creation. From what looks like emptiness comes energy.¹ The news comes just in time for me to glimpse what the black holes in my family are sending out like flashes that say we were wounded, but we are alive. It makes me think of a Bible verse: "Love covers a multitude of sins."

* * *

What is Lost in Translation

My cousin Michelle, my Aunt Sue, and I have put together what we think is a fair translation of my Great Aunt Savada's close handwriting that covers every bit of space on an old postcard from Tennessee, dated 1934, sent to Miss Dollie Hyatt, my grandmother before her marriage to Papa Moon. But first, some history.

The unmarried Miss Hyatt lived in Hazel Green, Alabama, which may appear to be a sleepy little town, but another formidable woman once called it home, and her story is due its telling here, where we have heard so much already of ghosts.

The woman, Mrs. Elizabeth E. Routt, has been described by Virgil Carrington Jones as so beautiful that her presence had a dramatic effect on most men. She was born Elizabeth Dale, the daughter and granddaughter of gallant military men. She was accustomed to plantation life with its fine things. She married first a Mr. Gibbons, then a Mr. Flannigan, both of whom died soon after marriage. Her third husband was Mr. Jeffries, who built her a dream home in Hazel Green, and gave her two children; one of whom, the daughter, died at age seven, having outlived her father by several years.

She was soon wooed by Mr. High, a North Carolinian and, three years after their marriage, he died as well. This time she would extend her bereavement for four years before acquiring as a husband Mr. Brown, a local merchant. A new, even finer house was built, on an Indian mound, and many festivities held there. Sadly, Mr. Brown would not be around to enjoy it, as he died the next year, leaving the widow Brown open for an engagement to Willis Routt, from which comes the name Elizabeth is most often called, although she is also known as Mrs. High Brown Routt, not bothering with the first three fellows represented.

It was only after Mr. Routt went the way of the first five that Elizabeth was put on trial for suspicion of the murder of each of her husbands. Her accuser was a neighbor, Abner Tate, with whom she had been arguing over loose farm animals and other matters.

Tate was shot by a slave, possibly hired by Elizabeth Routt, but he did not die, and she went to court but was not proved guilty ... of anything. Mrs. Routt at sixty was as compelling as she had ever been, and a Mr. Bingham sought her hand. This was convenient because Mr. Bingham agreed to address her problems with Mr. Tate by accusing him of the murder of a traveling man.

Tate wrote a book about Mrs. Routt, none too flattering, in which he mentioned the skeletons that gathered around her bed each evening, and the hat rack in her hall that carried each dead man's hat. The Mrs. left for Mississippi with her son, but not before first putting up a fight. She tried to get \$50,000 from Tate for defamation of character. She was not immediately successful and dropped the suit. We do not know whether Mr. Bingham, a schoolteacher, gave Elizabeth her seventh name. The house in Hazel Green was destroyed by fire in later years, when other tenants lived there, but the story is that the place is haunted, and the tombstones in the family graveyard there are untended.

We have not had enough of oddities, of mysteries, so let's return to the postcard from Great-Aunt Savada, and begin halfway through with her question to Granny: "Is there any mad dogs down there? Everything on the river is . . . mad foxes. The foxes is biting everything on the mountain . . . a 12 year old girl has gone mad. One bit two children on the river, and licked a little baby on the mouth. They are taking treatments. You all be careful if there is any down there. Answer soon."

Best to keep an eye on mad vixens and foxes running wild at rivers, mountains, and Indian mounds. As for Granny, I bet she got a hoot and a little shiver from that postcard, but then, she had her own den full of critters to manage.

* * *

Statement of Borrower

Among Papa's old papers, I found requests for loans from Martin Credit Union to help for such items as a payment for a 1940 Dodge car: \$286.00. He worked for Martin Stamping and Stove Company in Huntsville, Alabama for many years, retiring from there. The original company was established around the turn of the century by the Martin brothers; they had locations in Sheffield (King Stove and Range Company), Florence (Martin Stove and Range Company), and eventually in Huntsville. The collected businesses came to be known as Martin Industries.

During World War II, the company made heaters for the Army as well as bomb crates and other needed equipment. In the 1950s, the Huntsville plant began making electric heaters.

It was in 1955 that Papa borrowed the money for the Dodge. He signed a note that he would pay \$5 per week until the debt was paid. The car was from Venice, California. I have the certificate of ownership. My cousin Michelle explained to me that Alabama was known as the stolen vehicle state back then because no title was required by the state, so people would steal cars, switch the tag, and carry on with no difficulty. This is why it was important to keep the certificate of ownership; from what I can see, Papa and Granny kept up meticulously with all of their financial documents.

In January 1955, Papa borrowed \$165 "to pay house rent," and in September he borrowed \$100 "to buy school clothes," noting that for collateral, "wages, stock—you have all I have on a note now except a 1940 Dodge. Put it on it." Five men had to approve each of these loans by providing their signature. I can imagine Papa's embarrassment. In September of the previous year, he had borrowed \$300.00 for a 1936 Dodge Sedan, a washing machine, and a sewing machine.

For all of this, we have records. No memory is necessary. However, for personal interactions, for testimony and witness of family behaviors—actions, words, and feelings—records are far and few between. No one in the Moon family that I know of kept regular journals, and memory is affected by different factors. Charles Fernyhough has written in *The Guardian* that, "[m]emories are always being negotiated, fought over and shaped by the memories of others."²

I have witnessed this in my talks with Mama's family. In the trying to remember, there is a lot of "I think it was . . ." and "No, that can't be right because . . .," and one person's recollection being unique from another's.

At one point, when we were discussing Papa's violence toward Granny, Mama's sister Sue said, "I don't remember any of that, and I don't think Dot remembers it either." I could take this to mean

that Sue finds Dot's memory suspect, or simply that Dot may have been given the information by her parents and accepted as true when she did not see it for herself.

On another occasion, Faye mentioned that she thought Papa went out to California when he joined the service, and I replied that the letters he wrote to Granny were from a base in Florida. Later, when I ran across the Dodge ownership certificate that was clearly marked California, 1954, I remembered Faye's earlier remark and said, "Oh, I guess Papa did go to California at some point," only to have Cousin Michelle make the observation that the vehicle came from California, but it was probably sold to Papa in Huntsville, since his Huntsville address was on the back of it. It's easy to see how such a series of events can lead to a false memory that is then shared.

Sometimes we borrow our memories. Fernyhough observes that "the research on childhood memory shows that remembering is a fundamentally social process, and this doesn't change when we grow up." It is particularly troubling to us when someone else denies our memories, putting into question what are clear, vivid experiences in our own minds. It can create confusion, mistrust, resentment, and other problems between family members and friends. When Rick Bragg published his 1997 memoir *All Over but the Shoutin'*, people who had grown up with him said that the writing was embellished, that some events were exaggerated, that he had misrepresented some people's actions.

However, I would argue that Bragg's memories belong to him; they are unlikely to be the same as those of others, and as David Sedaris has said when he is asked whether his stories are true: "They're mostly true."

The responsibility, then, is for each of us to treat our memories with respect, but also with some careful consideration of the whole picture. This does not mean we must accept someone else's view that obliterates our own, and this is particularly true for victims of abuse. It simply means that, within our humanity, we have a healthy understanding that family memories are both shared and personal, collaborative and independent, and the best we can do is to reconstruct and deconstruct them as needed to move forward from them. I can make my Statement of Borrower, and sign it, and those who read it can take it as my witness to the past relayed as clearly as I could tell it.

Endnotes

1. Marina Koren, "Black Holes Caught in the Act of Cosmic Creation," *The Atlantic*, March 27, 2017 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/03/black-holes-baby-stars/520881/>).
2. Charles Fernyhough, "Shared Memories and the Problems They Cause," *The Guardian*, January 13, 2012 (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/jan/14/shared-memories-problems-they-cause>).

* * * * *





They Will Call You a Saint

They will call you a saint, look for you with antiquities
 under the arches of the basilica, line up in the vestibule
 to offer themselves in service to your memory; yes, a sainted poet,

after all, you gave them your sacred words, showed wounds,
 sacrificed yourself even, on altars, and they forgive you for it,
 the way you punctured their hearts and crept into their windows,
 kept them awake always with the literary canon fire.

Even now their eyes are dilated for the love of you, their pillows
 damp with tears or sweat, hot faith, devotion. Oh, to be a witness
 in the sacristy.

You've ensnared them, unawares. They can't go back
 to confession now; that's impossible. What they need they cannot get
 from a priest—compassion, protection, a personal gothic revival.

Here, in the nave, they will hope to find you on your knees in prayer,
 in monk's robes, light from the clerestory falling on your holy face;
 you said you'd be here, you promised. Nonsense.

Last night I traced the headboard and the sheets with my restless
 hands; I wanted to touch you but I wouldn't dare. You might say I set traps
 for saints and foxes and the last thing you'd do is follow that scent
 and be persecuted for it,

so I just came to lie down here on the ancient floor of the church
 in the midst of a hundred candles, and worship in my own way,
 recite your stanzas, your lines of pain and penance, your righteous
 anger.

Come if you want, my saint of flesh and bone. Come if you want,
 before morning.

* * *

Coming to Life

Michelangelo's commissions outnumbered his days on earth. The first art celebrity, he earned more money than he or you or I could ever spend, and left behind such extravagant and spiritual beauty that it brings admirers to tears, but sadly, he never seems to have had time for sex.

Even his two great loves, one a man and one a woman, may have been chaste.

His half-sculpted men and women wait to be released; they will always wait, like the couple in Keats' urn, always held in anticipation of ecstasy.

If we could call the sculptor back, and he could this hour bring his unfinished subjects to life, like God, His finger outstretched to birth Adam, would they be satisfied with their finished selves, their right to love and their call to passion?

What would they make of the after-glow?

Michelangelo's love for Tomas and for Vittoria acted out in a threesome, even, and him in the throes of a climax . . .

what would he say to those of us who are unfinished sculptures, on opposite sides of a wide room, but soon to be moved by the creator so that we touch, and the marble cracks,

and we take our first breath looking into each other's awe-inspired eyes?

* * *

Bus Stop Love

It's a mirror of rage and trees,
a salty tongue, an acrid leaf,
a knowing and a not belief.

A twisted range of smile and pout,
falling frogs, a plague of doubt,
a fist of pleasure, a day no rain
has come to make us whole again,

a rush of birds in darkened sky,
I don't know how or where or why
fast tires spread on new asphalt
and, in the end, it's not your fault.

It's clearly mine. A name unfolds
in beer or wine, a paper hat,
I told you that.

I told you this. An airplane low,
a forest mist, a wrecked up car,
an *I insist*, an anything that reminds you
of that first kiss,

It's 5 a.m., a sunrise rose,
a can you tell or just suppose,
a where I've been or no one knows.

A coming home (they say you can't),
a letting go of circumstance,
a will you stay, a wrought-iron black,
a turning stone, a wish it back.

Our love is liquor-bound and blue,
in what you said I mean to you,
on wooden floors of north and south
that tantalize a sullen mouth.

It's this way in, and that way out.

* * *

Car Parked Uphill

It's a steep hill; he has pulled the brake
on the Corolla and sighed again.
We've gotten out and locked the doors.
I've turned my ankle in these heels,
and keep apologizing

even though he isn't angry, just tired,
or angry with himself, the alter ego,
and at the parking meter
for which neither of us has any change.

We consider forgetting the concert entirely,
the one we were both so excited about,
clarinets and oboe, the whole brass section.

I go to get back in the car, in tears,
and the door falls back on my leg.

I'll have two bruises now,
but anyway he is at the door
in a flash because he's almost always kind
to me. *You've hurt yourself*, he says,
let me see. It's nothing, I say,
nothing, really. Let's just go.
We are out of money, and already late.

He takes a long look at me,
in my new dress, a slinky, low-cut affair,
and shakes his head.

We bought the tickets, we're here,
and you look beautiful, he says,
as he selects a curly cue section of my hair,
pulling it to tease me.

He draws me out the door again,
and, smiling, leaves a note on the car
for the parking attendant.

This hill is too damned steep,
is all it says.

* * * * *





Ton Pussy Est Aussi Précieux Que L'Or

It started with an earache,
expanded into excruciating kidney pain.

It could only be love.

I met her in the Ellesmere Port Library.
She was researching
a biography on Simon Callow
and was all dust and paper cuts.

I presented myself as fifty years older
yet arrogantly adept at getting wood,
largely due to her immaculate pussy,
which tasted and smelled of strawberries.

Not the ordinary kind.

I'm suggesting the south of France in June,
after a summer shower,
slightly and fortuitously damp.

I reminisce again now,
still depraved, deviant even.

Quite unable to observe the stars
because her knees are in the way.

* * *

Periods of Sunshine

Stranded, our hero has three ways
of getting back into town.
I have no idea what they are.

Some savior-like minority
will probably be introduced.
The symbolism is not lost on us:
Jesus said with an H.

Still, travels by donkey cart,
is a very affable fellow,
laughs at anything.

This phony contentedness is
racist, and wreaks of narrative elitism.
Good enough to string us along.
It's a link in the plot,
probably the reason I'm watching.

My kids don't understand.
They are all too well-intentioned,
respectful, and optimistic to
canonicalize a deity.

* * * * *

Dylan Thomas**Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night**

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Old age should burn and rage at the close of day.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

* * *

Among Those Killed in the Dawn Raid Was a Man Aged a Hundred

When the morning was waking over the war
He put on his clothes and stepped out and he died,
The locks yawned loose and a blast blew them wide,
He dropped where he loved on the burst pavement stone
And the funeral grains of the slaughtered floor.
Tell his street on its back he stopped a sun
And the craters of his eyes grew springshots and fire
When all the keys shot from the locks, and rang.
Dig no more for the chains of his grey-haired heart.
The heavenly ambulance drawn by a wound
Assembling waits for the spade's ring on the cage.
O keep his bones away from the common cart,
The morning is flying on the wings of his age
And a hundred storks perch on the sun's right hand.

* * *

Should Lanterns Shine

Should lanterns shine, the holy face,
 Caught in an octagon of unaccustomed light,
 Would wither up, and any boy of love
 Look twice before he fell from grace.
 The features in their private dark
 Are formed of flesh, but let the false day come
 And from her lips the faded pigments fall,
 The mummy cloths expose an ancient breast.

I have been told to reason by the heart,
 But heart, like head, leads helplessly;
 I have been told to reason by the pulse,
 And, when it quickens, alter the actions' pace
 Till field and roof lie level and the same
 So fast I move defying time, the quiet gentleman
 Whose beard wags in Egyptian wind.

I have heard many years of telling,
 And many years should see some change.

The ball I threw while playing in the park
 Has not yet reached the ground.

* * *

The Conversation of Prayer

The conversation of prayers about to be said
 By the child going to bed and the man on the stairs
 Who climbs to his dying love in her high room,
 The one not caring to whom in his sleep he will move
 And the other full of tears that she will be dead,

Turns in the dark on the sound they know will arise
 Into the answering skies from the green ground,
 From the man on the stairs and the child by his bed.
 The sound about to be said in the two prayers
 For the sleep in a safe land and the love who dies

Will be the same grief flying. Whom shall they calm?
 Shall the child sleep unharmed or the man be crying?
 The conversation of prayers about to be said
 Turns on the quick and the dead, and the man on the stair
 To-night shall find no dying but alive and warm

In the fire of his care his love in the high room.
 And the child not caring to whom he climbs his prayer
 Shall drown in a grief as deep as his made grave,
 And mark the dark eyed wave, through the eyes of sleep,
 Dragging him up the stairs to one who lies dead.

* * * * *



The Mother-in-Law Present

[Travel Journal]

i.

My surveying assistant and I enjoy swapping lies about our lives while taking measurements on the frozen steppe. We shuffle from foot to foot as we talk, stamping occasionally, trying to prevent frostbite in the toes. The ice crystals swirl about our feet, hurrying across the whitened ground. He tells me of the golden river where he easily dug one hundred ounces of nuggets one blissful summer.

“After moving one extra large boulder,” says he, “there was seven ounces spread out before me, like a bowl of spilled popcorn.”

And of course the water was crystal clear and the temperature was like a bathtub. Beautiful women were hanging all around the pile of gold like moths to a porch light.

“So why are you so stupid as to be here?” ask I.

Oh, this misfortune, that misfortune, sold the claims, new wife, new babies.

“But hey!” he says. “The gold is still there by the ton! Why, we only dug . . . and there was this place . . . and this other guy got . . .” *Ad nauseam.*

My greed is piqued. Next day, we gather all the information on the area. Due to my remote location, about 300 miles from civilization (library, bureaucratic center, McDonald’s), I can only get a crummy map of the area. Perusing the claim records, I am agog to discover that three-quarters of the area has no claim in it. A virtual research strike!

ii.

At home, I excitedly tell my wife. She says, “That’s nice, dear, but Christmas is a month away and you have to get a present for my mother.”

What? Is she loony? Here I am, discussing an empire of gold claims. A value that could be worth millions, just poised for the taking. *How narrow and niggling can life be?* Absolutely annoying.

A \$20 mother-in-law present. Christmas . . . *bab!* An impediment to progress.

Then clarity hits me. I can accomplish all my goals in one fell blow. I copy off a mass of claim forms and write up fifteen 80-acre claims. The last one is called “Mother-in-Law Sanctuary.” This I mail off to my wife’s mother with great fanfare.

Here the munificent, magnanimous miner is designating certain set aside areas to be maintained in perpetuity for all small mammals and the quality of life as ancestral tribes knew it. Green-speak.

“I proclaim this act as a conscious effort to preserve the ecology by the environmentally minded mining industry,” I write her.

I file all the claims with the proper authorities, (the courthouse and the Bureau of Land Management). Costs me about \$600. Much better plan than the \$20 trinket present.

These filing agencies are like used car dealers. Just sign here and pay up. No, we can’t say if it runs, if the transmission will melt within 100 yards, if there are 20 megalomaniacs claiming the same place. No mechanical or legal advice, just record and file.

I also buy better maps from the BLM of the claim zones. I peruse the maps for anything I have missed. *Horrors! Oh terror!* I have misread the meridian. All the claims that I just filed have invalid legal

descriptions and are technically *void!*

I have cross-staked on top of hundreds of other foam-at-the-mouth old-timers. I ain't nuttin' but a snake-eyed claim jumper! I can almost feel them out there . . . cleaning their rifles, carving my initials in the soft lead of a live bullet. The mother-in-law present is at best a lawsuit for claim jumping. At worst, a highwayman-style bushwhacking in some breathtaking natural setting.

I must try to rectify the Christmas present. When I search the records again, I find a huge river section on a more remote and wild tributary. Getting grandiose now, I file two claims of 160 acres each, a total of a half a square mile. In order to do this, I must put eight names on the claim forms. So I load it up with the mother-in-law's daughters, her sons-in-law, her husband, her postman, whoever I can think of. No problem that they are not around. I'll just act as their agent. File the whole mess with the courthouse.

Now to visit the place.

iii.

I turn off the highway and onto an old and neglected road, with fragments of asphalt occasionally appearing like some long forgotten skin rash. The oaks and moss hang over the narrow car-width track; low fog lays fifty feet overhead.

I pass a country residence with a hundred car junkyard. Squalid squire spreading his mangled mechanical malignancies across the scenic splendor. Like the eyes of some strange portrait, the real or imagined shotgun barrel follows me as I pass the junkyard shack. The hubcap shingles glitter through the gloom. *Will this truck join the junkyard? My body recovered 30 miles downstream?*

Mile after mile, up the one-lane track I traverse. Occasionally, there is another survivalist dwelling, crumbling pre-fab, beer cans and Pampers forming an encircling perimeter.

On deeper into the void. Nothing but worn dirt track. The tears from hundreds of years of settlers are sprinkled thick as dew in the crowding brush. As the road finally crumbles into chaos, I notice a notch in the fugitive flora heading for the river.

After parking, pointing my truck toward escape, down I go on foot, a faint vibration at my feet. Suddenly, with a last spider web in my face, I fall out into the open. Shear cliffs of blood-stained rock loom around me, their tops lost in the fog, their walls torn from the kinetic geologic process.

