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Number 93



June 2015

A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and branches, leading into a dense forest. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The ground is covered in a thick layer of green moss, particularly on the tree trunks and the path. The lighting is soft and diffused, creating a misty or ethereal atmosphere.

This rather simple epitaph
Can save your hide, your falling mind:
Fate isn't what we're up against
There's no design, no flaws to find
There's no design, no flaws to find.

--The Shins, "Young Pilgrims," 2003.

Victor Vanek

June 21, 2015
2:43 p.m.
Eastern Donut shop -
table by door ^(waiting) ~~mine~~ -
Zombie Town, Mass.

This is Volume CDLXXVII of my
Thoughts Pads, first of them written
back in 1981 down in my hometown of
Hartford, Connecticut. I wanted to have
an "on the road journal" to complement
the one I had at home, if a more
daily diary-of-events kind of project.

Canary yellow pads, 8 1/2" x 11", usually
writ with my medium point black Espresso
(now called Liquid Ink) pens. Contained
in a beat old pad holder, held together
by duct tape & old Burnip Man stickers.

Beginning each one is always a
little thrill. What's written on the opening
page, & along the way to the 50th
page, in usually 2-3 weeks. This volume
opening with pages to be featured in
Cenacle 193 / June 2015. 80th issue of
this journal, begun 20 years ago.
A strange, marvelous thing, pushing
me to do it good, do it better, do it
like every last page ever matters.

-2-

New page, deeper in. This "From Soutard's Notebooks" has long been sourced in these pages. So the pen is familiar, the paper, the purpose. Add this locale, a donut shop, I knew almost daily when I lived a few blocks away. Back in 2001-2002, this place open all night, no jobs, I'd come by about 1 a.m., stay till dawn, piss in the alley across the street next to the Chinese Christian church.

I'd read Stephen King novels, obsess into them, listen to my Walkman, write for hours on end. I felt safe here.

Today, now, I'm waiting for my corner table: a slender eyeglassed black man of 35 or 40 sits glued to reading the walls of electronic text on his small laptop. Part of me wonders what he is reading. More of me wishes he'd go.

Lots of orange, pink here, the company's branding. Half a dozen tables, a counter against one wall. Locked bathrooms. A steadily busy juve-through. I wait. Drink my diet soda from a plastic mug gotten at one of these joints down in Connecticut 2001.

years ago.

I usually pick favorite tables at joints like this I go to write at. Tables, armchairs, corners. A habit both lovely & annoying. One among countless which comprise me. Current habits, ongoing ones, ones come & go. Ones related to people, places, attitudes & beliefs toward life. Habits rooted in hope, others in fear. Habits that decorate me like an identity but, in truth, not quite. (Still waiting.)

Most writers I've known over the years preferred to work at home, in quiet, at a typewriter or keyboard, or with a pen and ink in their notebooks. They write, they cross out, they go slow; many call it a struggle.

When I was a teenager, I had no private space or time at home. I also had little money. I found that going to McDonald's, Burger King, donut shops, libraries, gave me cheap or free space to work, alone, & the stimulation of being out in the world, letting it affect my work. Watching trees, girls, musicians, street people, crowds, cars. In public so awareness heightened, even

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sharpened when at my best.

Right now, I can hear, without understanding, two men chat in Spanish, a radio commercial on the loud-speaker, the hum of machinery. Other occasional voices buying coffee or donuts. The light out is bright but fuzzy, the playful kind which occurs before a rain shower (I'm still damp from it). I'd bet it's about 68°F in here, not cold, not warm. Floor is grey & yellow square-tiled. No smells in the air.

Working people come into these fast-food kind of places. Rarely bring books & notebooks. In anything these days, cell phones & laptops. Newspapers.

He's leaving, packed up & going—yes

[moved to my table]

— Two middle-aged guys, prizzed some, chatting to a black fellow from Nigeria, quizzing him his homeland, & reasons for leaving. Remarking the violence of the world, stupidity of it. Left them back there at this beloved table, & my iPod & headphones blaring CCR's

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Green River album. Ahhh. Arrival.