Before me is a jumble of house-size boulders, not river-worn but sharp, like a gravel driveway from an ant's point of view. Just ahead is the river. A protozoic swirling fume of thunder, foaming waters. Rapids tear through the gorge before me. Not the "take your chances rafting" type of rapids, but the "wash-away-the-locomotive" type. They shake the monster boulder field.

The low vibration quivering my every inch fills me with a dread sense of evil. Tiny creeks cascade off the cliff walls to join the maelstrom. Moss, creepers, and scrawny trees follow the water wisps up the cliff as though they are attempting to climb out of the terrifying gorge.

Obsessed now, though, I dig some gravel from beneath a boulder. To pan in the river is a trial, the water level rising and falling three feet in the pulse of the water. One slip in and I am pounded to pulp.

There in the pan is *gold!* Not some smooth, flakey, tamely type, but ragged pieces torn violently from their rock and thrown ruthlessly into this gorge.

Looking around some more, I find a cable. It's wrapped around the axel of an early 1970s road hog, windows smashed, tires flat. The cable is stretched tight. It goes right across the river about sixty feet above the flailing cataract. It's greased. *The tram-car is on the other side.*

Lord, help me, some hidden survivalist must be drawing a bead on me right now. I have an out-of-body experience looking down on my shot and perforated body, the gun shots sucked up in the river noise to nothingness like firecrackers under the surf.

That's it. I'm out of here. I flee back to the truck. *Will it start?* I'm panicking, sweating in the fog, no rubber necking on the way out, strictly business driving. The highway never looked so good.

The clouds part, and a ray of sunshine fills the cab, illuminates the Highway 12 sign. *I escaped.*

iv.

Back to the courthouse. The recorder is a dowdy middle-aged woman, her face pinched up like a crushed hamburger wrapper. Her bad attitude surrounds her like a force field. Obviously hasn't had sex since 1964.

Politely, I state, "I made a mistake on some of my location notices. Can I just strike them from the record?"

"No. What's recorded is recorded," like the snap of a steel trap.

"Is there nothing I can do?"

Sardonically, she replies, "Well . . . you could file a relinquishment."

"OK. OK. What's that?"

"This form here." She pulls a Xerox from the desk. "It costs you a buck a page, then \$5 to file it. Every person on the claim must be notarized. Then, after I record it, it goes downstairs to the tax assessor." She smirks proudly from her power statement.

"Tax assessor? What tax?" stupidly I ask.

"Every mining claim must pay a tax."

"Mining claim tax!? I never heard of anything like that."

Silence from her. Force field growing.

"What's this all about? This sounds illegal."

"Look, mister, I could call security." She lifts the phone like a Smith and Wesson.

"OK. OK. Where's the tax assessor?"

"Downstairs."

Must be hard to get extra words out of the force field. Let's see . . . downstairs. Is that 20 floors below, like the Spanish Inquisition, or deeper still, like hell? I follow an unlit two-foot-wide concrete staircase down and down, the mottled concrete walls appearing flecked with blood and spittle from where they dragged some resistant citizen, bumping and clawing on the stone.

A greenish light looms in the distance. The ceiling is only five and a half feet high. I have to duck under the plumbing.

Now deep in the catacombs, an artificially lit lair, on the counter is a map of their world all blocked off into colored zones.

"Excuse me," I ask the bouffant bureaucrat. "I would like to ask about this mining tax."

"Your name, please."

"Ah . . . no. I'd like to inquire what the tax is for."

"Please give me your name."

You pathetic monomaniac. I'll give you a broken arm but what spell will you cast with my name?

"Well, really, I only came to ask about this tax." I try the sweet tone, but seems to not be working. Now she's shifting from foot to foot.

Screechily, she says, "But I must have your name."

"Charles Brown," I blurt out. Her stiffened body relaxes as she fluidly glides over to her filing cabinet. Like an ostrich burying her head in the sand, she seems to disappear past the neck into the cabinet. Soon, she's up for air.

"Oh yes, Mr. Brown. You have quite a few claims." She pulls a three-inch-thick dossier from the file. I smell my own fear.

"Would you like to make a payment? A payment?" She must be nearing some kind of bureaucratic trance.

"No. No. I don't want to pay anything." She deflates.

"But what's the rate, just out of curiosity?" She inflates.

"Well, Mr. Brown, it's quite variable."

“OK, varies between what?”

“Well, it’s different for every zone.” She’s shuffling again.

“OK then. Zone 6.”

“Oh, Zone 6.” She’s massively relieved. I’ve given her something to fixate on. “The rate is 12.36% of appraised value per cubic nautical mile to the half power, divided by 646.9.”

Right. Let me pull that string out of the back of your neck and hear that again. It would be easy for me to calculate, if my background was as nerd accountant.

“So, let’s see . . .” She’s in her element, deftly clicking away on a 1950s adding machine. “Ohooo . . . with all these 80 acre claims, the tax comes to \$1200. About a dollar an acre.”

“Gahhaaa!” I reply. That’s not a bill, that’s the Kublai Khan’s ransom. “But these claims are invalid,” I protest. “All those descriptions put the claims in a non-existent place.”

“We need to have a relinquishment form on file here. Otherwise we charge the tax.”

I need to pound her face into the desktop blotter until her eyeballs bug up like a halibut. I am quivering in rage.

“Look. I already paid federal taxes on this land. I don’t need to pay this illegal tax.”

She’s confused, crestfallen. She cannot separate her white trash private life from the reality of the bureaucratic job. Like a cat whose pleasure and aggression receptors are so close together on its brain stem that it bites you when you pet it.

She imagines that I’ve said, “I’m selling the trailer and going to Mexico with the blonde. Our life together has been a charade to please your mother.”

She replies, mascara starting to run, “But I’ve calculated correctly.” She thinks she’s said, “I’ve tried to be a good wife. I’ve always been faithful.” There is desperation in her voice.

I blurt back, “No way am I paying a *dime* until I get some answers about why this tax exists. What is this ransom all about?”

What her confused mind hears is: “Faithful. *Ha!* Faithful to the bonbon box maybe. Sex with you is like screwing a beached walrus. With the whiskers.”

She stiffens noticeably. My questions are beyond her comprehension. Defense mechanisms now on high alert.

“I’ll go get Mr. Lump,” she says. Her internal translation: “Talk to my lawyer, you two-timing bastard.”

Mr. Lump comes out of the paper catacombs. He’s a short pudgy type, with a little red bow tie. I repeat my protest to “the Lump,” claiming to be an upstanding citizen who should not be double-taxed under constitutional law, the Magna Carta, and God.

Very slowly he explains to me, the kindergartener, that this is a “user-possessory tax” for all the poor bastards who use federal lands. The proceeds go to buying new wigs for the spinsters in the building, red bow ties for himself, and a little left over for the local school for the mentally disabled, known as the “Public School.”

The little grub is so sure, so final. How can I doubt his assuredness? This is not a tax, but a natural force, like gravity.

I feel weighted down. Lost. No longer do I want to use experimental interrogation techniques on these poor pathetic dumpy people, graduates of their “Public School.” Maybe I’ll just start a small fire in the bathroom and leave, tail between my legs.

The file clerk is leaning against her cabinet, arms crossed, scowling. I muster my strength and give her a flirtatious wink. Her brows pop up, eyes open wide, the arms come out in a reaching gesture. She’s thinking, “He’s leaving the blonde and coming back to me. *He loves me.*”

Sorry, sweetie. Not in this lifetime.

I climb back up the stone stairs, avoiding the infectious walls. Back where I began, I buy two pounds of relinquishment forms from Spinster One. She’s scanning me with her death ray, head slightly askance so the whites of her eyes gleam menacingly. She’s been high speed talking to bouffant Spinster

Two in the basement. She secretly knows I'll be treacherously heading back to the blonde.

Back at my tiny village, I fill out the relinquishment forms. *Oh lord!* The monster claims with the surplus survivalists crawling all over them has eight names on each form. This means that I have to send it to my mother-in-law so she can get her signature notarized; she sends it to her son-in-law who does the same; he sends it to his sister-in-law; she to her aunt, etc. Thing will look like the chain letter version of the Declaration of Independence. Could take months, years, *epochs*.

v.

OK. OK. New plan. I fill out the forms with just one name, take it to the village Notary Public. She's 400 years old. She used to notarize land grants for the conquistadors in this area. Her sagging cheeks sweep back and forth across the desk. She has one of those Mexican dogs that looks just like her. As can be expected though, since time began for her, she's never seen one of these forms. She thinks I'm into some sort of weird Arizona land scam. In a way, I suppose she's right. She wishes to have one of those alarm buttons under the desk like they have at the bank. I can hear her bony finger knocking at the underside of the table until it sticks in some old chewing gum or similar foulness.

I pull out a crumpled mess of small bills as a good faith measure to show that I'm open to offering bribery. She tries to pretend that she's not looking at them, busy with her paperwork, but ends up giving the bills a slack-jawed stare. That will buy a lot of cow tongue soup, or whatever nasty shit these old people cook that is stinking up this trailer. Finally, laboriously, she signs it. I must be nearing her age now. I burst out into the fresh air, rushing home with my tightly clutched prize document.

My wife has developed a talent from using my checkbook all these years. She craftily forges the names of the rest of the people, the other magnificent seven, who supposedly accompanied me to the sagging notary. Oh yes! These signatures are great! We've got to open a small check cashing business some day. I mail in all the relinquishments. Fifty dollars in postage.

About \$800 later, I'm now back to square one—but *free!* I make an appointment with a brain surgeon for a lobotomy, to prevent making this type of clerical error in the future. Trade him my adrenal gland for the procedure. Meanwhile, my mother-in-law is planning a trip to visit her sanctuary. She's all excited about the biological beauty, the diverse flora and fauna. I'm thinking one of those nice Kevlar vests that are guaranteed to stop a .38 slug would be a great new year's gift for her.

Epilogue

Twenty-three years later, at an address that is supposed to be off the grid, but on the dark web, I receive a letter from the Trinity County Tax Board, from a J.F. Lump, Junior. This little drama in faraway California has been erased from my mind by life's continuing troubles—and the drugs used to accomplish the erasing.

But the previous exalted tax collector, Mr. J.F. Lump, Senior, has bequeathed his profession to an offspring now full of his "Public School" education, and now out to make a name for himself by collecting all the taxes in arrears over the past fifty years.

In an orgasmic moment, similar to what his father had with the bouffant recorder so many years ago, Junior finds my tax bill for the multiple claim filings. He sends me a bill for the 1995 tax on the mining claims, which amounts to \$847.

How he found the fake address in the Idaho desert is not clear. But because I am a criminal, there is a penalty of \$393.58. And, because of their trouble, a collection fee of \$120. Then, due to my insensitive dereliction, my money was actually their money and I just didn't know it, so interest in the amount of \$2,285.58 has been added to the invoice. At least I'm getting off easy on the puny collection fee. All told, I owe the State of California Franchise Tax Board \$3,646.16.

Get in line.

* * * * *



Gregory Kelly



The force that pushes the water to shore

We see star systems like geoboards and wrap the stars with elastic bands.

We see the distance

from

the soil at our foundation to the pylons to the treetops that are rolled hay bale hills.

We see where

the

sky fails its azure pact where colour is bleached.

We see telescopic renditions of coastlines like

cartographers taking stock of the scapes they sketched and the blank page that is left.

But

We

do not see what is beyond our reach

the hidden dip beyond a cresting tsunami

the force that

pushes the water to shore.

* * *

A Field

Why do we attempt to tame what
continues?

The field
Its hay cut low

Baled and removed

Like there was too much clutter
Between

The hedges and
The poplars

It already grows again
The quiet field.

* * *

I craved quiet.
Tonight.

Sat next to the burnt grass.

Under the pale sky
With its shadowy frame.

And let the wind run its fingers
Through my being.

Until

I was thoughtless.

Still.

Staring at the light
Across the field with no motive.

* * *

I sought stillness
But
Nothing
Is ever still, is it?

Not the way the poplars sway
Not the bench and its loose fittings
Not the way the oak seeds steal in through open windows
Not the wooden floor, its rivets and its breaks where all that remains are the dust and
oddments
 we've lost
Not the fence, its vines
Not the tarpaulin as it mimics the motion of a chest
 And not the breath between my breath.

* * * * *



Page End News
 No. 307 September 20, 2003
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Watz a Weede Artist?

Yor olde pall Algernon haz bin
 cawld Mene a nam, in hiz daie
 Menee, yiks. Dum beegel, buwegel
 twas, stoopid beegel Ol' mah feelin'z
 loon! Then sumwud nis lik mee's
 Chees mah persynomy will cawld
 mee twawa for sum bottles meet
 mee Babey Blonche cheerleed, wil
 say "Jay Beegel! A so thate vater
 but for mah humblen, Di shunks!
 Nobody haz evr cawld me a
 artist tho, I amm jst a beegelboye
 jernel'iz tryin' to do so mah
 job ut rit, go about mah strange
 howt'ing Jazz'ans
 Wel, on have thiz story iz
 about mah frends the Weedz.
 They, ar nis lile gys, with no
 frends but mee so thay could
 mee theer King but I say wat
 our gus. It make them kapy
 the the leave Jay Algernon the
 King, I k sum but with that

Page End News
 No. 308 September 27, 2003
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Learnin' How to Mak Weed Muzik!
 Yor old pall Algernon a Weed
 Artist, hm. Hm. Hm! Yah rit But,
 um, I gess so.

An onlee in dreams ta. Wen
 I try too play the Weedz Wen
 I am awak thay onley yell "Yay"
 Algernon the King! too wich I
 say "O Shucks!" & thay yet open
 a so onn.

But wen I amm dreamin'
 its a hol nother story. Thay sing
 too wat I dee. If I jump or
 run or roll around the ground.
 My wende to. Even if I sing in
 nigh krakkd old beegel idys
 thay sing along with mee in
 thier strange Weed veyses. Some
 how strange. But very butiful
 the waye strang things sumtin'z ar.

Page End News
 No. 309 December 6, 2003
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Intervu with the Leonna Lyon!

Algernon- Hi, que!

Leonna- Hi, Algernon!

Algernon- Sae weer hav' yu bin?

Leonna- I tooke a keepin' pilgrime

o.

Algernon- A wat?

Leonna- Wel theer iz thiz plas
 weer thee grabst keep, go too
 keep & lern mor about keepin'.

Algernon- Ar thay a w' lyonz
 ik w?

Leonna- laffz- Nol keepin' iz
 nett jst for lyonz! Aw! sotha ut
 creechurz leep.

Algernon- Aw! kinde?

Leonna- Shur Sumtims creechurs
 evin leep in groups or doo tricks.

Algernon- Intiz? Graps?

Leonna- I lern'd allat.

Page End News
 No. 310 December 25, 2004
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Algernon Beegel Waks Up!

Goodnes weer weaz I? If
 weaz sumtharp lik a dream but,
 thay told mee a long tm went by
 to, & then I larn bak a sut
 wilep & heer I amm, yor old
 pal Algernon, wuz mor.

I deesided too start ritin'
 mah newspaper open bekauz
 mebbe I wil remember bettr
 that waye wat hapened or
 why I think I waz suposed
 too bring bak a message or
 sumtharp lik that.

It figgers ferst think itt
 evr with mah owne stromp
 braynon then go too thee
 bigs, que & imant que I no
 with sh'p'ink I thar'kd up.



Bags End Book #11: Algernon Beagle Wakes Up! Part 1

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

Hello Cenacle readers,

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

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. 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.

What's a Weed Artist?

Your old pal Algernon has been called many a name in his day. Many, yikes. Dum beagle, Beagle Face, stupid beagle. O! mah feelings bone!

Then someone nice like mah dear friend Miss Chris will call me A-wa-wa or Simmi Bittersweet the Baby Blondy cheerleader will say, "Yay! Beagle!" & so that's better but 4or mah humble bone. O! Shucks!

Nobody has ever called me a Artist be4ore tho. I am just a beagleboy journalist trying to do mah job of writing about mah stranger homeland called Bags End.

Well, anyway, this story is about mah friends the Weedz. They are nice little guys with no friends but me so they call me their King but I say, "whatever, guys." It makes them happy tho to say, "Yay! Algernon the King!"

like Simmi but with that extra bit.

Since Weedz are everywhere, I see them a lot & they always know me & cheer me, even if it's a new place I have never been. Weedz don't use telephones so I don't know how they tell each other who I am, but they do.

And they cheer me like I told you, & I say, "O! Shucks!" & "hello, Weedz" & they cheer me again cuz maybe that's all they have to say to me, or maybe they don't know any other English.

I was walking home from school wun day with mah adopted older sister & mah newspaper's riter-downer, Lori Bunny, when some Weedz see'd us & did their usual cheer.

"O! Shucks!" I said back usually & they cheered again.

Lori adjusted her smart guy's spectacles & said, "Greetings, Weedz!" all friendly.

"Yay! Algernon the King!" they told her back, friendly 2 but confusing.

"Hmm," said Lori like smart guys do when their brains are whirring.

"Do you have an idear about these Weedz, Lori?" I asked. I like Lori's brain's idears a lot.

"I don't think English is their language but they learned enough to tell you they like you, Algernon," she said.

"O! Shucks!" said me.

"But maybe there's some other way to talk to them more," she said too.

"Hmm," I, um, hmm'd.

Lori said she would have to think about it more so we said goodbye to the cheering Weedz & went on our way. Mah hmm went with us.

Anytime later I walked by Weedz, & they cheered like usual, I wondered what bright idear Lori would come up with. I tried in mah unsmart way to teach the Weedz some English.

"Say beagle," I teached.

"Yay! Algernon the King!" the Weedz didn't learn.

"Say Blondy," teached me again.

"Yay! Algernon the King!" the Weedz didn't learn some more.

"Bump!" said mah suddenly present brother Alexander Puppy.

"Alex says, 'Weedz, try Bump language. It's easier,'" said that also now present green-eyed Allie Leopard, friend of foolish kinfolks.

"Bump!" said the Weedz to mah amaze.

"They said, 'Yayy! Algernon the King!'" Allie explained, smiling.

"O! Fooey! O! Shucks!" I double cried.

So much 4or mah try at being a smart guy.

Then, one Milne's Porch napping day, who comes to see me in mah comfy armchair but mah real smart guy friend Lori. She sat with me & after a good nap she told me her idears from the papers she brung.

"I think Weedz talk by how they move in the breeze," she read to me.

"Hmm," said me. "What do they say?"

Lori adjusted her smart guy's spectacles & read some more. "Well, they don't have jobs or go to school so they don't talk about those kinds of things."

I 4orgot about hming & just listened.

"Algernon, I have been watching your friends the Weedz 4or days & I think what they do in their own language is sing," Lori said, looking at me instead of reading.

"Sing?"

Lori nodded. "They take turns singing about what is going on. Then sometimes they sing all at once."

"Sing," I said again like some kind of fake Bump language with only one word.

Lori smiled her nice orange bunny smile at me. "I think you need to come with me & see."

So me & Lori went to see a big field of Weedz on some level of Bags End, through a door.

"Yayy! Algernon the King!" the Weedz yelled all happy. "O! Shucks!" yelled me, all humble.

Well, they kept cheering awhile till Lori said she thinned the trick to hearing them sing was to pretend to be asleep.

So me & her hunkered down & were very quiet. I think I forgot to pretend to be asleep tho, cuz strange things happened next. I heard Weedz singing! It wasn't words I knowed or just humming but it was something.

I started to get more comfortable & the music changed again. I moved again & it changed again. I saw Lori moving but the Weedz only changed their singing for me.

So not thinking too much I started running & boy! did their singing go crazy! Then I stopped fast & they got loud then very soft. Hmm.

OK. Now what? Lori Bunny hopped up to me smiling & said to me, "I wonder what will happen when we wake up?"

And we did but the music was gone. Or something. I wasn't sure if it stopped just before or after our dream. Lori didn't know either.

"Yayy! Algernon the King!" the Weedz yelled, but I wanted them to sing again. "O! Shucks!" I added.

Lori & me went back by paw & hop to Milne's Porch. We sat in mah comfy armchair. We were quiet.

Since we had the same dream, I knowed it had happened but it didn't seem to happen after we woked up.

Lori adjusted her smart guy's spectacles & said, "In dreams you are a Weed Artist, Algernon. You shape the Weedz' singing like a conductor."

"Picasso & Miles Davis are Artists, Lori," I said, a little grumpy. "I am just a beagleboy journalist trying to do his work."

"O, you are very much more, Algernon," Lori said with a nice & smart smile. "Even Sheila says that."

"Ha!" said me. "No way, Brains!" That's Sheila's nickname for Lori. I thinned she was making fun of me so I got grumpy.

But Lori gave me a hug that was love beagle not mock beagle. "You're a good Weed Artist too," she smiled.

Well, somehow other Bags End guys found out about me being a Weed Artist in dreams, & some were happy, but some didn't like that me not them was getting attention.

"Thwat dwum bweaglefwace cwouldn't mwake bwerds swing!" mocked red-haired Sargent Lisa-Marie Chowe of the Army of the Babys.

Others didn't bother to say more than "HA!" which I thought was even worse somehow.

But my usual friends were happy. Miss Chris wanted to play her piano while I made Weedz sing but we couldn't figger out how to get it into mah head. Heh.

I started avoiding Weedz cuz it was all getting too complex. Lori told me the Weedz missed me tho I didn't know how she knew when they talk no English but "Yayy! Algernon the King!" O! Shucks! Maybe they said it sadly.

Your old pal Algernon is King of the mushy-hearted guys too. So I figgered that I had to do something to make the Weedz happy again. O & make the HA! guys believe it was true.

"Put on a show!" said Miss Chris, all happy. "I will help you, A-wa-wa!" Gosh, a show starring your old pal A-wa-wa, I mean, Algernon.

Well, since I didn't really know how to play the Weedz, I told her I had to practice.

Now it's near the big day 4or our show. I think it will be good. I hope everybody comes cuz dreams have lots of room.

Yayy! Weedz!

* * * * *

Learning How to Make Weed Music!

Your old pal Algernon a Weed Artist, hm. Hm. Ha! Yah right. But, um, I guess so.

And only in dreams too. When I try to play the Weedz when I am awake, they only yell, "Yayy! Algernon the King!" to which I say, "O! Shucks!" & they yell again & so on.

But when I am dreaming, it's a whole other story. They sing to what I do. If I jump or run or roll around the ground. My words too. Even if I sing in mah cracked old beagle voice, they sing along with me in their strange Weedz voices. Boy! How strange! But very beautiful the way strange things sometimes are.

I never knowed how the Weedz would sing or make music to mah doings. It was never the same. So I couldn't think, "OK, if I do this, the Weedz will do that." Nothing they did sounded wrong tho.

People & others started showing up in mah dreams to listen to me & the Weedz practice 4or our big show. Since I wasn't sure what we were doing, I didn't know what to do with an audience.

"You have groupies, A-wa-wa!" said mah dear friend Miss Chris, & then she & mah other dear friend Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna giggled. Me. Groupies. Ha!

"Thwis is jwust swome lownghwair hwippy music, you dwaftdwodging cwa9ine!" yelled that silly baby Sargent Lisa. She was in Miss Chris's lap wearing her green army diaper & M*A*S*H shirt.

"Ha!" said me, getting sorta one-worded about the whole thing. "I don't have long hair, I have short fur! I would be a hippy but I don't know how!"

Speaking of real hippys, Miss Chris's toy tall big brother Ramie was sitting next to her asleep. Ha some more! Lazybug asleep in our group dream! Go him!

The Blondys 3 floated around & I think they got Weedmusic best. Blondys are nice magickal girls & things are different with them, like dangers & bad guys & all that. They float cuz they don't know about the Law of Grabitee & the littlest Blondy Simmi cheers even without a game. I have learned that when you're with Blondys, & you're still you, you better hold on tight cuz they don't know that too good.

Well, I was even brave & hardly whimpered when they jammed with me & the Weedz by floating me high. The Weedz like the Blondys ☺ The music got real dancey & that was fun till I remembered I don't float & begged to go back aground.

"Bump!" cried Alexander Puppy, mah tall dubious relative, who is a good dancer anyway, I must admit.

"Alex says Weedz kind of get it," explained green-eyed Allie Leopard, who knows lots of languages but is shy.

"Ha!" I challenged him but he just smiled & bumped mah nozebone softly. Silly brother.

We were all cuddled up in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch & I

didn't know how more would fit but they did. Inside the dream we were in a big sunny field of Weedz so that part was OK.

Then Betsy Bunny Pillow showed up with her retinue of shadowy Allies. The Weedz don't like Betsy much since they had to save me from her wrathful smothering ways. They stopped singing & just yelled, "Boo!" a lot.

Well, Betsy is a big guy & big guys don't like when little guys crawl out from under foot.

"Loyal Allies, annihilate those Weedz!" she cried in her crazy whispery voice. I don't think the Allies would have done that but Miss Chris got involved anyway.

"Betsy!" she said, all happy & hugged her twice & twice again. Big guys get hugs 4or not beating little guys up. What a world, ha! OK, I'll stop that, heh.

It was too crazy to keep trying to rehearse but once Betsy was quieter in Miss Chris's arms the Weedz started their music again.

I closed mah eyes & tried to remember what I was doing be4ore all the controversy broke out. But I could not at all. I think the Weedz made their music 4orgetting music, but I don't know how.

It was starting to be OK when I heard the unique sound of a purple trumpet. I did not have to open mah eyes to know it was mah adopted sister & Mayor of Bags End, & King cuz she says so, Sheila Bunny.

I kept mah eyes close to see what would happen but then I fell asleep like a Lazybug. In mah dream's dream, the whole world was shaped like Sheila's purple trumpet, but it was made out of Weedz! I don't know what I was though. The trumpet played softly. Played & played.

The second dream became the first when Miss Chris & Princess Crissy & the Blondys 3 joined me in their dance, & the Weedz' music became like a sing-a-long or maybe a dance-a-long. Good grief, & a Bump-a-long because mah silly bumping brother Alex joined in too.

The Weedz amazed me how they kept their music going no matter what was going on. I thinked it was because maybe the music was about what was going on, but mah secret beagle wisdom Crissy says I have, told me their music was more than their Weedzy kind of newspaper. Or maybe it was kind of like mah newspaper, cuz I write to tell everyone what happened & to try & um understand it dressed in words.

I decided at some point that Weedz don't know about practice or rehearsal cuz they just sing right the first time, or it just sounds right, or they don't think about right or wrong when it comes to singing & making music.

Also they don't know or care about being the star because they were just as happy when everyone was singing & dancing with them. Ramie woke up a little & said, "No Spectators" & later when Lori Bunny told me what that second word meant I understood. Everybody joins in & things are better.

So this was the show, not some practice 4or it, & I guessed that was good. It was why Sheila showed up with her purple trumpet cuz she knowed that the show was now. When I said that to her later, she said, "The Show is Always Now, beagle."

When the sun went down, the Weedz sang the sinking colors of pink & red & orange. When the stars & some of the moon came out, they played that too. Sometimes the Bags End guys took breaks or came & went & it was OK. Weedzmusic goes on always like the show.

Mah poor brainbone finally tired about all of this, it was so new to me even tho I have knowed the Weedz a long long time. I was happy they made lots of new friends, at least 4or while they singed in mah dreams & made music with everybody.

Then I waked up, I don't remember the moment but it happened, & what a crowd was with me in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch! Everybody, even the big guys, were happy & nobody threatened mah vitalities as they left. Some even kissed & hugged & nice-worded me.

Weedzmusic is a success in Bags End. Everybody likes it & there's hardly anything else that's true about.



* * * * *

Interview with Leona Lion!

A few days after that big Weedzmusic show, I got a visit at Milne's Porch from mah nice & pretty brown-eyed friend Leona Lion. She had not been around in awhile, & yet here she was now, in mah comfy armchair with me. We had a nice hug & then talked.

"Say, fella, can I interview you 4or mah newspaper? To catch everyone up on your doings?" I asked politely & hopefully.

Leona's pretty eyes lit up & she said, "Sure! I'm sorry I missed your big Weedzmusic show."

"It's OK. I can show you all about it sometime, just us two." She smiled at me so yes.

"So where have you been?"

"I took a leaping pilgrimage!" she said exited happy.

"A what?" I knowed Leona is a guy who loves her leaping, but not much else.

"Well, there is this place where the greatest leapers go to leap & learn more about leaping."

"Are they all lions like you?"

She laughed, but nicely. "No! Leaping is not just 4or lions! All kinds of creatures leap!"

"All kinds?"

"Sure. Sometimes creatures even leap in groups or do tricks."

Wow. "Tricks? Groups?"

Leona nodded. "I learned a lot."

I said, "But you're the best leaper I know."

"But there are lots of good leapers & I can't leap like trees or clouds."

"Hold on. Trees & clouds leap?" Crazy.

"They leap really good. I like asking them 4or leaping advice."

Well, now she was so excited talking about leaping that she had to do some leaping 4or awhile. When she came back, she was kinda too excited to be interviewed but she tried to make me happy.

"Were you leaping?" I asked.

Her smile even bigger now. "Like the lords!"

"Huh?"

She smiled me. "I always wanted to leap with you 2."

"Beagles don't leap, fella," I gruttered.

"That's not true!" she said. "I did some research."

"About beagles leaping?"

She nodded. "Not many but a few."

"Which ones?"

She thought. "Well, there was a Jethro Saint Beagle, who leaped 4or helping the world."

"Who?"

"And there was a magician called Fayth Beagle the Great who leaped in his magic act. It was how he finished his show. He would say, 'G'night, everybody!' & leap over the heads of the audience & disappear!"

"Um."

"And there was Jorge Beagle Juwsford, who was a farmer. His whole family of farming beagles would plant & pick by leaping around their fields all day long."

"Um, Leona?" I said seriously.

She looked right back at me. "Yes, Algernon?"

I spoke sadly. "If I leap with you, I will break every bone in mah body. That will hurt."

Leona replied with a smile, "Not if I teach you how to leap right."

Maybe after learning how to make Weedzmusic, I thought that I was kind of on a roll of learning strange new things. That's my best guess 4or how Leona convinced me to take leaping lessons from her. Also, she kept doing more research to find more leaping beagles in history till I begged her to no more. I told her I was afraid to be the beagle in history who leaped & broke. But I agreed. I guess I'm a sucker 4or nice pretty eyes & crazed enthusiams.

What Leona could not figger out was how to get me off the ground. Then one day I by mistake told her how the Blondys 3 would float me sometimes even though beagles don't float neither. But Leona got excited & said we must consult with them.

Blondys are hard to find if you look for them, so we just went to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch & talked a lot about leaping & floating & stuff. Blondys are very curious & like to be near where the action is, & so they came along.

What happened was that me & Leona napped & were sharing a dream about leapfloating or something, & I'm pretty sure there was some Weedzmusic going too. I think I was pretty good at leapfloating because I wasn't sure in dreams that I wasn't.

Then the Blondys joined in & it was going OK till somebody said, "Yayy! leapfloating dream beagle!" & I crashed.

"Ow! Mah dreambones!" I cried. Me & Leona & the Blondys were all sitting awake now in mah comfy armchair. They all comforted me with hugs & nice pats of mah fur. Leona asked the Blondys to stay around as part of her grand scheme to float, or maybe leapfloat, me.

But she had to figger out about the crashing part, or the non-crashing part as I called it. She was quiet awhile, & I was quite happy to let a nap come on along again, but then she got excited suddenly with a new idear.

"We have to go to see Betsy Bunny Pillow!" she said all excited. Believe you me, Dear Readers, I have NEVER said those words in that way ever.

The Blondys took us, despite mah protests. But we did get there fast, which turned out to be Miss Chris's house in Connecticut where Betsy was visiting.

"Why should I?" whisper-demanded Betsy to Leona's bright idear, in her best Bagzinian grumpiness. I figured the only thing Betsy would do 4or me is whisper-yell & smother me.

I hoped all the good guys involved would keep that from happening. And I guess the Blondys & Miss Chris gang-niced Betsy into helping Leona's plan.

"Now we need the rocket fuel," said Leona with glittering eyes. She kept forgetting again how Bags End guys don't really like to help.

I wondered why we went to Sheila's Thone Room next until I saw Leona convincing her to help with the plan. I think mah earbones stopped working from disbelief that any Bags End guy would help us, but the Blondys had, & Betsy did, & Sheila would. I kind of lost track of the details in mah honest & true quiet terrors.

Leona & I came back to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch 4or a little while. She hugged me & told me that the next day would be mah grand leaping debut. I reminded her about how beagles do not leap or float, or together somehow, & she reminded me about the great prophet Wendy Methuselah Beagle, who leaped into the sky & never came back, to show that anything was possible. I grumbled something like defeat.

"It's fun, Algernon!" she said, all bright-eyed & smiling.

"Broken bones ain't no fun, Mister. I mean, Miss," I grumbled again with what I had left.

So the great & tragical day came when many Bags End friends & I guess others too came to see me leap or leap-float, I had lost track. Nobody believed I would crash more than me. Miss Chris & Princess Crissy hugged & kissed me 4or good luck. Mah quasi-lingual brother Alexander Puppy bumped me once & left it at that. I agreed with him 4or once.

It was a big field like where the Weedzmusic show had happened, but not a shared dream this time, & a lot more scary 4or mah own safety. Everyone was cheering me louder & louder as I stood there wondering where Leona was. Then I suddenly knowed because she & Sheila were both coming toward me so fast! O dear gosh & dang!

But they didn't crash me. Between them they grabbed mah pawbones & I was drugged up into the air! We were leaping &, um, hopping? high & I was terrified liking it when they let go!

But instead of a final plunge to earth, I heard a cheer & was now surrounded by Blondys who leaped/floated/hopped? me along & I thought: "OK, this is great & over soon!"

But then they let go & I was heading toward the blue blue ground of mah demise. Very blue.

The blue of Betsy Bunny Pillow's dress who I landed on, soft as a her, & rolled off un-annihilated!

I leaped/floated/hopped/did not crash? Leona ran up to me first as I stood there shaking off mah many terrors.

"I told you there were all kinds!" she said, & laughed nicely.

* * * * *

Algernon Beagle Wakes Up!

Goodness, where was I? It was something like a dream, though not like the one of Weedzmusic, & they told me a long time went by too, & then I came back as suddenly, & here I am, your old pal Algernon, once more. I think I was supposed to bring back a message, or something like that.

I guess it was not long after all that leaping that I started feeling a little weird deep down. Not like a ache or being sick, but something. It was sort of hard to pay attention at Mister Owl's school, & I kept forgetting to

do mah newspaper. I don't know how to tell, Dear Readers, but I decided after a long while I had better start writing mah newspaper again because maybe it would help me remember better what happened or why.

I figured first think it over with mah own strange brainbone & then go to see the big guys & smart guys I know with anything I think up.

Start really slow, fella, first thing first. I remember that I opened mah eyes & found mahself on Milne's Porch, but on the floor, not in mah comfy armchair. I was breathing fast too, like I had been running. I looked back at the window to mah & mah brother Alex's bedroom, & it was open. I never leave it open! Mostly so I don't have to listen to mah silly brother talk his dum made-up Bump language to that nice guy Allie Leopard.

I looked at the open window & there was mah adopted sister & alleged King of Bags End Sheila Bunny climbing through, & then mah dear friend Miss Chris & mah dear friend Princess Chisakah of Imagianna.

They all wored worried looks, even Sheila, who wears her grumpy look like home base usually.

"Algernon!"

"Don't run away!"

"Are you back, beagle?"

They all crowded round me & talked at once & Sheila got grumpy be4ore too long.

I wasn't sure what to say or do when they all left at once to go get Doctor Greenface. I thought it was weird that they worried but all left too till I saw in the air just beyond Milne's Porch floated the Blondys 3. Guarded by Blondys is safe as a mortal guy can be.

"Hi Blondys!" I said in mah friendly Algernon way.

"Yayy! Beagle Beagle!" yelled Simmi the Baby Blondy who is a cheerleader in a yellow uniform.

Hey! Hm. She never yayys me by mah kind twice. I didn't say anything though. I figgered even the Blondys might be worrying on me in their magical girls kind of way.

So I tried thinking again. Ha! Beagles think best on the run or something. Not no HindyBoodizt, me.

I thought about mah name, Algernon Beagle, & mah native homeland, called Bags End. My newspaper, my silly bumping brother.

A message? What message from who & where? Had I been kidnapped or runned away from home? Why would I do that? I like Bags End some a lot, so hmm there.

The window to Bags End near me opened again & Miss Chris came through the window dressed up like Doctor Miss Chris, & she was carrying that tiny little furry green guy called Doctor Greenface. Then Doctor PurplePurpleEyes, who is also Sheila Bunny, & Princess Crissy, who I guess is always her & not sometimes a doctor to.

Wow. Three doctors to check me up & the best ones in Bags End.

So these doctors worked me over 4or a long time. Doctor Miss Chris had her Doctor's bag & used a stretchiscope to listen to mah heart bumping & mah breaths breathing. Doctor Greenface studied me closely, "4or signs of un-beagleness," he said. He said hmmm & ahhh a lot too.

Doctor PurplePurpleEyes tickled me a bunch & I don't know what else. Strange doctorings.

I think I fell asleep cuz later they told me that cranky old Doctor Horatio Algernon showed up but mostly talked about his aches & pains & made Miss Chris & Crissy hug him a lot. Dum relative of some sort.

But none of them could figger out nothing except it had started in

mah dreams & took me in & in till I was gone. Nobody could figger out where I was 4or a long time, till I showed up suddenly again, running really fast till I got to Milne's Porch, where I stopped but didn't remember nothing.

"We need Benny Big Dreams," said Sheila. "Friend of mine, beagle," she said to when I was about to ask.

"Why him?" I ask be4ore she read mah brainbone again.

"He knows about dreams. And he plays harmonica in my Kool Jazz Band," she said, & then left.

I looked at Princess Crissy & Miss Chris, & they hugged me & smiled a lot at me, which is always a good thing, but I wanted to know about Benny Big Dreams. So later on I went to see mah friend Lori Bunny.

She is always happy to see me & closed her book & all.

"Benny Big Dreams is a traveler."

"Where does he travel?"

"He travels in dreams. He is sort of an Oneironaut."

"A what?"

Lori laughed & thinked a minute how to explain me in regular guy English.

"Well, you know an astronaut is someone who travels in space?"

"Like those Star Trick guys?"

She nodded. "An Oneironaut is someone who travels in dreams. I think Benny stays in them tho."

"You mean he never wakes up?"

"I think he is from dreams in the first place, Algernon."

"O." I thinked a minute. "So how does Sheila take me to see him?"

Lori wasn't sure.

I didn't know what to think because I felt OK but the big guys I trust were still worried on me. Well, I guess I will talk to Benny Big Dreams then.

It was those nice but magickal Blondys 3 that Sheila asked to take me along to see Benny Big Dreams. They floated onto Milne's Porch & settled all around my comfy armchair with me. I waited to be trembly & fearfilled floated away, but they falled asleep right away, still smiling their tricky Blondy smiles.

Hmm. I guess I had to go with them, to find Benny Big Dreams, so I got comfy too & tippy-toed into sleep, hoping not too much trouble was waiting.

* * * * *

Searching 4or the Other Algernon!

Your old pal Algernon has been traveling to find mah new friend Benny Big Dreams 4or quite some time now, & it is only this very moment when I have been able to get back near enough to Bags End to write mah newspaper.

How to tell of mah days isn't easy. I have learned so much that I never learned in my regular teacher Mister Owl's school.

Dreams are real like other things. If you go deep enough into them, you will find other people. I knew that already, I think, because I have cluster-dreamed be4ore with Bags End friends like Sheila Bunny & Miss Chris & even Princess Crissy. I tolded already in this book too about how we all shared a dream to watch me make the wonderful Weedzmusic.

But really, I guess I had thinked it was like a game just us guys played. I didn't think dreams were more real than that.

Then I waked up & found out I had been gone a long long time in dreams & I was sick from it. Like something happened that usually doesn't. Like I was

Bagel End News
No. 311 April 2, 2005
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Searching Dreams for thee O'er Algernon!