Big window to the street behind me.
Low buildings so half the view is sky,
pale, grey, mostly peaceful. I haven't
lived in this town in 13 years, ran
happy & relieved from it back in June
2002. And yet, and yet, moved back to
Boston in 2010, I come back every couple
of months. 30 times since then? More or
less. Did that in six weeks back when.
Habit's come, go, return in altered form.
Now I live in a pretty house, with a prettier
wife, a town away from here. Yet this
place remains dear to me, & others like
it. The heart extends & extends to in-
clude all, let go reluctantly, allow reunion
is possible for nearly everything, always.

Bushes just outside the window,
purplish-green leaves mostly the size of
a fingernail, jiggling in the breeze. We
humans jiggle too, & often relate to it
poorly. Smack back, people, nature,
ourselves. Try to explain the jiggle to
ourselves, to each other. Control it,
change it, synthesize it. What is it?
What are we to it? Everything touches,
that's all. Everything jiggles.

-6-

One more diet soda for my mug, one more bathroom break. Sky's getting blue, sunny. Joint's now empty but me & the tattooed old gent, a couple of tables over, mulling his laptop screen. I'll be leaving here shortly, walk a few blocks, bus on home. Came here to write this piece, my 5th & final piece of writing for this issue. Been writing it for over an hour, watching, drinking soda, writing. Music on headphones. CCR before, now an obscure NYC band called Sea Ray, their sole album from about 2003. Melancholy jangle.

Looks like two Asian men are conducting a job interview between them. One in a suit, one in shorts & t-shirt. They might be here when I have left.

Would my 2000 self have believed I'd be who I am, 13 years later, sitting where he sat? Would he be pleased? Would we jiggle in concert? Maybe. Possibly. It's a somewhat silly question. Everything touches, that's all. Everything jiggles together, even when it isn't pretty.

I hope I come again here soon. I wonder, when & why. It's a nice mystery to leave with. 6/21/2015

The Cenacle

Number 93 ❖ June 2015

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Thank you to everyone who has contributed to 80 issues of this periodical. It’s a magic & an mystery & a long sweat of loving work that keeps it going on as well as it does.





All Hell Breaks Loose

[Travel Journal]

When I went back to Ecuador to pursue my apprenticeship with don Joaquín, I was in a relationship with a talented art student named Deirdre. She affected a British accent and believed in magic, and seemed to have just walked in from a misty woodland. We soon found that our beliefs clashed, but by then we had already become addicted to entangling ourselves in each other's bodies like a Celtic knot.

When we had our clothes on, she argued that it would be impossible for me to become a shaman. "A shaman," she maintained, "is a social role in an indigenous tribe. If you're not a member of the tribe, you can't be a shaman, and any shaman who tells you otherwise is just using you for your money."

Another day she added that it was foolish to pursue magic, and she feared that something terrible would happen if I did. I countered that I feared something terrible would happen if I *didn't*, and not just to me. The earth urgently needed people to learn and practice the ancient spiritual traditions, which had become neglected, leading to the destruction of the environment. We fought about this, and about other matters. Wrapped up in my own ego, I wasn't sympathetic enough when her grandmother died and her father lost his job.

One night after arriving in Quito, I spied a strip club around the corner from my hostel. I thought it would be nice to see a naked woman who wouldn't slap my face or scream at me. In terms of my training, I knew it wasn't the best thing I could do—but as long as it was only a question of looking, not touching, it wouldn't pull my spiritual level down too far. Besides, I never wanted to be a shaman. It felt like an imperious demand from something greater than me. "If there's a God who wants me to do this work," I reasoned, "he'll make it happen. And in the meantime, as I've learned from the yagé itself, I'm a male mammal with a male mammal body."

I found myself in a tiny mammal theater, with a stage with a pole in the middle. My neighbors in the audience were a dozen mammalian Ecuadorian businessmen in suits. Loud pop music polluted the air. One after another, seven unattractive mammalian women strode out on the dim stage, gracelessly stripped, and flounced away. The eighth, though, felt like an electric shock; she was slender, dimpled; a vision from my dreams.

Afterwards, she came down from the stage and danced among the customers, then writhed naked on the floor to the beat of the thumping music. The businessmen laughed and finished their drinks and headed out to the next strip club. I was stunned by their indifference. I mastered my pounding heart and asked her for a lap dance. I sat on a sofa while she perched astride me. We embraced like lovers who had saved each other from a shipwreck. We clung for a long time.

"Let's make love," she spoke in my ear, loudly, so I could hear over the music.

"How much?"

“90,000 sucres [\$36].”

“I’ll have to go back to my hostel for it.”

I left at a fast walk and zoomed back with the cash. Fast forward ten minutes. I joked, “If you keep doing that, *I’m* going to have to charge *you* money.”

She stopped and said, “Oh, you finished.”

I said, “Yeah.”

Climbing off, she said, “Did you like it?”

I said, “Yeah, very much,” which was true. But the black mist of depression was already beginning to rise. Why had I needed to do this? I was submerged in my own filth. *Only my own sins can ensnare me*, I remembered.

As we dressed, she said, “Do you want a girlfriend?”

“No, I already have one in the United States.”

“You can have one there and one here.”

That was a good point, but I shook my head. There was no use explaining that I was studying to be a shaman. As I tied my red Converse low-tops, I concluded I was a failure both as a lover and as a mystic. I kissed the fragrant girl on her smooth cheek that had wounded me, and slumped back to the hostel.

I traveled to Joaquín’s place a few days later and, a couple of days after that, we brewed yagé. To while away the time as it was boiling, he wove me a crown of palm leaves.

In the dark as the yagé comes on, I put the crown on my head again. *It burns! It’s fire!* I whip it off and throw it on the floor of Cabaña Supernatura. With a great buzz, a ferocious swarm of insects dive-bombs me, biting and stinging. Then it vanishes and a different species does the same thing. Then another one. Then thickets of thorny plants rip my skin as I’m propelled through them, many kinds of plants, one after another. Then insects again. Then plants again. Shredded, slashed, bitten, flung, I dimly figure that the episode with the hooker has stripped away the defenses that normally guard me against low-level hostile spirits.

Soon I’m not even in the hammock anymore, but on all fours on the floor. Off to one side, a blob of darkness with a dozen shiny black eyes takes in every detail of what I’m doing. I vomit hard, once, twice, thrice; yagé mixed with stomach acid spatters the floorboards. Then come the dry heaves. I can barely breathe: with everything pushing out so hard, it’s nearly impossible to bring anything in. My body is running a program that makes it strain to eject something that has no obvious physical substance. Vocalizations oscillate from my mouth: blasphemous, sacred, obscene. Suddenly, I find them beautiful.

And then it seems, as I’m groaning, with drool hanging off my lower lip, and the black blob eyeballing me, that the problems I’m experiencing in my life are the result of an old man cursing one of my ancestors in the 18th century. I watch an angry encounter on a street in a village in Poland. Yiddish words are spoken, of judgement and punishment. They leap at my ancestor, and bury themselves in his genes.

Maybe I need to break the curse.

Maybe it ends with me.

The vision bugs and thorns play their punishments on me. The yagé seems to be demonstrating its displeasure with me for my lack of compassion for Deirdre, and for my disrespectful attitude toward the sacred—the idea that I could just bang a hooker, then come here and drink the brew.

Meanwhile, my teacher does his best to ignore me. Joaquín sings intermittently, shaking

a leaf fan, then drinks another cup of yagé, feeds the fire, places the leaf fan on the floor, wraps up in a blanket, and dozes off.

Some six hours after they began, my symptoms abruptly cease. I understand that the yagé has once again welcomed me into its good graces. It didn't like the illicit sex energy that had clung to me like a stench, and it got rid of it by puking some of it out and feeding the rest to the insects and plants. Now, lying in the hammock and feeling cleaner, I see, up near my left foot, fifteen or twenty tiny multicolored people wearing indigenous-style crowns. They're like the celestial spirits I saw in the desert in Mexico on peyote, but they're much smaller, and they're stretching their higher dimension down so they can visit me. With great good humor, making fun of me and sharing the joke with me, they grab my left foot like Lilliputians and drag it up into Heaven. The rest of me is still too heavy, but they manage to get one foot up there. We all share a laugh before they let go and vanish.