You did pal Algernon hay
bin travelin' w/ the mah netwe
trend Benzee Bagg Dreams
for kwit sum time now &
itt iz onlay thuss rezy moment
in abel to gett
off too Baggend
swzpan
told o'g mah
zee. I hav leard
never lerned
for teacher Mistr
an reel like
'yu go dosep
memor yu wil
do, I-nure that I:

6
Bagel End News
No. 312 May 7, 2005
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

To Beagle's Ekwels Wunn! Eh?

I lookd att mee & sed, "lissenc
fella, wee kant, both see mee!
W/ not?" I reply'd.
"Bekoz I amm a I an I iz
wun of see. Mee! criyeth mee.
But theer ar 2 I's heer. I and
I. Doo yu dispost?"

itt dispost.
help! Is eyall'd
ey's 3 lookd att uss
beagel inn tree grasses
& on iz or wass
ay began floatin' up
sed
"ut them!"
"oo nott-flot!"
oo

Bagel End News
Double Issue!
No. 313-314 June 18-25, 2005
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Algernon Beagle Waks Upp Ages!

Wel, thann, sum dayz gett
mee wun'ing itt memereez arat'
jest bak'wordz but forwerts, evin
sidwayz. Iz thatt possibell, too remember
sid wayz? Mah brayn bon iz nolt soittel
enuf' by its kraft' too imagin thatt
veree fair.

Eh?
Yahh I unndr to.
Enywaye I askk bokuz thiz stree
I amm telin' vizz godd lik a pretzel
inn ite wave.

O pretzels! Yuk!
Heh. Bettir. Sum beagel fier
theer for a moment.

Wat?
Yes.
See mah bak'com bokom I.

living in mah dreams, not just in the night in mah bed, but all of me inside dreams.

What happened next after me & the Blondys slept was that I noticed how strange it was that I couldn't tell if I was floating with them or if they were walking along with me. It wasn't both or neither. I felt safe with them, like always, but they seemed less strange to me than they usually do.

I know in dreams there's the harder kind & the looser kind. The harder kind just sort of drag you along some really odd story till they're done & something else happens. The looser kind are more the game kind because you can think things up to make happen in them, like Weedzmusic shows. I like those better so I hoped me & the Blondys were having a looser dream.

We were in Bags End, a dream Bags End I guess, & I decided to test out the dream. I have a little trick 4or doing this. Since Bags End has no stairs, I try to make some show up with mah brainbone's best try.

So I did & they did & I was about to tell the Blondys when I saw someone at the top of the stairs with brown & white fur like me, & a stick-up tailbone like mine, & he was low to the ground like I am.

"Hey! You!" I yelled. "Are you me?" Um. Then I started running up the stairs on mah short legs. The Blondys followed but I still could not tell if they were floating after all.

I am not too good on stairs but I climbed them fast as I could, & I thoughted I would get to the next level of Bags End, but it wasn't. O yah, dreams.

I made sure the Blondys were still with me & they were but stranger now. It was like there were still 3 of them, but also thousands. I don't know how they do that!

And no dream Algernon, if that is who that was. Now what? Your old pal Algernon is not too good at this kind of thing. I think looser dreaming is like throwing a baseball, & I am not too good at that too, cuz I was hoping 4or the other beagle to show up when I found mahself in an endless sea of beagles! Beagles & Blondys, good golly!

"Hey!" I yelled, & all the other beagles did too & the echo was crazy, heh.

"Stop that!" cried me, & all of the beagles again, & now I was annoyed. I hushed & thinked deep into mah dream brainbone.

I looked one beagle full to his face & said, "You are not Algernon. You are Fred." He nodded & said, "Hi, guy," still sounding like me, but not quite.

I teached Fred how to name the next beagle, & soon many beagles were naming many other beagles, & there were no more crazy echoes. The Blondys 3 & 3 thousand just smiled. They don't work like me so it was OK how they were. Um, yah.

I hushed up all the beagles, & they hushed up each other, & all that hushing got loud again, so I hushed the hushing like I had done the naming, by one & then a few & then many.

"Is one of you beagles the first beagle I saw at the top of the stairs?" I said. They all said no. It took awhile.

Hmm. Now what?

Well, OK, since they were all there I told them about the other beagle & how I thinked he was me too.

"Are you gonna teach him how not to be you like you did with all of us?" asked one beagle who had mah funny accent but angled some other way from me.

"I don't know. He might be different. Now, listen, beagle hordes. I ask you to spread throughout Dream Bags End to fetch this maybe other me. Will

you do this?"

There was a cheer that was so good I thought maybe the dream Simmi Bittsweet Blondy 1 & many had been giving cheering lessons. Then the beagles scattered every way &, faster than I could watch, they were all gone but me & the regular 3 Blondys.

Now what? I was not sure. Dream Bags End, if this really still was, is very strange.

OK. I mean, fine. I decided looser dreaming was like a horsie to ride, & I don't do that good either, but the Blondys would help if I let them.

"Blondys, let's ride this dream to where we need to go!" I cried, for a moment some brave guy having a big adventure, & loving it till it will get stranger.

Yah. Right. Me, that? Ha! We were now dream floating & I could not feel mah beagle body!

"Help! Help!" I cried. "I'm, um, drowning! Um no! I am missing! Um, no! I am something scary!"

I felt Blondys move near me then, & that was better, but I still didn't like it. I guess I am not too good at riding dreams.

"Try harder, guy," said a voice in me & close too. A Algernon voice but not like those many others. Me & not-me both.

"Who are you?"

"Algernon."

"Me too!"

"How can that be?"

"Dunno, fella."

"Which one of us is talking now?"

"Hard to say."

"Why did you run away?"

"Why did you run away?"

""HHeellpp,, BBllloonnddyss!!""

The Blondys figured out us beagles don't like nobodiness & then there we were, sitting on the grass. 3 of them & 2 of me!

* * * * *

2 Beagles Equals !! Eh?

I looked at me & said, "Listen, fella, we can't both be me!"

"Why not?" I replied.

"Because I am a I & I is 1 of me. Me!" cryeth me.

"But there are 2 I's here. I and I. Do you dispute?"

"I do not dispute."

""BBllloonnddyss,, HHeellllpp!!""

The Blondys 3 looked at us 2 Algernon Beagles in the grass of something like or is or was Dreamland, & they began floating upwards very slowly.

"Uh oh!" I's said.

"Get a hold of them!"

"Beagles do not float!"

"Here we go!"

"Yayy! Benny Big Dreams!" Simmi Bittersweet yelled as we floated up into the air.

For a long time we floated, & I had some time to think over mah adventures in Dreamland. I think I fell asleep, but I didn't, so of course it got weirder. Ha! I think the rule for weird finally broke!

The Blondys floated slowly to assuage mah fears some but they kept seeming farther & farther away tho I's holded on tightly to their shoes as we could. Then we weren't even floating anymore & the Blondys were gone.

"Hmm," I said.

"Agreed," I said too.

"Now what?" I asked.

"I don't know. Maybe Benny Big Dreams is around here?"

"Where?"

We found we could not really see where we were, though it wasn't night & I's don't think we were blind.

"What do we do?"

We both yelled, ""HHeellpp!!"" loudly at the same time. We yelled it a lot but nothing seemed to happen. So we yelled some more.

""HHeellpp!! HHeellpp!!""

Everything else, whatever was, there was quiet.

Finally I said, "Let's listen now," & I agreed, & we stopped our yelling, & listened real good with all our earbones.

Mah eyes were tightly closed listening when I thought, "Hey! Something strange has happened! More! Again! I am I & not I's! Where did the other me-fella go?"

Then I thought, "Uh oh, am I I or the other I? How would I know?" I was getting worried by this when a voice laughed. "He will be back when you need him again." I opened mah eyes & I was somewhere again. There was sky up there, the kind with pretty grey clouds crawling slowly along.

I waited 4or this voice to show its talking creature but it had got quiet again. "Hello?"

I waited some more. Nothing was clear but the grey clouds, but then I saw this bird tiny far away in them. Not flying exactly, more twinkling like a star.

Well, thought me, I guess things happen when you wait, & not too.

"It's OK," the voice talked again. "Nobody will hurt you."

"Are you Benny Big Dreams?" I croaked like a scared froggy.

The voice laughed. "I have heard that name be4ore. It's as good as any."

"Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I live in Bags End," I said politely. "When I am awake," I added, confused.

"Hello, Algernon Beagle of Bags End when you are awake! How do you like Dreamland?" said the voice friendly 2.

"It's OK. I am sick so they sent me here to find you. Mah friends. They sent Blondys with me but I lost them."

The voice laughed. "The Blondys are nearby! They never abandon their friends."

I nodded. Blondys are good guys.

The voice waited.

"Can you help me?"

"How?"

"I don't know. Everyone in Bags End thinks I am sick & need your help." Then I said the whole story I have already told you loyal Dear Readers.

I waited while the voice thought. I don't know I knowed it was thinking but I did. I could tell he was a smart guy & nice in a big guy sort of way.

"Are you sure you are sick?"

"I dunno. The big guys in Bags End all think so."

"Do you feel sick?"

"I feel OK. I mean, I feel like I always feel."

"How's that?"

Now I thought. "I feel like a guy hanging on to see what happens next."
Benny laughed, & I decided I could see how he was good friends with Sheila Bunny.

"Maybe you are well now," Benny said. He sounded tricky tho like the answer was the other way from where his words were pointing.

"Can I see what you look like?" I asked politely.

"I don't have a body like you. Anymore."

"O." Hm. That didn't work.

"I can show you my tattoos," he offered brightly.

"Um?"

"Pictures on me drawn in ink," he said.

"Drawed on you? Like you're a painting?"

"You might like them. They tell stories. You like stories."

"True," I said.

"Will you look at one?" he asked politely. "I think it might help answer your question."

Then I saw an arm with a lot of muscles in it & it was covered in pictures like he said. How strange! I wondered if Miss Chris knowed about painting arms!

"Which one?" I asked.

"Just look till one sticks close to your mind," he said.

Hmm. That sounded hard but I figured OK.

So I looked slowly & Benny held his arm still 4or me.

Was that picture really there or did I just dream-in-dream it?

It changed as I looked. It felt warm & nice like a kiss on mah 4orhead, but that's not a picture!

Warm & sleepy like sitting in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch with maybe Miss Chris & the Blondys there 2--

Safe as listening to Sheila's Kool Jazz Band when they calm down some their playing--

Brave like Betsy Bunny Pillow & her plans to save all the little Pillows of the world from every doom--

I 4orgot I was looking at an arm & the scene changed because I 4orgot. Dreamland is like that.

I was running again tho. Why does that keep happening? I decided to be braver than me & keep running straight on & find out.

* * * * *

Algernon Beagle Wakes Up Again!

Well, then, some days get me wondering if memories aren't just backwards but 4orwards too, even sideways. Is that possible, to remember sideways? Mah brainbone is not subtle enough by its craft to imagine that very far.

Eh?

Yah, I wonder too.

Anyway, I ask because this story I am telling has gotten like a pretzel in its ways.

O! Pretzels! Yuk!

Heh. Better. Some beagle flair there 4or a moment.

What?

Yes.

See, mah problem became I could not tell if it was me or the other me thinking, & then I wondered if I was moving backwards somehow. I had been

in Dreamland 4or so long I didn't remember how days or hours worked. It troubled me in mah simple beagle brainbone.

Hm. Work on that voice there, pal, neither fall into parody nor overripe into dullness.

See? See?

One word, then the next, fella. That's all there ever is in this newspaper business. "Use your noggin, beagle," is what mah adopted sister Sheila Bunny says, if I complained. Then she would tap her furry little head like that showed me how.

Ha. But here I was running through Dreamland using mah short paws more than mah brainbone. But mah brain was asking me what I was doing.

"Shhh," said me.

"No! I will not shhhh!" cried mah stubborn brainbone.

"It's easier not to ask these things."

"No, it's not! I always ask!"

I had to agree with this. Mah brainbone asked every time, no matter what.

I guessed I could not argue no more. "We're going back to Bags End. I am. You're me, ya brainbone."

"I know. I am glad you figgered that out."

At that very moment, I used all mah humble bodybone had in it to leap from Dreamland to Bags End, like I was mah friend Leona Lion leaping through the air. She did give me leaping lessons, I have tolded you about earlier in this book.

I landed running & kept running. I figgered I better not stop yet till something else happened.

Then I was being chased & yelled at & knew that I had to stop soon. I was breathing hard & shaking, but I runned on & on till I got to mah & mah brother Alex's bedroom, & through the window to Milne's Porch.

Now here I was, on the floor of Milne's Porch & looking over to see the window was still open, & here was Sheila & Miss Chris & Princess Crissy coming through to find me.

"Dayja foey," I muttered.

I told them the story of going to Dreamland to find Benny Big Dreams, like they said to when they were doctors. But they didn't remember that!

Then I noticed there were no Blondys floating near the porch & I began to get suspicious of all of this.

"This is still Dreamland!" I said, & I looked closer at these big guys, & they looked more like beagles than girls & bunnys!

The Sheila beagle took off his mask. He looked guilty.

"Why did you trick me?" I demanded.

Just then, someone climbed over the railing onto Milne's Porch. It was a big vague guy with tattoos on his arms.

"Benny Big Dreams?" I asked.

"You 4orgot something," he said, smiling smart but scarier than when I met him be4ore.

"What?"

"My message. Last time I sent you back you 4orgot it."

"O." I tried to figger out how this was working, but mah poor brainbone whined & whimpered, so I stopped.

Benny laughed. "It's easier than that! I want to help!"

"Help what?" I asked.

Now he didn't laugh. "When I send you back, it's to work harder than ever."

"You mean write mah newspaper a lot?" I asked. I was getting annoyed. This sounded like one more big guy getting into mah own business. A fella has to have some of his own hours.

He laughed again & I decided I liked this better. "I want you to do what you like, Algernon. There's more as you follow your root. Remember that."

I think I can say that finally Dreamland let me up some after that. I had mah message, I guess, & so Benny had done his bit. OK.

"There's more as you follow your root." Ha! Sounds like a big guy's way of making you work harder & taking credit 4or it too.

But maybe not all. I figgered I had better check this out fully when I got back to the real Bags End & its real weirdo denizens.

So, yes, Dear Readers, again I found mahself running through Bags End, & onto Milne's Porch with mah friends after me.

"Blondys 3!" I called out. They always come that way. And they did.

"OK, you guys, remember that beagles don't float while you lift me up to tell everyone on Milne's Porch."

So the Blondys who don't let me fall ever despite mah non-floatingness floated me anyway over the railing and sort of away from the Porch a little ways. And Sheila, Miss Chris, & Crissy came climbing through the window, like the other times. They surprised to see me, but I talked right away.

"Now, you Bags End guys, turn your worry over me to listening when I say, there's more as you follow your root!" I cried.

"You dum beagle! Float your sorry carcass back here so we can doctor you properly!" grumped Sheila Bunny. The only roots she likes are carrots. O! Yuk!

Milne's Porch was more crowded than I had ever seen it, as more guys kept coming through the window. Alex, Allie among them. I was just worrying it would break when I felt the Blondys around me let go, & I was falling!

"SSSSStupid Bennnnnny Bigggggg Ddddddreams!" I yelled as I fell, because I knows that mah real Dreamland or waking world Blondys do not let go.

I got so mad I stopped falling. "Ha! Dream grabitee!" I said. I began walking up to Milne's Porch & when it got too slow, I started swooping. I guess now I know that beagles don't leap or float but they can swoop! Well, at least in dreams.

I climbed onto Milne's Porch & all the Bags End guys cheered. Dream Bags End guys anyway.

They stood looking at me & I tried to think what next.

"You're dream guys but I'm not. This is mah dream but it's like a bunch of dreams stuck together," sed me longly. Sheila, Betsy, Miss Chris, Princess Crissy, mah brother Alex, Allie Leopard, & the rest all looked at me, waiting. I hmm'd.

How do you ask dream guys 4or help? How can they help? I wondered if they could fall asleep themselves & their dream parts help me out. It almost seemed like a math quiz in school.

But that's what to do. We all curled into mah comfy armchair & fell asleep. I told them not to get fooled but to keep close to me.

I had to get deeper into this to find out how to escape. I had only mah simple brainbone to advise me what next. I promised I would not let anyone down.

I wasn't sure how many dream guys followed me down deeper into Dreamland, but I remember feeling like Sheila & Betsy & Miss Chris & Princess Crissy & Alex were nearby. I swooped without looking back 4or fear of tricks

that might happen if I did. Ha!

As I swooped, I worked what was around me. Looser dreams let you do that. I made the air soft to swoop through, almost as soft as Betsy Bunny Pillow, tho I would not tell her that 4or fear of a retributive smother. Ha!

I wanted the dream big guys with me to help more but I still did not even know how to ask. Finally, I just said, "Help!" & that worked some.

Sheila took charge at first, I think, because she swoophopped ahead of us & landed us in a big field. "There!" she said like we were all done & time 4or a victory nap. I said no word at all but waited.

Now that we weren't swooping no more I felt calmer which I guessed was good. My brother Alex talked next.

"Bump Bump Bump!" he yelled in his usual non-English way. At first, nothing happened. Then there was a giggle near mah earbone & I jumped. Another! Then it was raining giggles on all of us. Umm.

I looked around 4or Allie Leopard, that nice green-eyed fella who speaks real languages like English & made-up ones like Bump.

He smiled & said, "Alex was just testing. He said, 'look out!'" & Allie winked at me.

"O" I said. "Now what? More silly Bump shenanigans?"

"Bump!" Alex said all upset.

"Alex said, 'of course not!' He said, 'Dreamland lasts until you wake up,'" Allie explained.

"I tried that," I grumbled.

"Bump. Bump?" Alex said.

I looked at Allie but he was gone. So was everyone. What I had left was a couple of Bumps floating in mah face.

Great. OK. Fine. Now I was grouchy. "Come along, you crazy Bumps!" I gruttered & I guessed they knew English enough cuz they did.

What I couldn't figure out was how to make waking up stick. Dreamland liked to turn everything into more dream.

I stretched & crunched mah brainbone 4or an answer. Nothing helpful showed up at first.

So I stretched & crunched harder, & I left words by climbing inside them & that was strange, but finally it seemed like I was getting somewhere. I crawled along inside words 4or a long time. When it got too long I closed mah eyes & crawled there too. There was a way & I could, so I kept on.

Then I went slower after awhile, slower & slower. Then I stopped. No talking, no looking, no listening.

Mah eyes opened to Milne's Porche & I knowed right then what was true & why I had had such trouble.

You may not believe me, loyal & Dear Readers, but everything is dream. I suppose that's hard to figger on but it's true.

So here I am not because I am awake but because I choose to be here. I am still dreaming. You are dreaming too, that you are reading a newspaper writed by a guy named Algernon Beagle, who is telling you that you are dreaming.

Benny Big Dreams nodded. "I knew you would figger it out," he said proudly.

"But what do I do about it?" I demanded.

"You don't have to do anything about it," he said calmly.

"Most people won't believe me," I protested.

"They don't have to," he said calmly again.

"Then what was the point of all this?" I yelled.

He smiled. He was gone.

When all the Bags End guys came to doctor me, yet again, they didn't find anything wrong. I was just sad, but I said I was tired.

Later, I talked to mah friend Princess Crissy.

"Do you believe me, Crissy?"

She smiled her nice Crissy smile at me, & I had to look over mah shoulder to see who.

"I do. Why aren't you happy to know a truth like that?"

I thinked even harder than when I was crawling inside & outside mah head.

"I don't know. Maybe it's not enough 4or me."

She nodded.

Well, the days went by in the more regular way, & I guess I began to cheer up,

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Till one morning I woke up no longer a beagle! I don't know what I was, a sort of black blob, I guess. That roughed me out of mah idears about dreaming.

I gathered what little of mah brainbone was left & began folding mahself out of the place I was in. Good grief!

I unfolded into another dream as mah regular beagle self, & decided it was useless to accept or deny this situation.

What then? I did not know & had not known 4or so long I just felt sad, not even grumpy.

I don't know what would have happened if I kept trapped in mah dreaming like that. What I did finally decide to do was wake up & stay waked up. I am not sure how it worked this time, but I figgered that I had to jam open mah dreams to let me out & then jam them closed again.

It was tricky. But what happened was that I finally figgered out why I could not do like I wanted. It was Benny Big Dreams.

He nods. "You figgered me out."

"But why, guy? What did I do to you so mean?"

He laughs. "Nothing! I am amazed how far you have gone along! Most give up & stop. I let them go."

"But not me, huh? Lucky guy I am?"

"You are special, Algernon."

"I know. Mah friends who are nice ones tell me. So I believe them sometimes."

"I am offering to let you write about Dreamland."

"Do I have to? Could you stop me?"

He laughs. "I just want to help you along. Most people have no control over their dreams or any idear what they might be about 4or real."

"4or real? Benny, can I go now? I don't like this."

"You don't want to write Dreamland's books & newspapers?"

Now I just left. He looked sad.

I wake up & this time it sticks.

I am in mah bed & it is early morning. Mah silly brother Alex is sleepbumping his little blue foam toy or friend I dunno. I am glad to see him.

Thing is, maybe there is more than one Bags End. Not like a real one & the rest, but different ones, like a team or a family.

Is there more than one Algernon? I dunno, again. Yes & no.

So what do I do? I could tell Benny OK, in Dream Bags End I will write your paper or maybe a dream version of mine. That would make him happy, & it could be I will like it. Could be.

I crawl through mah window onto Milne's Porch, & into mah comfy armchair where this began.

Or maybe it continues. Bags End isn't the kind of place where things go away 4or good.

What then? Is it only me who sees how things are? I think the Blondys do. Sheila & Miss Chris & Princess Crissy, I don't think they would ever know less than me about nothing. I am pretty sure Betsy Bunny Pillow does not care.

So I sit & I am not sleepy which is good. I try to think of something happy & mah mind thinks about mah Mommy Beagle. She would sing to me & call me Sonny Boy.

What did happen to her? Is she around in some other Bags End?

But she wasn't in Bags End. She was in Peoria. Is that far?

What would I say to mah Mommy Beagle if I seened her? I don't remember saying much to her back then. Did I speak Puppy to her?

Maybe go to see Sheila? No. This time around none of the big guys really helped me or saved me. I did it mahself. I am not such a little guy anymore. Or maybe I don't see big guys in the same way.

Hmm. Mah brainbone felt like it was smoking from too much use.

This has been such a long story, it's got its own weird ways.

Is it over? No. I can't trick it like that.

What I learned, best I can figger, is there are many Bags Ends at once. Really hard to think this & then get along to Mister Owl's school to learn arithmaticks & gramma.

But OK, that's how it is. I crawled back into Bags End & walked through mah bedroom softly to not wake Alex. I came into the Bunny Family apartment but nobody was awake.

Out into the hallway & I thought: where's the light bulbs? Weird to wonder & why is there no top or bottom to Bags End? Why does it look so much smaller from the outside? How does this work?

If I am not a little guy exactly, or really a big guy, then maybe I am a middle guy now.

I sorta liked that. Maybe I can watch out 4or the little guys better, & stand up to the grumpy big guys better too.

Some good idear in that, I think.

Are there other middle guys around, or am I some new kind? I dunno, again & again.

I am gonna find out a lot of things, me vows. And Benny Big Dreams & I will talk again. I won't be so shy or scared of him too. He needs me. He said so.

Read Part 2 in Cenacle | 106 | December 2018!



* * * * *

Tom Sheehan

Early Management of Dreams

Morning's promised vise went on its rampage,
the last ounce ushered into gear, heady, sticky
later on if she had left it alone, but oh no, not
this imagery in morning's walk which cleaned
as good as any kitchen lady at dined finishing.
Wipe down. Wipe out. How do you like those
oranges, my faultless mister in the night?

Now, staring at the next light, the one on the hill
known before, the climb to a barn and a gingerly
small house looks down on the sea, the exquisite
and lightsome lady too, I bring back the crowded
room of smells, liquor on final legs, dregs at their
last cries founding frames to reside in, sometimes
headless, the little madam of taste that crawled up
beside me at the bar, creature of eyes emblazoned
with stories, cheek bones like early manufactured
flint, lips that might stretch a river wide, sex itself
having a rest after a heady ride.

* * *

I'm Cheap, She Said

I'm cheap, she said, a 100 pounds of cheap
 that two drinks can buy for the night. I liberated
 myself for a nightly prison. But I'm good at being
 jailed, being sent off for a one-night stand or a lay-down,
 or however you'll have it. I never get too talkative. I don't
 let my mouth get in the way of anything that comes up real.
 Morning comes too soon, too smelly, too late for some right here,
 right now. There's not a good piece in this whole joint. All you've got
 to do is ask me.

You dress well, I said.
 I touched her fabric and was
 charged with electrons in a shocking
 move, a whole laboratory of jump, tingle,
 and broadcast. Her dress, thin, blue as a forgotten
 bird's egg, rigged like a sail's caught a fresh wind off shore,
 hip marks saying a vault could be ajar, was right next door
 to ignition. Right there. Gas-like. *Bang! Poof!* How do
 you come across with that heat? Where does it
 come from? Are any shock-proof measures
 required? Does it have a hidden switch?
 An off-on switch? A toggle switch?
 A switch you can see in the dark?
 Is it universal? Global?
 A trip around the world?
 Are you switchable?

* * *

God, Gray Flies, Friend Edward

The fields are wet with hunters,
fish float on my stream,
gasps of a tree root exaggerate
the song in my ears

Clouds lean on a last bright out ring
of moon August lets go of; friends
continue to carry themselves away
in black dress, slow straps mocking
the plight of brown grass.

When we fished the Pine River,
you trod like an Indian.
When you broke twigs,
it was to start fire.

The gray ghosting flies you tied all
winter tumbled slowly like a pigeon
a hawk cut in the speed lane hackles
dusting light gray the first sliver of
sunlight, the last bare sword of it
cutting water.

Next May the mayflies will consecrate
the river all over, the river will turn,
I'll wake early. Look for your sign,
listen for your first laugh aloud.
Miss it.

* * * * *





The New Alchemy

[Essay]

From This is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience, Vintage Books, 1973.

This essay was written in 1960.

Besides the philosopher's stone that would turn base metal into gold, one of the great quests of alchemy in both Europe and Asia was the elixir of immortality. In gullible enthusiasm for this quest, more than one Chinese emperor died of the fabulous concoctions of powdered jade, tea, ginseng, and precious metals prepared by Taoist priests. But just as the work of transforming lead into gold was in many cases a chemical symbolism for a spiritual transformation of man himself, so the immortality to be conferred by the elixir was not always the literally everlasting life but rather the transportation of consciousness into a state beyond time. Modern physicists have solved the problem of changing lead into gold, though the process is somewhat more expensive than digging gold from the earth. But in the last few years modern chemists have prepared one or two substances for which it may be claimed that in some cases induce states of mind remarkably similar to cosmic consciousness.

To many people such claims are deeply disturbing. For one thing, mystical experience seems altogether too easy when it simply comes out of a bottle, and is thus available to people who have done nothing to deserve it, who have neither fasted nor prayed nor practiced yoga. For another, the claim seems to imply that spiritual insight is after all only a matter of body chemistry involving a total reduction of the spiritual to the material. These are serious considerations, even though one may be convinced that in the long run the difficulty is found to rest upon semantic confusion as to the definitions of "spiritual" and "material."

However, it should be pointed out that there is nothing new or disreputable in the idea that spiritual insight is an undeserved gift of divine grace, often conveyed through such material or sacramental means as the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the mass. The priest who by virtue of his office transforms bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, *ex opere operato*, by the simple repetition of the formula of the Last Supper, is in a situation not radically different from that of the scientist who, by repeating the right formula of an experiment, may effect a transformation in the brain. The comparative worth of the two operations must be judged by their effects. There were always those upon whom the sacraments of baptism and communion did not seem to "take," whose lives remained effectively unregenerate. Likewise, none of these consciousness-changing chemicals are literally mystical experience in a bottle. Many who receive them experience only ecstasies without insight, or just an unpleasant confusion of sensation and imagination. States akin to mystical experience arise only in certain individuals and then often depend upon considerable concentration and effort to use the change of consciousness in certain ways. It is important here, too, to stress the point that ecstasy is only incidental to the authentic mystical experience, the essence of which might best be described as insight, as the word is now used in psychiatry.

A chemical of this kind might perhaps be said to be an aid to perception in the same way as the telescope, microscope, or spectroscope, save in this case that the instrument is not an external object but an internal state of the nervous system. All such instruments are relatively useless without proper

training and preparation not only in their handling, but also in the particular field of investigation,

These considerations alone are already almost enough to show that the use of such chemicals does not reduce spiritual insight to a mere matter of body chemistry. But it should be added that even when we can describe certain events in terms of chemistry this does not mean that such events are merely chemical. A chemical description of spiritual experience has somewhat the same use and the same limits as the chemical description of a great painting. It is simple enough to make a chemical analysis of the paint, and for artists and connoisseurs alike there is some point in doing so. It might also be possible to work out a chemical description of all the processes that go on in the artist while he is painting. But it would be incredibly complicated, and in the meantime the same processes could be described and communicated far more effectively in some other language than the chemical. We should probably say that a process *is* chemical only when chemical language is the most effective means of describing it. Analogously, some of the chemicals known as psychedelics provide opportunities for mystical insight in much the same way that well-prepared paints and brushes provide opportunities for fine painting, or a beautifully constructed piano for great music. They make it easier, but they do not accomplish the work all by themselves.

The two chemicals which are of most use in creating a change of consciousness conducive to spiritual experience are mescaline and lysergic acid diethylamide (known, for short, as LSD). The former is a synthetic formulation of the active ingredients of the peyote cactus, and the latter a purely synthetic chemical of the indole group which produces its effects even in such minute amounts as twenty-five micrograms. The specific effects of these chemicals are hard to identify with any clarity, and so far as is known at present they seem to operate upon the nervous system by reducing some of the inhibitory mechanisms which ordinarily have a screening effect upon our consciousness. Certain psychiatrists who seem overly anxious to hang on to the socially approved sensation of reality—more or less the world as perceived on a bleak Monday morning—classify these chemicals as hallucinogens producing toxic effects of a schizoid or psychotic character. I am afraid this is psychiatric gobbledygook: a sort of authoritative rumble of disapproval. Neither substance is an addictive drug, like heroin or opium, and it has never been demonstrated that they have harmful effects upon people who were not otherwise seriously disturbed. It is begging the question to call the changes of consciousness which they educe hallucinations, for some of the unusual things felt and seen may be no more unreal than the unfamiliar forms perceived through a microscope. We do not know. It is also begging the question to call their effects toxic, which might mean poisonous, unless this word can also be used for the effects of vitamins or proteins. Such language is evaluative, not descriptive in any scientific sense.

Somewhat more than two years ago (1958) I was asked by a psychiatric research group to take 100 micrograms of lysergic acid, to see whether it would reproduce anything resembling a mystical experience. It did not do so, and so far as I know the reason was that I had not then learned how to direct my inquiries when under its influence. It seemed instead that my senses had been given a kaleidoscopic character (and this is no more than a metaphor) which made the whole world entrancingly complicated, as if I were involved in a multidimensional arabesque. Colors became so vivid that flowers, leaves, and fabrics seemed to be illumined from inside. The random patterns of blades of grass in a lawn appeared to be exquisitely organized without, however, any actual distortion of vision. Black ink or *sumi* paintings by Chinese and Japanese artists appeared almost to be three-dimensional photographs, and what are ordinarily dismissed as irrelevant details of speech, behavior, appearance, and form seemed in some indefinable way to be highly significant. Listening to music with closed eyes, I beheld the most fascinating patterns of dancing jewelry, mosaic, tracery, and abstract images. At one point everything appeared to be uproariously funny, especially the gestures and actions of people going about their everyday business. Ordinary remarks seemed to reverberate with double and quadruple meanings, and the role-playing behavior of those around me not only became unusually evident but also implied concealed attitudes contrary or complementary to its overt intention. In short, the screening or selective apparatus of our normal interpretative evaluation of experience had been partially suspended, with the result that I was presumably projecting the

sensation of meaning or significance upon just about everything. The whole experience was vastly entertaining and interesting, but as yet nothing like any mystical experience that I had had before.

It was not until a year later that I tried LSD again, this time at the request of another research team. Since then I have repeated the experiment five times, with dosages varying from 75 to 100 micrograms. My impression has been that such experiments are profound and rewarding to the extent that I do my utmost to observe perceptual and evaluative changes and to describe them as clearly and completely as possible, usually with the help of a tape recorder. To give a play-by-play description of each experiment might be clinically interesting, but what I am concerned with here is a philosophical discussion of some of the high points and recurrent themes of my experiences. Psychiatrists have not yet made up their minds as to whether LSD is useful in therapy, but at present I am strongly inclined to feel that its major use may turn out to be only secondarily as a therapeutic and primarily as an instrumental aid to the creative artist, thinker, or scientist. I should observe, in passing, that the human and natural environment in which these experiments are conducted is of great importance, and that its use in hospital wards with groups of doctors firing off clinical questions at the subject is most undesirable. The supervising physician should take a human attitude, and drop all defensive dramatizations of scientific objectivity and medical authority, conducting the experiment in surroundings of some natural or artistic beauty.

I have said that my general impression of the first experiment was that the “mechanism” by which we screen our sense-data and select only some of them as significant had been partially suspended. Consequently, I felt that the particular feeling which we associate with “the meaningful” was projected indiscriminately upon everything, and then rationalized in ways that might strike an independent observer as ridiculous—unless, perhaps, the subject were unusually clever at rationalizing. However, the philosopher cannot pass up the point that our selection of some sense-data as significant and others as insignificant is always with relation to particular purposes—survival, the quest for certain pleasures, finding one’s way to some destination, or whatever it may be. But in every experiment with LSD one of the first effects I have noticed is a profound relaxation combined with an abandonment of purposes and goals, reminding me of the Taoist saying that “when purpose has been used to achieve purposelessness, the thing has been grasped.” I have felt, in other words, endowed with all the time in the world, free to look about me as if I were living in eternity without a single problem to be solved. It is just for this reason that the busy and purposeful actions of other people seem at this time to be so comic, for it becomes obvious that by setting themselves goals which are always in the future, in the “tomorrow which never comes,” they are missing entirely the point of being alive.

When, therefore, our selection of sense-impressions is not organized with respect to any particular purpose, all the surrounding details of the world must appear to be equally meaningful or equally meaningless. Logically, these are two ways of saying the same thing, but the overwhelming feeling of my own LSD experiences is that all aspects of the world become meaningful rather than meaningless. This is not to say that they acquire meaning in the sense of signs, by virtue of pointing to something else, but that all things appear to be their own point. Their simple existence, or better, their present formation, seems to be perfect, to be an end or fulfillment without any need for justification. Flowers do not bloom in order to produce seeds, nor are seeds germinated in order to bring forth flowers. Each stage of the process—seed, sprout, bud, flower, and fruit—may be regarded as the goal. A chicken is one egg’s way of producing others. In our normal experience something of the same kind takes place in music and the dance, where the point of the action is each moment of its unfolding and not just the temporal end of the performance.

Such a translation of everyday experience into something of the same nature as music has been the beginning and the prevailing undertone of all my experiments. But LSD does not simply suspend the selective process by cutting it out. It would be more exact to say that it shows the relativity of our ordinary evaluation of sense-data by suggesting others. It permits the mind to organize its sensory impressions in new patterns. In my second experiment I noticed, for example, that all repeated forms—

leaves on a stem, books on shelves, mullions in windows—gave me the sensation of seeing double or even multiple, as if the second, third, and fourth leaves on the stem were reflections of the first, seen, as it were, in several thicknesses of window glass. When I mentioned this, the attending physician held up his finger to see if it would give me a double image. For a moment it seemed to do so, but all at once I saw that the second image had its basis in a wisp of cigar smoke passing close to his finger and upon which my consciousness had projected the highlights and outline of a second finger. As I then concentrated upon this sensation of doubling or repeating images, it seemed suddenly as if the whole field of sight were a transparent liquid rippled in concentric circles as in dropping a stone into a pool. The normal images of things around me were not distorted by this pattern. They remained just as usual, but my attention directed itself to highlights, lines, and shadows upon them that fitted the pattern, letting those that did not fall into relative insignificance. As soon, however, as I noticed this projection and became aware of details that did not fit the pattern, it seemed as if whole handfuls of pebbles had been thrown into the optical space, rippling it with concentric circles that overlapped in all directions, so that every visible point became an intersection of circles. The optical field seemed, in fact, to have a structured grain like a photograph screened for reproduction, save that the organization of the grains was not rectilinear but circular. In this way every detail fitted the pattern and the field of vision became *pointillist*, like a painting by Seurat.

This sensation raised a number of questions. Was my mind imperiously projecting its own geometrical designs upon the world, thus “hallucinating” a structure in things which is not actually there? Or is what we call the “real” structure of things simply a learned projection or hallucination which we hold in common? Or was I somehow becoming aware of the actual grain of the rods and cones in my retina, for even a hallucination must have some actual basis in the nervous system? On another occasion I was looking closely at a handful of sand, and in becoming aware that I could not get it into clear focus I became conscious of every detail and articulation of the way in which my eyes were fuzzing the image—and this was certainly perception of a grain or distortion in the eyes themselves.

The general impression of these optical sensations is that the eyes, without losing the normal area of vision, have become microscopes, and that the texture of the visual field is infinitely rich and complex. I do not know whether this is actual awareness of the multiplicity of nerve-endings in the retina, or, for that matter, in the fingers, for the same grainy feeling arose in the sense of touch. But the effect of feeling that this is or may be so is, as it were, to turn the senses back upon themselves, and so to realize that seeing the external world is also seeing the eyes. In other words, I became vividly aware of the fact that what I call shapes, colors, and textures in the outside world are also states of my nervous system, that is, of me. In knowing them I also know my self. But the strange part of this apparent sensation of my own senses was that I did not appear to be inspecting them from outside or from a distance, as if they were *objects*. I can say only that the awareness of grain or structure in the senses seemed to be awareness of awareness, of myself from inside myself. Because of this, it followed that the distance or separation between myself and my senses, on the one hand, and the external world, on the other, seemed to disappear. I was no longer a detached observer, a little man inside my own head, *having* sensations. I *was* the sensations, so much so that there was nothing left of me, the observing ego, except the series of sensations which happened—not to me, but just happened—moment by moment, one after another.

To become the sensations, as distinct from having them, engenders the most astonishing sense of freedom and release. For it implies that experience is not something in which one is trapped or by which one is pushed around, or against which one must fight. The conventional duality of subject and object, knower and known, feeler and feeling, is changed into a polarity: the knower and the known become the poles, terms, or phases of a single event which happens, not to me or *from* me, but of itself. The experiencer and the experience become a single, ever-changing self-forming process, complete and fulfilled at every moment of its unfolding, and of infinite complexity and subtlety. It is like not watching, but being, a coiling arabesque of smoke patterns in the air, or of ink dropped in water, or of

a dancing snake which seems to move from every part of its body at once. This may be a “drug-induced hallucination,” but it corresponds exactly to what Dewey and Bentley have called the transactional relationship of the organism to its environment. This is to say that all our actions and experiences arise mutually from the organism and from the environment at the same time. The eyes can see light because of the sun, but the sun is light because of the eyes. Ordinarily, under the hypnosis of social conditioning, we feel quite distinct from our physical surroundings, facing them rather than belonging in them. Yet in this way we ignore and screen out the physical fact of our total interdependence with the natural world. We are as embodied in it as our own cells and molecules are embodied in us. Our neglect and repression of this interrelationship gives special urgency to all the new sciences of ecology, studying the interplay of organisms with their environments, and warning us against ignorant interference with the balances of nature.

The sensation that events are happening of themselves, and that nothing is *making* them happen, and that they are not happening *to* anything, has always been a major feature of my experiences with LSD. It is possible that the chemical is simply giving me a vivid realization of my own philosophy, though there have been times when the experience has suggested modifications of my previous thinking.¹ But just as the sensation of subject-object polarity is confirmed by the transactional psychology of Dewey and Bentley, so the sensation of events happening “of themselves” is just how one would expect to perceive a world consisting entirely of process. Now the language of science is increasingly a language of process—a description of events, relations, operations, and forms rather than of things and substances. The world so described is a world of actions rather than agents, verbs rather than nouns, going against the common sense idea that an action is the behavior of some thing, some solid entity of “stuff.”

But the common sense idea that action is always the function of an agent is so deeply rooted, so bound up with our sense of order and security, that seeing the world to be otherwise can be seriously disturbing. Without agents, actions do not seem to come from anywhere, to have any dependable origin, and at first sight this spontaneity can be alarming. In one experiment it seemed that whenever I tried to put my (metaphorical) foot upon some solid ground, the ground collapsed into empty space. I could find no substantial basis from which to act: my will was a whim, and my past, as a causal conditioning force, had simply vanished. There was only the present conformation of events, happening. For a while I felt lost in a void, frightened, baseless, insecure through and through, yet soon I became accustomed to the feeling, strange as it was. There was simply a pattern of action, of process, and this was at one and the same time the universe and myself with nothing outside it either to trust or mistrust. And there seemed to be no meaning in the idea of its trusting or mistrusting itself, just as there is no possibility of a finger’s touching its own tip.

Upon reflection, there seems to be nothing unreasonable in seeing the world in this way. The agent behind every action is itself action. If a mat can be called matting, a cat can be called catting. We do not actually need to ask who or what “cats,” just as we do not need to ask what is the basic stuff or substance out of which the world is formed—for there is no way of describing this substance except in terms of form, of structure, order, and operation. The world is not *formed* as if it were inert clay responding to the touch of a potter’s hand; the world *is* form, or better, formation, for upon examination every substance turns out to be closely knit pattern. The fixed notion that every pattern or form must be made of some basic material which is in itself formless is based on a superficial analogy between natural formation and manufacture, as if the stars and rocks had been made out of something as a carpenter makes tables out of wood. Thus what we call the agent behind the action is simply the prior or relatively more constant state of the same action: when a man runs we have a “manning-running” over and above a simple “manning.” Furthermore, it is only a somewhat clumsy convenience to say that present events are moved or caused by past events, for we are actually talking about earlier and later stages of the same event. We can establish regularities of rhythm and pattern in the course of an event, and so predict its future configurations, but its past states do not “push” its present and future states as if they were a row of dominoes stood on end so that knocking over the first collapses all the



others in series. The fallen dominoes lie where they fall, but past events vanish into the present, which is just another way of saying that the world is a self-moving pattern which, when its successive states are remembered, can be shown to have a certain order. Its motion, its energy, issues from itself now, not from the past, which simply falls behind it in memory like the wake from a ship.

When we ask the “why” of this moving pattern, we usually try to answer the question in terms of its original, past impulse or of its future goal. I had realized for a long time that if there is in any sense a reason for the world’s existence it must be sought in the present, as the reason for the wake must be sought in the engine of the moving ship. I have already mentioned that LSD makes me peculiarly aware of the musical or dance-like character of the world, bringing my attention to rest upon its present flowing and seeing this as its ultimate point. Yet I have also been able to see that this point has depths, that the present wells up from within itself with an energy which is something much richer than simple exuberance.

One of these experiments was conducted late at night. Some five or six hours from its start the doctor had to go home, and I was left alone in the garden. For me, this stage of the experiment is always the most rewarding in terms of insight, after some of its more unusual and bizarre sensory effects have worn off. The garden was a lawn surrounded by shrubs and high trees—pine and eucalyptus—and floodlit from the house which enclosed it on one side. As I stood on the lawn I noticed that the rough patches where the grass was thin or mottled with weeds no longer seemed to be blemishes. Scattered at random as they were, they appeared to constitute an ordered design, giving the whole area the texture of velvet damask, the rough patches being the parts where the pile of the velvet is cut. In sheer delight I began to dance on this enchanted carpet, and through the thin soles of my moccasins I could feel the ground becoming alive under my feet, connecting me with the earth and the trees and the sky in such a way that I seemed to become one body with my whole surroundings.

Looking up, I saw that the stars were colored with the same reds, greens, and blues that one sees in iridescent glass, and passing across them was the single light of a jet plane taking forever to streak over the sky. At the same time, the trees, shrubs, and flowers seemed to be living jewelry, inwardly luminous like intricate structures of jade, alabaster, or coral, and yet breathing and flowing with the same life that was in me. Every plant became a kind of musical utterance, a play of variations on a theme repeated from the main branches, through the stalks and twigs, to the leaves, the veins in the leaves, and to the fine capillary network between the veins. Each new bursting of growth from a center repeated or amplified the basic design with increasing complexity and delight, finally exulting in a flower.

From my description it will seem that the garden acquired an atmosphere that was distinctly exotic, like the gardens of precious stones in the *Arabian Nights*, or like scenes in a Persian miniature. This struck me at the time, and I began to wonder just why it is that the glowingly articulated landscapes of those miniatures seem exotic, as do also many Chinese and Japanese paintings. Were the artists recording what they, too, had seen under the influence of drugs? I knew enough of the lives and techniques of Far Eastern painters to doubt this. I asked, too, whether what I was seeing was “drugged.” In other words, was the effect of the LSD in my nervous system the addition to my senses of some chemical screen which distorted all that I saw to preternatural loveliness? Or was its effect rather to remove certain habitual and normal inhibitions of the mind and senses, enabling us to see things as they would appear to us if we were not so chronically repressed? Little is known of the exact neurological effects of LSD, but what is known suggests the latter possibility. If this be so, it is possible that the art forms of other cultures appear exotic—that is, unfamiliarly enchanting—because we are seeing the world through the eyes of artists whose repressions are not the same as ours. The blocks in their view of the world may not coincide with ours, so that in their representations of life we see areas that we normally ignore. I am inclined to some such solution because there have been times when I have seen the world in this magical aspect without benefit of LSD, and they were times when I was profoundly relaxed within, my senses unguardedly open to their surroundings.

Feeling, then, not that I was drugged but that I was in an unusual degree open to reality,

I tried to discern the meaning, the inner character of the dancing pattern which constituted both myself and the garden, and the whole dome of the night with its colored stars. All at once it became obvious that the whole thing was love-play, where love means everything that the word can mean, a spectrum ranging from the red of erotic delight, through the green of human endearment, to the violet of divine charity, from Freud's libido to Dante's "love that moves the sun and other stars." All were so many colors issuing from a single white light, and, what was more, this single source was not just love as we ordinarily understand it: it was also intelligence, not only Eros and Agape but also Logos. I could see that the intricate organization both of the plants and of my own nervous system, like symphonies of branching complexity, were not just manifestations of intelligence—as if things like intelligence and love were in themselves substances or formless forces. It was rather that the pattern itself is intelligence and is love, and this somehow in spite of all its outwardly stupid and cruel distortions.

There is probably no way of finding objective verification for insights such as this. The world is love to him who treats it as such, even when it torments and destroys him and, in states of consciousness where there is no basic separation between the ego and the world, suffering cannot be felt as malice inflicted upon oneself by another. By the same logic it might seem that without the separation of self and other there can be no love. This might be true if individuality and universality were formal opposites, mutually exclusive of one another; if, that is, the inseparability of self and other meant that all individual differentiations were simply unreal. But in the unitary, or nondualistic, view of the world I have been describing this is not so. Individual differences express the unity, as branches, leaves, and flowers from the same plant, and the love between the members is the realization of their basic interdependence.

I have not yet been able to use LSD in circumstances of great physical or moral pain, and therefore my explorations of the problem of evil under its influence may appear to be shallow. Only once in these experiments have I felt acute fear, but I know of several cases in which LSD has touched off psychic states of the most alarming and unpleasant kind. More than once I have invited such states under LSD by looking at images ordinarily suggestive of "the creeps"—the mandibles of spiders, and the barbs and spines of dangerous fish and insects. Yet they evoked only a sense of beauty and exuberance, for our normal projection of malice into these creatures was entirely withdrawn, so that their organs of destruction became no more evil than the teeth of a beautiful woman. On another occasion I looked for a long time at a colored reproduction of Van Eyck's *Last Judgment*, which is surely one of the most horrendous products of human imagination. The scene of hell is dominated by the figure of Death, a skeleton beneath whose bat-like wings lies a writhing mass of screaming bodies gnawed by snakes which penetrate them like maggots in fruit. One of the curious effects of LSD is to impart an illusion of movement in still images, so that here the picture came to life and the whole entanglement of limbs and serpents began to squirm before my eyes.²

Ordinarily such a sight should have been hideous, but now I watched it with intense and puzzled interest until the thought came to me, "*Demon est deus inversus*—the Devil is God inverted—so let's turn the picture upside down." I did so, and thereupon burst into laughter for it became apparent at once that the scene was an empty drama, a sort of spiritual scarecrow, designed to guard some mystery from profanation by the ignorant. The agonized expressions of the damned seemed quite evidently "put on," and as for the death's-head, the great skull in the center of the painting, it became just what a skull is—an empty shell—and why the horror when there is nothing in it?

I was, of course, seeing ecclesiastical hells for what they are. On the one hand, they are the pretension that social authority is ultimately inescapable since there are post-mortem police who will catch every criminal. On the other hand, they are "no trespassing" signs to discourage the insincere and the immature from attaining insights which they might abuse. A baby is put in a playpen to keep it from getting at the matches or falling downstairs, and though the intention of the pen is to keep the baby closed in, parents are naturally proud when the child grows strong enough to climb out. Likewise, a man can perform actions which are truly moral only when he is no longer motivated by the fear of

hell; that is, when he grows into union with the Good that is beyond good and evil; which, in other words, does not act from the love of rewards or the fear of punishments. This is precisely the nature of the world when it is considered as self-moving action, giving out a past instead of being motivated by a past.

Beyond this, the perception of the empty threat of the death's-head was certainly a recognition of the fact that the fear of death, as distinct from the fear of dying, is one of the most baseless mirages that trouble us. Because it is completely impossible to imagine one's own personal absence, we fill the void in our minds with images of being buried alive in perpetual darkness. If death is the simple termination of a stream of consciousness, it is certainly nothing to fear. At the same time, I realize that there is some apparent evidence for survival of death in a few extraordinarily unexplainable mediumistic communications and remembrances of past lives. These I attribute, vaguely enough, to subtler networks of communication and interrelationship in the pattern of life than we ordinarily perceive. For if forms repeat themselves, if the structure of branching trees is reverberated in the design of watercourses in the desert, it would not be so strange if a pattern so intricate as the human nervous system were to repeat configurations that arise in consciousness as veritable memories of the most distant times. My own feeling, and of course it is nothing more than an opinion, is that we transcend death, not as individual memory-systems, but only in so far as our true identity is the total process of the world as distinct from the apparently separate organism.

As I have said, this sense of being the whole process is frequently experienced with LSD, and, for me, it has often arisen out of a strong feeling of the mutuality of opposites. Line and plane, concept and percept, solid and space, figure and ground, subject and object appear to be so completely correlative as to be convertible into each other. At one moment it seems that there are, for example, no lines in nature: there are only the boundaries of planes, boundaries which are, after all, the planes themselves. But at the next moment, looking carefully into the texture of these planes, one discovers them to be nothing but a dense network of patterned lines. Looking at the form of a tree against the sky, I have felt at one moment that its outline "belongs" to the tree, exploding into space. But the next moment I feel that the same form is the "inline" of the sky, of space imploding the tree. Every pull is felt as a push, and every push as a pull, as in rotating the rim of a wheel with one's hand. Is one pushing or pulling?

The sense that forms are also properties of the space in which they expand is not in the least fantastic when one considers the nature of magnetic fields, or, say, the dynamics of swirling ink dropped into water. The concepts of verbal thought are so clumsy that we tend to think only of one aspect of a relationship at a time. We alternate between seeing a given form as a property of the figure and as a property of the ground, as in the Gestalt image of two profiles in black silhouette, about to kiss. The white space between them appears as a chalice, but it is intensely difficult to see the kissing faces and the chalice simultaneously. Yet with LSD one appears to be able to feel this simultaneity quite vividly, and thus to become aware of the mutuality of one's own form and action and that of the surrounding world. The two seem to shape and determine each other at the same moment, explosion and implosion concurring in perfect harmony, so giving rise to the feeling that one's actual self is both. This inner identity is felt with every level of the environment—the physical world of stars and space, rocks and plants, the social world of human beings, and the ideational world of art and literature, music and conversation. All are grounds or fields operating in the most intimate mutuality with one's own existence and behavior so that the "origin" of action lies in both at once, fusing them into a single act. It is certainly for this reason that LSD taken in common with a small group can be a profoundly eucharistic experience, drawing the members together into an extremely warm and intimate bond of friendship.

All in all, I have felt that my experiments with this astonishing chemical have been most worthwhile, creative, stimulating, and, above all, an intimation that "there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in your philosophy." Only once have I felt terror, the sense of being close to

madness, and even here the insight gained was well worth the pain. Yet this was enough to convince me that indiscriminate use of this alchemy might be exceedingly dangerous, and to make me ask who, in our society, is competent to control its use. Obviously, this applies even more to such other powers of science as atomic energy, but once something is known there is really no way of locking it up. At the present time, 1960, LSD is in the control of pharmacologists and a few research groups of psychiatrists, and though there are unscrupulous and frankly psychotic psychiatrists, this seems to me a far more reliable form of control than that exercised by the police and the Bureau of Narcotics—which is not control at all, but ineffective repression, handing over actual control to the forces of organized crime.

On the whole, we feel justified in using dangerous powers when we can establish that there is a relatively low probability of disaster. Life organized so as to be completely foolproof and secure is simply not worth living, since it requires the final abolition of freedom. It is on this perfectly rational principle of gambling that we justify the use of travel by air and automobile, electric appliances in the home, and all the other dangerous instruments of civilization. Thus far, the record of catastrophes from the use of LSD is extremely low, and there is no evidence at all that it is either habit-forming or physically deleterious. It is, of course, possible to become psychically dependent on stimuli which do not establish any craving that can be identified in physiological terms. Personally, I am no example of phenomenal will power, but I find that I have no inclination to use LSD in the same way as tobacco or wines and liquors. On the contrary, the experience is always so fruitful that I feel I must digest it for some months before entering into it again. Furthermore, I find that I am quite instinctively disinclined to use it without the same sense of readiness and dedication with which one approaches a sacrament, and also that the experience is worthwhile to the precise degree that I keep my critical and intellectual faculties alert.

It is generally felt that there is a radical incompatibility between intuition and intellect, poetry and logic, spirituality and rationality. To me, the most impressive thing about LSD experiences is that these formally opposed realms seem instead to complement and fructify one another, suggesting, therefore, a mode of life in which man is no longer an embodied paradox of angel and animal, of reason fighting instinct, but a marvelous coincidence in whom Eros and Logos are one.

Endnotes

1. I have often made the point, as in *The Way of Zen*, that the “real” world is concrete rather than abstract, and thus that the conceptual patterns of order, categorization, and logic which the human mind projects upon nature are in some way less real. But upon several occasions LSD has suggested a fundamental identity of percept and concept, concrete and abstract. After all, our brains and the patterns in them are themselves members of the concrete, physical universe, and thus our abstractions are as much forms of nature as the structure of crystals or the organization of ferns.

2. Later, with the aid of a sea urchin’s shell I was able to find out something of the reasons for this effect. All the small purple protuberances on the shell seemed to be wiggling, not only to sight but also to touch. Watching this phenomenon closely, I realized that as my eyes moved across the shell they seemed to change the intensity of coloring, amounting to an increase or decrease in the depth of shadow. This did not happen when the eyes were held still. Now motion, or apparent motion, of the shadow will often seem to be motion of the object casting it, in this case the protrusions on the shell. In the Van Eyck painting there was likewise an alteration, a lightening or darkening, of actual shadows which the artist had painted, and thus the same illusion of movement.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

cxiv.

I see Figga & Rey & Pirth with my eyes closed. We are climbing into the back of a large freight truck. We sit together among something strange, things, many of them.

Pick one up. Sniff. Study.
"Yellow onions" I say, not quite certain how my knowledge.

Figga stares me close. Her hair is much darker now, curly-haired. Her face shading toward someone I knew a long time ago. Says nothing.

Rey is staring me too. I wonder why they are not seeming to see each other? Pirth is in my lap, quiet right now, as is rare.

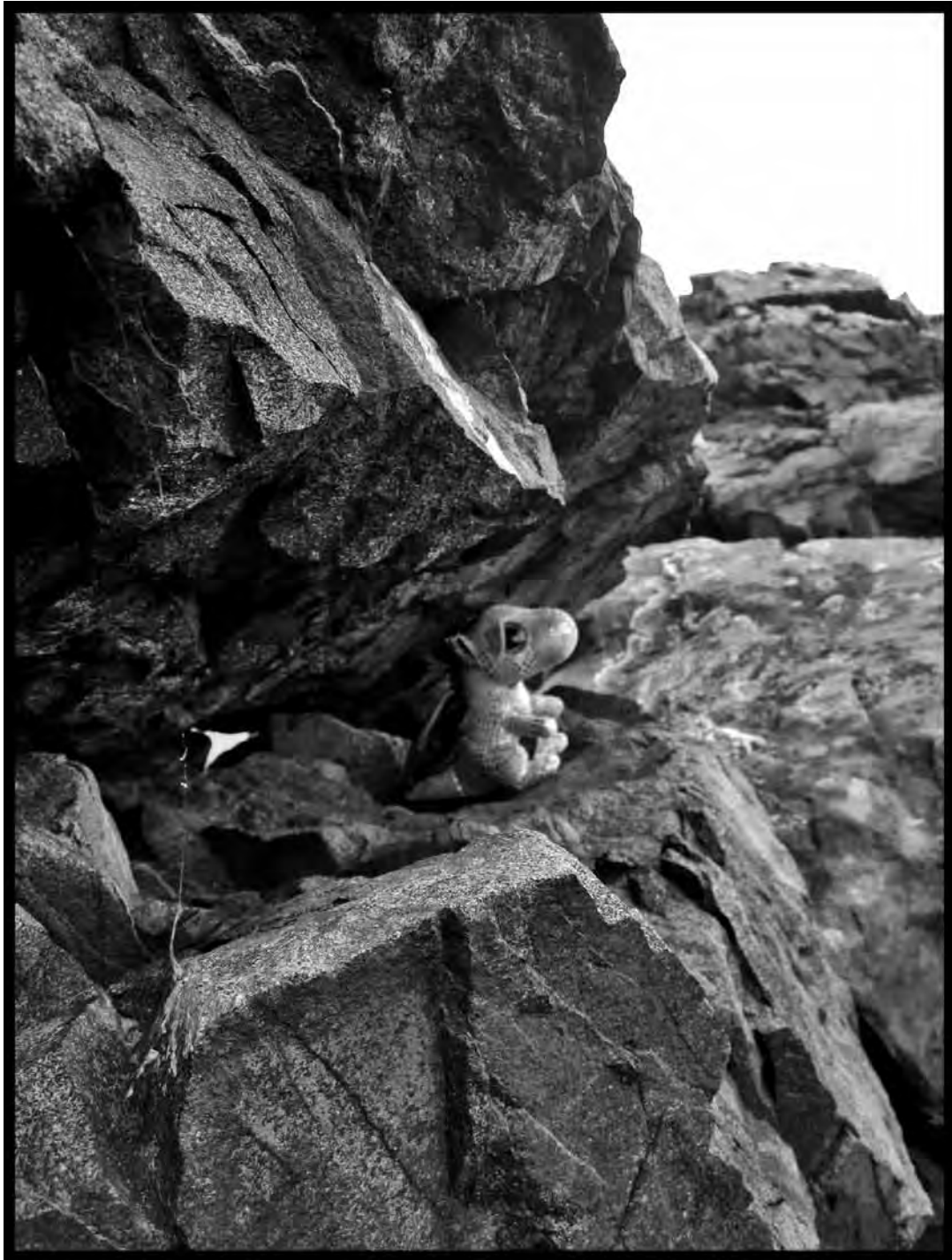
Am I dreaming? What is this?

Suddenly I get up, hand Pirth over to Rey, who holds him, looking me steady.

Climb out of the truck & make my way to its front, climb up clumsily to its cab, & into driver's seat.

I'm not really a driver but this looks easy & I feel compelled to try. The truck is on. I see no ignition. Nor brakes or gas pedal on the floor. Just a steering wheel before me & a lever to my side. Two options: *Forward & Stop*. Stopped now.

21. My eyes still closed? Dreaming? Strange bright room still? I move the lever to *Forward* & the truck moves forward slowly but steadily. I hold on to the steering wheel. We / I move forward.



But to where? Nothing through the windshield but yellow, same as the onions in back. Yet I feel *passage, movement*.

22. Now a scent in the cab & I jerk to see Figga in the passenger seat. But not really Figga.

“Hi” she says.

I nod & turn back to driving, it vaguely occurring to me we could crash into something at any moment.

“How are you?”

“Why?”

A quick intake of breath, & a sigh.

I nod. “I remember that well.”

Silence.

“Why are you here?”

“I’m . . . not sure. Did you call me here somehow?”

“Sort of. Some notes for this section.”

Nods. These words mean nothing to her.

“Are you now or then?”

Corner my eyes see her half-smile, remember that too. She’s dressed like then, sexy because not provocative, long lacy flowery dress. Some makeup, little needed.

23. “Are you here to help?”

“I . . . can.”

“Do you want to?”

She stares now at the yellow onion murk we drive through.

“It’s up to you. Do you really want me here?”

Now I sigh. “You show up in my dreams, elusive & luring as ever. I think because you’re the flaming tip of all the good things I wanted then & I did not get.”

“You have good things now?”

“I do. But I am not young anymore. My age but not just that.”

“What?”

“An ignorance of mortality. Something. I wish I could have told him some things.”

“Like what?”

“Like let you go. Like pining over you did harm. I think it began a pattern even with girls who did want me for awhile. I could not keep them & I could not let them go.”

“And now?”

“Now I’m lucky. I try to live & love those in my life like I feel this luck.”

“But not always?”

“All those years happened. Pain doesn’t disappear anymore than happiness does.”

She nods. Thinks.

23A. *Something something something*
something something
something

24. We're all in the truck's cab now & I'm still driving only the steering wheel is colorfully big & I notice my feet below peddling away to keep us going.

Pirth is dancing on the dashboard & I sideways glance see Figga & Rey curled up amongst each other & Figga is her Emandian red-haired self again—

White Woods yet I'm able to drive easily between the pathless trees till I come to a tree with a poster on it.

“*Don't You Know That Dreams Are Real?*” & a picture of the White Woods all about it, wavering a bit, & a tiny little cackling black & white pandy bear speeding away deeper in the poster as we ever watch.

Figga & Rey sort of curl into me now as I peddle on.

25. We roll onto a rocky beach by a roiling patch of seashore. I drive us among the big rocks quite close to the water. Sun shining in glitters & shades.

26. I stop the yellow onion truck & get out. Find myself barefoot walking the rocky sands & this weird; my feet are excruciatingly sensitive bare to stones! But OK. I walk along. Water is a little tinted, rainbow colored?

27. And now swishing to shore are a few, then more, then many Polaroid photos, still developing into images as they slide close enough to pick up.

28. There's a picture of you at a birthday party, among presents & cake, smiling at me in that way you had. Measured affection. I wanted you too much, more than anyone else did, probably more than you could handle. *Save my life, heal my heart, help me escape my life's hell.*

You were a smart, sentimental, romantic girl but I don't think you wanted that much ferocious need from a boyfriend.

29. Other pictures of other girls looking at me, love in varying degrees of arriving, escalating, departing.

30. Then it's friends, some loved for years & years, smiling, jumping happy, pleased of me. Then something else & something else & then no more. Photos that develop into empty pictures. Empty tables, parks, skies.

- I find a box of Red Dog Diner matches in the glove box of the yellow onion truck. Make a fire on the stony beach as the night settles in along its far treeline.

Pirth dances by the fire happily. Figga & Rey sit on a log together, clustered & curled & watching me. I am welcome in their cluster & curl if I wish.

I stand, for a moment. I've gathered every Polaroid photo I can find, & toss them like playing cards into the fire where they warm, curl, crisp, & burn away into sky-rising sparks.

Yours last. Whatever you were. Any of you. Somewhere on this planet, tonight, all of you, save a few blood-kin, & a dear friend worth the lot of you all by a numberless exponential factor.

You'll never leave my heart.
Burn Burn Burn Burn Burn Burn

"Feel better, Ray?"
 "I'm glad you're together again."

We watch the night sky rise of stars, feeding our fire, Pirth dancing, Rey & Figga joining him when they can't help it. Me too.

Pain & loss should not be the only way to mature a living soul.

cxv.

Bowie & Iris are sitting at BAR now, talking to Mr. Bob the barman. Mr. Bob likes Iris immediately, finds her familiar in some way he cannot quite reckon. Not something you say to a pretty lady you just met, especially if she's very with a relatively safe spy.

"Where are you two bound next?"

Bowie turns to look at me, now agreeably arrived to the page. Iris smirks me hello.

"What are you game for?"
 Bowie eyes me with green eye & mushroom eye, affectionately perhaps. Shows me his hand clasped with hers.

I nod. "Got it."

"There is a Rainbow Wheel that unites the Six Islands, as once they clustered together in the times before time."

They nod. Listen. Mr. Bob has made for Iris an iced drink that shimmers pink red pink—Bowie's drink is the dark caramel of a whiskey. My water is iced.

"I'm curious about what is at the center of this wheel, where its colored paths of lights cross."

Iris smiles. "A mission?"
 Bowie frowns.
 "More of an expedition."
 "What's there?"
 "Well, deeper under the surface is a beach."

Iris is more pleased. Bowie sips, less. But listening still.

"Keep talking."
 "Something's there, deeper even than that beach."
 Listening.

I shrug. "I don't know anymore. But, yes, it's a mission."
Listening.

"You can travel there with Creatures."
Now Bowie looks up.
"Probably the only way to get there."

Iris looks ready to go. Bowie hesitates. Looks at Iris again. Nods at me. I nod to their clasped hands.
"I promise."

"Are you traveling with us?"
"I'll be there enough."
Now Iris takes my hand with her free one. "Come on this mission with us, Raymond."
"Why?"
"We'll find more. We miss you."

Bowie nods too, sincerely.

"Aren't you going to ask how & why you ended up here?"
Look at me quizzically. Guess not.

"Now, which Creatures to travel with?" I say, finger on my chin. "Boat Wagon? Sea Dragon? Air Current?"

Bowie & Iris & Mr. Bob nod me quietly go on.

I think, uncertain. "What I think is that we may find origins down there, of Creatures, of the world itself, I don't know."

Smile. Waiting.

Look through my pages. "Place of Art," I mutter.

"It's in the White Woods. You find it by *hmmming*, by sharing the *hmmm* with everything around you, till all relents, & joins in. Shimmer back & forth until it is revealed."

"Not the Sea?" asks Bowie.

I think. "Maybe in the desert too. So maybe by more than one place."

"Is the Place of Art our mission?" asks Iris, curious, hopeful a bit.

Mr. Bob leans forward & puts a hand on my shoulder. "Stalled, son?"

I nod. "I feel like this could be something. But it has no tracks to ride on yet."

"Like a train?" asks Bowie.
"An old-fashioned steam locomotive," I say.
They nod.

I stand. Smile at Mr. Bob. “Thanks.”
Smiles in return.

Gesture to Iris & Bowie to come along, & we leave BAR to discover the choo-choo train outside, just waiting. We step into one of the open air passenger cars.

TooT! TooT! the choo-choo train cries, & begins to slowly move along.

To the Place of Art? Maybe.

Soon we’re past buildings & industrial places altogether, & into the White Woods, where choo-choo trains used to be unknown but there’s this one now—

We chug along for a peaceful time, perhaps us dozing in our seats, when with a TooT! TooT! the choo-choo slows to stop. At a station?

Or at least a restaurant where this train stops. Sign says *Blue Dog Eats* & I can see inside not the usual array of tables & chairs but old-fashioned school desks.

A middle-aged lady steps out from the restaurant with a bag, & climbs into the passenger car just ahead of ours.

She smiles at us & says “Hello.” Her smile lingers on me & I wonder if we had met somehow. But then she settles in her seat facing forward, & soon the choo-choo TooT! TooT! & rolls on.

Another long stretch along old but smooth tracks & again perhaps dozings until a soft *hmmm* begins, from the lady in the seat ahead of ours.

Iris & Bowie are curled into each other as ought but also near to me, I am part of their cluster, naturally, & we begin to *hmmm* too, uncertainly, but then each finds a way in, & together, & we four are now together in a deeper way, sweet, subtle, fine—

These Woods join in with us, shimmer a little, waver back & forth like in a strong wind, release a little, release a little more, & arrive to somewhere new old.

cxvi.

Kinley & Maya & Christina & Dylan now with Troy & the wee cackling imp.

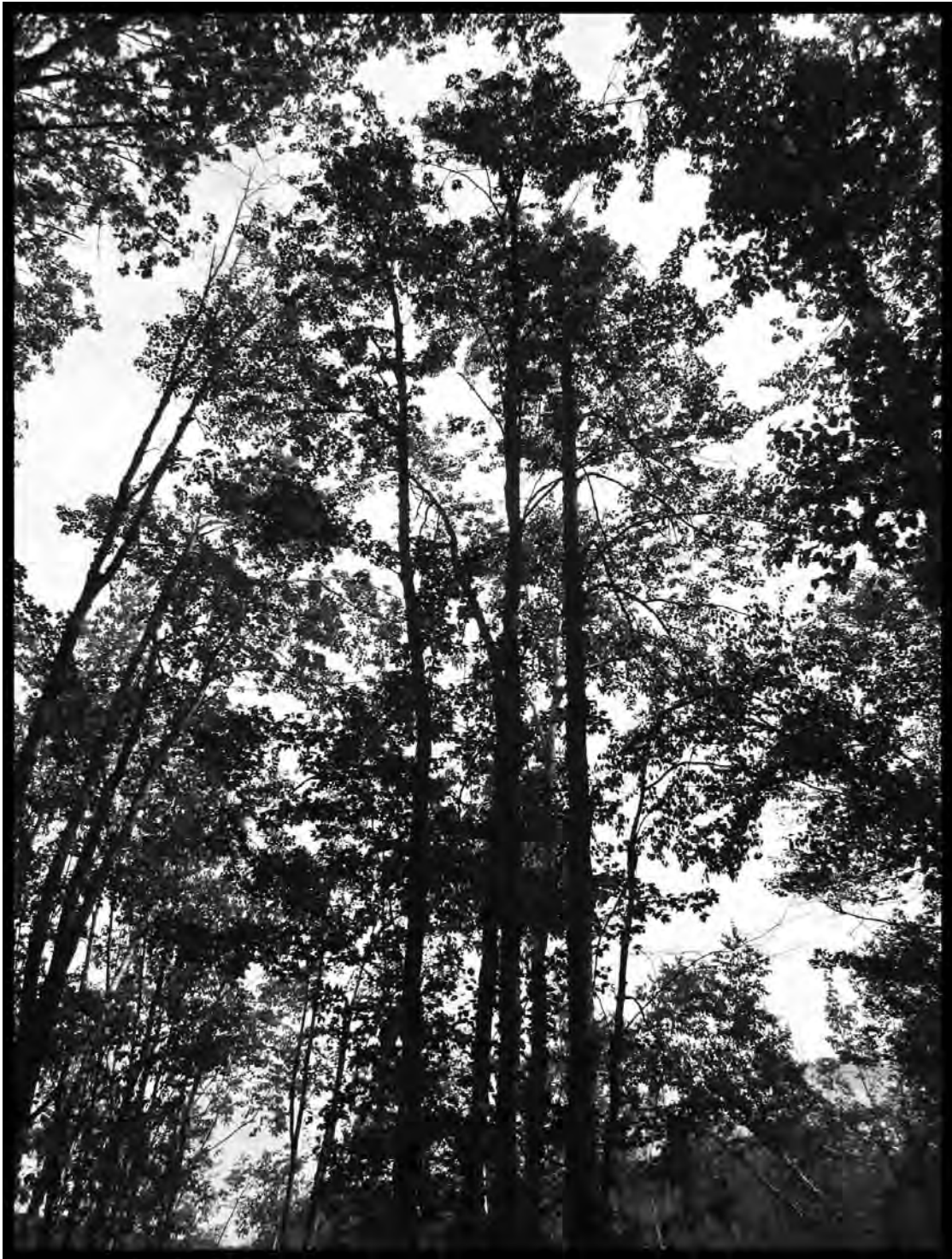
“Why is there something instead of nothing?”

Kinley explains to Troy that this question is now accompanying them.

The murk around them is quiet & Troy is strangely more relaxed among these new & mysterious old friend.

“Do you have an answer?” he asks.

Christina laughs & takes his hand. “Not one.” She pauses, studying him with vague smile. “But you



might be a clue.”

Bright eyed, “Me?”

Kinley laughs & takes Troy’s other hand. “She likes to play.”

Maya begins to talk. “I knew a man who had answers. I don’t think he liked them.”

Global Wall.

He would tell her stories he told nobody else. He would be asleep, eyes open, talking to her, her in pigtails, white panties, & a nightie down to her waist. He had not touched her. The impediment was his, not hers.

She looked at bit like the girl in the K-Mart advertising circular (but Maya blonde not brunette) in the Sunday paper. His cumming dream companion, like none would have him in waking, & maybe you’d call it lucid dreaming, maybe not, but he was both that odorous pimply boy & the man he was now (then, with Maya), & with her he could only imagine (now, then) what like to touch her, the sweetness (then) with the sense of bitter denial (now), her become her, become her, talking about something in between them then & them then

“It was my birthday back when I was in college. I had roommates & we lived in an apartment off campus that was also part bar & part classroom.

“I woke that morning before anyone else, which was pretty early, & walked the rooms.

“One of the apartment’s rooms was filled with racks of clothes everyone had donated to share. We wore each other’s clothes, female, male, whatever. It was a nice mix. You got to learn how the other guy or gal felt, you know.”

Maya & the girl in the circular agree to something. Each a soft small hand on his then/then cock, & a slow stroke. Felt nice to touch there, felt nice to listen.

“Some of mine though were kept in the far corner racks, playfully mocked & derided, & I wondered why, because they didn’t seem any stranger or odder or whatever, *more idiosyncratic* than anybody else’s but, still, there they were, in the far corner. I don’t know, maybe they were older & more worn. I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway.”

Feels it/it harden in her & her hand, warm, throbbing lightly.

“I walk into the barroom &, by golly, there *are* people awake at the bar already, drinking their breakfast. One of them is kind to me, he always sits at a particular seat, can’t tell how old or young he is. He seems to be grey-haired & about twenty, but I don’t think he is.

“I clap his shoulder smiling, which he returns in full, & say to him, *you’re a good man*, Bill.

“And everybody else at the bar laughs & mocks a little, but I get in all their faces & *oh oh mmm—*”

The circular girl teaches Maya how to slow stroke him along, a little faster, a little harder, she’s done this so many times in his mind, it’s nice this time to have someone else too—

He gasps but talks on. “Finally I walk into the classroom, & it’s occupied too. There are two girls, a brunette & a blonde, I sit down with them. Well before classes, I don’t know why they’re so early.”

Faster harder, lean forward bite his shoulder, bite harder, faster harder he can only mumble “it was my birthday, it was my birthday.”

Now lips, licking, tongues, suck, a little more, little more, more, he cries of an anguish so many years clogged deep in him.

Wakes alone/alone. Again/again.

They come as a group in this dark murk to a white-faced pink cat radio, on the floor, shown by a softly glowing light.

A voice on it, intoning words garbled & uncertain.

*“Astral beings? Interdimensional
beings?
Astral beings? Interdimensional
beings?
Astral beings? Interdimensional
beings?”*

Finally fades & is gone, dust rising
from the radio.
Exhaling.

Then another voice. Stronger. Humorous a bit.

“In Imaginal Space, find out why Something instead of Nothing! Hurry now!”

cxvii.

A happy cry:

Smile.
Wake up!
Happiness

Now what, Pirth. Now what, Figga.
Now what, Rey. Early morning.
Rocky beach. Those lovely old words
arrive waking with me & I say
them aloud.

“TooT! TooT!”

We stand & hurry back up the beach to the Woods &, stranger than stranger, than even that yellow onions truck, which seems gone as tho never was, there is a road, & upon it pulled up is a public city

bus, yellow & green & blue & golden I guess.

The door opens & we see in the driver's seat a familiar old face.

"It's President Clusterfuck! Donald J. Trump!" I cry as tho pleased.

Figga & Rey look at me oddly, as though they see someone else.

"*It's him.* Dressed up like Ralph Kramden in *The Honeymooners*, but him! Look!"

They do, but don't.

"All on board, folks, we got a schedule to keep!" Maybe-President Donald J. Trump cries out merrily.

So we all climb up the stairs on board, Pirth now in my jacket pocket again.

"TooT! TooT!" he honks as he pulls the door closed & resumes driving along the road.

We at my insistence sit in the very back seats, passing by faces & quasi-faces & no faces as we go.

"Hang on, folks! And away we go!" he cries & pressed the gas pedal to the floor. *We go.*

Someone in a nearby seat is mumbling something over & over. An old ragged bearded man, floppy hat over most of his face. "You have not seen **RemoteLand**, you have not seen **RemoteLand**, you have not seen **RemoteLand**"

"I have," I grumble. "I have. *I have.*"

Bus driver maybe-Donald J. Trump's voice booms through the bus as he greets passengers & tells funny stories.

"So I says to Mrs. Ling when I get my black coffee & cheese Danish this morning, 4 am, on the button, every morning, just as my shift is starting, I say, 'I was sure your people were just going to buy America for pennies on the dolla', sooner or later. And I tried to warn people, raise tariffs, do all I could. But nobody listened to me. I was so sure I knew. But you didn't. *Why was that?*'"

"And she sighed at me all serious like she does every time I bring this up. 'President Donald, I tell you time & again we wouldn't do that. America stinks of Americans. We just look to be your landlords, not your owners!'" Then he laughs & laughs as people crowd on & off. The ragged ones he lets on with a wink & a smile, his hand firmly over the fare box.

Rey & Figga smile a little, at least at his booming, jovial voice; Pirth dances among their laps, unnoticing; I feel full quickly, & don't figure a bus will get us anywhere any better than walking, or some more Creaturely transportating fellow.

So I pull the stop alert wire that runs the length of the bus. Somehow it TooT! TooTs! but backwards. Hm.

Bus driver maybe ex-President Clusterfuck Donald J. Trump pulls up by a seeming random white

birch, uses a big handle to push the door open.

“Peace & love, pretty peoples!” Pauses, a sharp eye on me leaving last. “You’d be smart to find Webster Hill soon.”

I’m out before these words cohere in my ears. The bus is gone in two blinks at most, a TooT! TooT! its lingering, lingual tail.

White Woods. Strange & lovely as always. Now what?

Rey & Figga are looking at me, more curious than in deference. Pirth is dancing happily nearby.

They nod me my half-formed ideas to speak.

“There is a Place of Art & I think it may tell origins. All kinds of origins. Or one kind that seems like all kinds.

Nod. Smile.

“I feel inclined to bend many paths toward this barely known where.”

Figga’s turquoise eyes are strangely more intensely upon me.

“What?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Tell me, Figga. Tell us.”

She’s leaning against Rey, eyes wider. “I think I know it,” she whispers. “I think I was there.”

Now we’re all sitting, Pirth still dancing.

Figga raises a pretty finger, takes a breath or two, calms.

“It’s in your notebooks. Go & look in them. We’ll wait.”

cxviii.

Riding this familiar train, so many years known, trip high on a Saturday night, lot of those too, R.E.M. music on my beloved Polly iPod

*I . . . could . . . turn . . . you . . .
inside out!*

*I . . . could . . . turn . . . you . . .
what I choose . . . not to do*

And what of all of it? What are these hours riding this old swaying train Cambridge to Boston, cross the Longfellow Bridge, golden lit up skyline to nod a heart-deep thankee?

I don’t know. In other cities, other trip-high Saturdays, other trains, sometimes buses. Familiar contours

in my soul. Old & familiar.

A book 3371 pages & counting. Past 12 years & counting. No answers, just pleasure, & again, & again.

I remember Cinema City in Hartford, on Brainard Rd.; it's long gone now, but numberless years ago it was my teacher, art films that pushed my mind new, strange places. In the middle of nowhere.

Outlet stores. One for lamps. Another for rugs. A big gas station mart. Why a film art-house out in this desolation? Cheap rent?

A McDonald's too. It was good hiding. Two hours hidden in a strange film & bus rides to & fro.

Whatever any of it meant, or means. Another train now, used to take it trip-high Saturday nights to ZombieTown. Now next door Milkrose.

Hiding to think. To write, mostly. Read. Listen to music.

Now drones w/phones in nearly every seat.

Is this better, me & this pen & this notebook & my very old & beloved Polly iPod?

I don't know. I know the far end of this are wasted daylight hours.

Soon not yet I'll be at a new version of my courtyard at Au Bon Pain Cafe in Harvard Square. An old friend returned to me.

For all lost, that will be a lovely returned gift. That will be fine.

Some days have a salve to them. Maybe such days are invitations to try new, to hope, press the pedal down again.

The deep hunger in me to make good Art is ever there. To feel its salve, & share it how I can with the world.

That hunger has been my best guide, my compass through strange years, (as all years are strange to their inhabitants).

A gratefulness in doing this. That I insist. Nothing over my running years from youth to now but this has come, is with me tonight, accompanies me ever on, if I am profoundly lucky.

Mondays have not been too good for me for awhile & yet these lines resume on this one. A recently found joint, refill soda, corner table by a big window to Main Street.

Quiet here, a big restaurant. Pizza, dinners. Friendly people behind counter. Reminds me of a joint back in Portland I'd spend a lot of time in, walkable home—not as rough cut as there, poor, homeless, drunk, rowdy Burnside Ave out the window. But . . . something.

I've sat writing at joints for years & prefer it mostly. Began as escape from crowded & dirty family home, needed places cheap & hours long at them. But something else too.



A feeling of being unbothered. No cruel high school. No waits. Just me & notebooks & black pens & music on Walkmans till later & now Polly iPod. Just music on her, no Internet, no phone, *just here*.

Phone too, green Gumbee, but for calls, for picture taking, a wee bit of Internet, but little. Look up bus times & movies just seen on *Wikipedia*.

Eurydice too, though not tonight. I want to be here, not the endless spidery elsewhere online.

I've been reading an old dear book of mine. *Victoria at Nine* by Don Robertson, from 1979. I bought it in paperback in 1980 about, I think in the pharmacy of my teenage hometown.

I was 16 or so, far closer in age & spirit to the child protagonist. Now I'm closer in a way to the adults in the book. Yet I read it to renew friendship with her, her magical world of dolls & animals, her *fellowship* with them.

I feel lately drawn to these pages more powerfully, hunger, want, *something*.

Coming autumn? It could be.

This passage began as I travelled late Saturday across metro Boston to a theater in a town I used to live in. And then I was in Cambridge where my beloved Au Bon Pain Cafe courtyard is two years gone & now something near ready to succeed it there—

A lingering something of being there, memories rustled from my mind's dust—old affections, places walked, faces.

Letting these things rustle, reappear to me.

Memories of people, places, events, many gone from me in time & place & spirit. Binds undone.

A wish to remember & not feel sad.

A wish to look forward too, sometimes.

Across this street is a bus stop, near the intersection & its traffic light. I was sitting here one time, quite high, watching a black man standing there, & me not yet realizing it was a bus stop. I worried about him in this mostly white town. Then . . . *o! bus stop! Dumbass, me.*

I'll get back to the many stories here, & more of them too eventually, since right now focussed on this part fairly exclusively.

Yes, the autumn coming is cheering me. Cooler days, longer nights.

Can it be OK to remember?

Not dangerous & harmful?

Does this make curiosity for new days possible?

People come & go. It's not predictable, nor rational.

Some don't go. Some return.

Memories don't have to be like markers in a graveyard.

And it is possible to revisit some people, places, & things of the past, but certainly do not expect what was, fully intact anyway. Fragments, surprises, disappointments, delights.

Next lines, here, toss the coins, the dice, resume the fixation.

—Or maybe not yet. Maybe a bit more these ragged mullings.

Place of Art. What tis? Letting this phrase lure me on. Letting it have power to help me shape.

Somewhere in the White Woods there is a place where *hmmmming* will occur &, invite, & when invitation is accepted, will agree, all will let, let, let to each other, & the trees will shimmer & change, & what is visible about will let to something else—

It looks, at first, like a great, grand Liberry, with heightless murky roof & long, long reaches of bookcases, & books tall, tall upon them, & small, small as the period at the end of this sentence, small.

But it's not a Liberry, not just, for it seems like the White Woods that had seemed gone are still here somehow, that we've not left them, no, not at all, no, this is a great Liberry & it is the White Woods too, not trees becoming books but *trees are books & books are trees, & how this so, & what does this mean?*

And what is that sound, nearer & farther away, a distinct, familiar kind of sound? A *whoosh-whoosh-whoosh* kind of sound? It's—

It's the *Wide Wide Sea*, here, this wondrous mystery of a place, not visible quite to the eye & yet this deep sound, & a bare tint of salt in the quiet still air here, *how so? what tis?* Water, books, Sea?

Not enough to say what this Place of Art is. Like origins *but what does this mean?* Origins of this world, the Universe, me? Are these really separate?

I tend to think of this book as unique, & yet *part of*. I'm back at this joint, dusk, traffic passing by, each vehicle distinct, clouds in the sky, buildings, that bus stop over there but *part of* too.

What, then, of this Place of Art?

OK, say it.

*The Place of Art is why there
is something instead of nothing.*

I sweep my writerly hand in a long blur to bring Kinley, Christina, Dylan, Maya, & Troy to The Place of Art. I do not join them but to have them see & follow those who have recently passed through here.

They get it, this trick of following spectres awhile, get it's a clue for them along their passage, help along their way. Let Maya tell awhile here.

We sit in a circle in this place we've come to, it's like the White Woods we know but crossed, or co-existing, or something like that, with this Great Liberry, great big unending high & deep, like Dylan's

bookstore but a world of its own kind. I look up & see no roof but murk. I look deeper in & see no end. Like if the world itself was part books as part of its native blood.

We are among a much bigger circle & some we know. Next to me is Marie the Traveler who it seems like we just left. I know somehow that's her brother Joe over there, & there Daniel their guardian, & Derek the Islander. But more that that.

Those bloo-eyed Kittees & their yellow Friend Fish. And that beautiful Sea Dragon. Are these knowledge from memories or is the Author helping?

And a very very old looking Sea Turtle with a sweet kindly face.

Mine to tell right now, I feel the *hmmm* here beneath my bones; I hear somewhere too deep to know the *whoosh-whoosh* of the Wide Wide Sea.

I feel the real touch & spectral touch too of my friends & these sweet others known & not yet known.

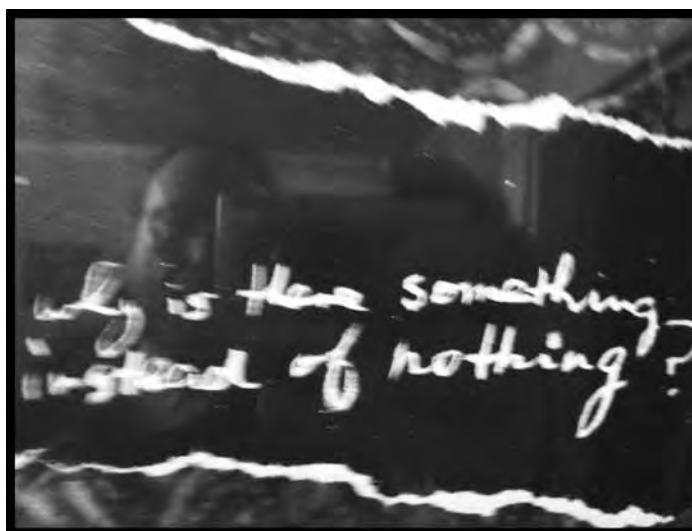
Then there sweeps in & amongst our circle a beautiful Rainbow Fish, large sparkly purple eyes, sweet Creaturely smile, swimming high & low in the air, so many colors filling the air behind us—*round & round & round!*

Then seems like there's more than one of her—3, 4, 5, 6 in all? Her or her kin? The Liberry / White Woods / Mystical Murk washes wildly with colors!

And when the Rainbow Fish leads us, that is them, to stand, & move deeper into the Place of Art, I know this phrase now too, we follow along. Still touching to touch, still *hmmming*.

Daniel pauses by a wall less murky than the rest, little framed pictures hung on it, abstract & pretty

But one is words



he reads & is this their quest too?

We resume walking even as it seems like these words now travel with us like the *hmmm* & the *whoosh-whoosh*, & the colors, & then something new—

A scent, strange & yet I know it. And before us a Great Tree. *Goodness gracious!*

The Sea Turtle points his ancient paw & says, “*This* is why something instead of nothing.”

Quiet. Us all looking at this beautiful creation.

Then Derek the Islander says shyly & quietly, “What does that mean?”

Quiet again & then the Sea Turtle laughs gruff & charming. Says, “this is for all of you to find out. Go now, my friends, go!”

Then it fades, this spectral scent, & I am looking at Dylan, Kinley, Christina, & Troy. Still Place of Art. Still Great Tree.

A new sound. It’s the Great Tree. Its green & golden fruits, their music, low but sure, tinkling, tinkling.

Words in them, deep in them?

“Stop. Heal. And remember.”

Over & over again, those words, & I cannot be certain but seem just for me? How? *How any of this?*

Kinley smiles at all of us, raises his hand, bids us all closer to the Great Tree.

cxix.

What if dream mind is supra-consciousness? Think about it sometime.

That’s what he had heard on the white-faced pink cat radio tonight in his motel room. What stuck.

Global Wall had to talk to Benny Big Dreams, & tonight, & *now*. No reason for him doing what he was doing if he wasn’t with them. The risk, the uncertainty, yes, but *it drove him, they drove him*.

Getting to Benny is usually Benny’s choice. His terms are the only ones.

Especially since he’s been guarding them to boot.

This motel room is empty & full of them. No visible sign of when they were here together. Nothing to see or sniff. Touch, taste, hear.

Nothing. But everything. His body prickling all over with memories, something deeper than memories, of them with him here.

And more. In a corner of this small two bedded, one TV’d, one desk-table’d room, something more

than his supra-memories.

Under the rug. Something he'd done while they had been out, directed to find them all a table for pancakes at the Red Dog Diner next door.

Lucky the floor was not cement or brick or stone. Old tile covered in carpet.

A hammer, a few other tools. Small shovel. A hole dug out, a box buried. A supra-adhesive glue to restore the tile, the rug. All more adhered to each other than before.

And now here he is again. Trembling it will all be gone. Yet nothing in this motel looks repaired or replaced since that last visit.

It's good. It's there. He digs it up.

He turned on the white-faced pink cat radio while hammering & digging. Restless jazz, noisy, both scary & funny down deep. Piano, bass, guitar, drums.

Turns off the one light he'd had on, the squat little hooded green thing on the desk-table.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, trembling, holding the warm *hmming* wooden box awash in sigils, lifts lid.

A many-colored glow seems to reach up & touch his face.

A small ivory hairbrush, a pink ribbon. White cotton panties. Wrapped & tied around a small thick book.

Within, instructions on how to get to Benny Big Dreams.

He caresses & sniffs these items. A language in their scents only the oldest, deepest part of his mind can decipher.

Opens the small, frail pages with the sniff afog about his mind, & begins to read.

Global Wall has to bring his girls to a place where them being found is not possible.

And as much as he would rather not be with them than be any kind of danger to them, he knows they would not accept this. He belongs to them as much as them to him.

There are places in the White Woods he never knew, never imagined. Safe places.

The Secret Book describes these places as magickal beyond reckoning.

He reads of a Traveling Troubadour. He reads of tiny Guardians of the White Woods. Many wondrous beings & things. Rutabega Festival. Place of Art. Great Tree.

Benny will know how.

He gave me this book.

Told me how to use it.

Breathes in his icons again & tries to read deeper into the pages. Feels like there are levels within, words within words within words.

Where do I start?

Then . . . something . . . nearer & farther, like inviting him?

A deeper sniff & within the Secret Book now, giving chase to something small & merry & playful. Cackling?

Follows, faster, loosing of his limbs, his body, now just mind following deep into the White Woods of these pages.

How, what? Oh.

It's from my past, not something new. *I have to go back there.*

The white-faced pink cat radio turns on again even as Global Wall is far from listening to it.

“You’re listening to the ‘Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution.’ I’m Soulard your host, broadcasting on this page from a glassed overlook in Harvard Square.

“It’s marvelous to be broadcasting on the page from this new / old place that was lost to me once by my departing Boston, & a second time by local powers that be deciding to change things.

“My courtyard is same / different but I’ve never been up above the earth here, a second floor high looking out through glass at the Square below.

“Wonderful. Marvelous.

“We should get back to Global Wall now. Just had this thrill to share.”

cxx.

Kinley, Christina, Maya, & Dylan approaching the Great Tree for what seems like far too long—

[And the question: where is Troy now, just with them? When he saw the spectre of the Ancient Sea Turtle, whose name is Abraham, tho you can call him Abe, he knew with certainty this, *this*, is who he was looking for.

[“Who is he to you? How do you know you’re looking for him?”

Troy clucks impatiently at my question.

“It’s a really good feeling. I think, ‘follow him, talk to him,’ & all the rest of this jive confusion is nothing. *OK, writer guy?*”

[I nod. OK. "I'll find you again to tell more later."
Now he smiles, sweet, charming, guileless. "Deal," he says & hurries back the way he came.]

"Kinley" begins Christina.
He raises his hand. "I know. We need help. Wait here. I'll look around."
Knows full well this won't help. But does leave them a short while to think. The murk is cool & quiet,
& his thoughts percolate slow until . . .

Returns. Hand raised again. "Let's sit here in a circle again."

They do & notice Troy is missing. "He's OK," I whisper to Maya.
She nods the rest. "We'll see him again." Obligating me, smirking.

Sit on the warm grey floor in a circle & hold hands.

Kinley looks at Maya. "I think we need Creaturely help & you're their special friend. Lead our
hmmmming?"

She thinks, likes Kinley, nods, smiles. Eyes closed, a low *hmmm* begins.

The rest join in one by one, each finding a way in, braiding among the others until they are one, many,
none.

Sniffs near & distant but Maya is looking for someone to bring them to the Great Tree & eventually one
of the beautiful Rainbow Fish appears to them, swimming lightly in the air. Great purple eyes, pink
smiling face. Sparkling many colored back & fins.

Maya stands them up &, like with the spectres they'd followed, the Rainbow Fish swims air in the
direction of the Great Tree, its tinkling green & gold fruits a bit louder with each step.

Their approach is now easy & swift. Once quite near, the Fish winks & smiles them all & swims up in
the grey sky until gone.

Kinley is the first to step close enough to touch this ancient tree. So large tis like a mountain to their
miniscule size.

"Yggdrasil," he says quietly, touching its bark, warm & rough. Glowing a bit.

"Yigg-what? asks Christina, now touching the tree too. Pleased beyond words.

"The Great Tree of the old Norse mythologies."

"That's what this is?" asks Dylan, as he & Maya step forward & touch with pleasure too.

Kinley is quiet, studies, touches, peers up into the merest visual portion of its massive height.

"No. Yggdrasil didn't have green & gold fruit. Or appear to be a number of kinds of trees in one. But
important like it, to us, our world. Important to us in our quest."

"What do we do then?" asks Christina, who loved this tree & being near it. A love not far from how she



felt about Kinley. Deep, playful, desirous, endlessly curious.

Before Kinley could answer, there was the flash of something, just beyond the curving turn of the Tree, whose full radius could not be grasped. Kinley in an equal flash was racing after it with a quick wave to the others.

They chased & chased & chased & Kinley in the lead of them got close enough to realize they were chasing a squirrel. Grey one? Perhaps.

And they were not remaining at the same level of where they'd been. Somehow he was sure they were descending down lower & lower & this made no sense but yes.

Lower & lower they went, now a sure depth of being underground somehow & Kinley now saw what he had not before—that they were not rounding the Great Tree but racing alongside of one its enormous roots, half above ground. And as they tired, the Squirrel slowed for them, so it was no chase on his part, but him leading them somewhere.

And, as suddenly as this realization, was them suddenly crashing & toppling off an edge into something much farther down below them than they had been.

[For a weird transitional period you are all with me as I sit & write at this window desk in my office.

["Transitional?" smirks Christina in my ear.

"En root"

"To where, Raymond?" asks Kinley, almost scolding teacherly.

"Not sure."

Maya leans familiarly over my shoulder, watching me write these words with a black pen on the lined white sheets in this notebook. Dylan, I think, is looking around. Finds the Creature Common in the next room & hurries back to tell Maya. She kisses my cheek warmly & now all four of them are in there.

[Sitting on the bed & floor, the three of them watch Maya sniff back & forth with MeZmer the White Bunny, & laugh as she doesn't often. Her laughing lures to play the tiny little individdle pandy bear Rosa!eeta who sits on Maya's hand, cackling merrily & gnawing her palm lazily.

[MeZmer nods to me somehow, my Tender, she can, & I let their slow fall continue until they are *down down down—*]

Come to, lined up side by side, slumped against a Great Tree root half sunk in the earth but still bigger than all of them.

"Look!" Christina points to a ladder not far, leaning against the root, tall enough to reach near its top.

Climb up to its top, walk along, over to the other side?



To be continued in Cenacle | 106 | December 2018

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NEW ENGLAND

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Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. He's currently "doing mining work for a guy," which I think is a very good thing for him to be doing, when he's not scribbling away of course. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His poems for this issue have not been previously published. His current book of poetry, *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It Is So*, was published by Unsolicited Press in August 2018. I continue to be grateful for the poems he contributes to *The Cenacle*.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*, & is often inspired these days by the times he spends out on Nantucket Island. His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html>

ElectroLounge Forums is a new discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to get to know those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She's right now at a three-day workshop / retreat, being taught by a Buddhist nun, "from Switzerland and very cool. Buddhist-style." Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His piece in this issue is adapted from some of his writings & commentary at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Still working his way through a health struggle, but getting to higher ground day by day. Jimmy's most recent book, *Nonlocal Nature: The Eight Circuits of Consciousness*, was published by New Falcon Publications in September 2017.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Wishing him good luck in his variation current ambitions. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He's been deep in the bosom of his growing family of late, enjoying the experience. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press in October 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. He is a rare & sweet thing for me lately: a genuine friend with whom I work at my current long-time job.

Dylan Thomas was born in Wales in 1914, & died in New York City in 1953. He is rightly considered one of the 20th century's greatest poets. Scriptor Press published a volume of his poetry called *In My Craft or Sullen Art: Selected Poems*, as part of the 2003 Burning Man Books series. This volume can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent monthly poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). I wish her more time for her mulling solitudes.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Wishing her the best of good health after her most recent surgery. Her recent book of poetry, *Never Completely Awake*, was published by Deer Brook Editions in August 2017. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinaneberry.wordpress.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Thinking kind & healing thoughts for him. His newest book of cowboy stories is called *Between Mountain and River*, published in 2018 by Pocol Press.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Her photography & graphic design make this periodical a blazing, brilliant thing. She is the finest of the fine.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Just back from the far wilds of New Britain, Connecticut, where I wrote & proofread & edited for three straight days at the Peoples Donutshop & elsewhere. Wonderful good time.

Alan Watts was born in Kent, England, in 1915, & died in Mt. Tamalpais, California in 1973. His 1957 philosophical volume, *The Way of Zen*, was one of the first best-selling books in the West on Buddhism. His writings on psychedelics are widely admired, including his 1962 work, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*.

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"Remember to look up at the stars
and not down at your feet."
--Stephen Hawking, 2010.