Joaquín has made it clear that I'm welcome to pick up a mamecócó any time I want. So while the old man dozes, I retrieve the leaf fan from the floor, and very slowly begin to turn it around, scrutinizing the whispers of the individual leaves softly scraping against each other. I let it guide my movements. It rises above me.

It's a prize for surviving my own stupidity. A scepter of authority over the self. A receiver and transmitter. A physical record of energy shooting up out of a seed. A show of DNA's power to manufacture beautiful, durable objects of carbon. It's the whole history of plants in human hands—hands that have evolved, in part, to hold plants. It's the healing herb, the digging stick, the spear, the paintbrush, the canoe paddle, the rattle. It's itself, waiting patiently, until I'm ready to shake it and sing.

* * * * *





Nathan D. Horowitz



Ecuadorian Highlands

Pa

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a.

Looking down into the valley
at the field of forty black and white cows,
the road where I left my new friend
the big orange and green trumpet-shaped *huantuj* flower,
the dark furry cleft where trees flank a river
that runs between green fields.

The low roar of a highway.
A visitors' center invisible from up here.

All of a sudden the sun comes out,
and I have a shadow that lies
on the ground next to drops of rain
that are tiny crystal balls
clinging to blades of grass.
The day has millions of eyes.

Songbirds
whose language I can't transcribe
chant electric syllables.

Flocks of bamboo stalks line the trail in places.

Up they grow, and over,
straight lines leaning over into semicircles.
One makes a graceful arch over the path,
pure poetry, but who can quote it?
Music of a fly,
music of the wind in forty million leaves of bamboo.

Purple clover flowers stare straight at the sun
with faces that are blind and not blind.
The sun shines in and out of water droplets.
In the heat, water evaporates unseen,
a tide rises into the air.
A cumulus cloud, mountain-made-of-mist,
mocks the shape of a hill.

The infinitely complex bodies of plants.
 Green wings and feathers fan the air
 without flying anywhere.
 Around the joints of these bamboo stalks
 grow forty nodes resembling tiny fingers.
 Some of these sprout shoots
 that shoot up and out to sprout leaves like grass blades.
 Like fingers, the leaves feel all that passes,
 reading me, and every pulse of wind.

I rest in the lap of a huge slanting tree
 with numerous trunks and much carved graffiti
 and bromeliads, free riders,
 and rain, still, long after the rainfall, falling off leaves
 to land on other leaves on the ground.

MORE

demands a graffiti inexplicably.

But at a certain point the air turns cold
 and the forest abruptly refuses to speak to me.
 It shows me heart-shaped leaves wet with rain.
 Hummingbird wings inhabit the air above my head.
 I pull my leather jacket out of my knapsack.
 Second skin, crumpled, beginning to stain,
 just like my first skin.
 And these hands that have been at the ends of my arms
 all these years, they're clearly not a boy's hands anymore,
 as they were all those times
 I looked at them when I was a boy,
 wondering what they'd look like
 when I was grown up.
 I chant the verses of last year's poem to keep warm:
What makes the crow fly delirious with cunning?
With the catflash of a many-fingered tornado?
 Hummingbirds have woven a spell above me,
 they're from a species known as the Green Thoughtcatcher.
 My ankles are cold
 where I rolled up my pantlegs to keep mud off.
 My black Converse All-Star tennis shoes
 look as if they want to keep walking,
 so I'll go too.

Father Sky,
 Madre Tierra, Mother of Bamboo,
 source of ferns and thornbushes,
 hear me.

A tiny weevil hunches on my hand,
 the Bic ballpoint pen casts a rainbow on my fingers,
 busses honk in the valley below.

1995 AD: whiteman rules the world.
 The world is unruly; whiteman walks alone.

Alone
 what will I do without you?
 In my mind, she answers, *What did you do before you met me?*
You'll do that.

Before I met you, I was alone.
 I got by with a little help from my friends.
 I studied in my room, and cut up *National Geographics*
 with an Exacto knife, and collaged them into a book
 which I called *Heroical Sailings*,
 after an article on Sir Francis Drake. In that way
 I made sense of my world.
 At this moment, it's 4:53 PM and I'm alone in South America,
 crouching on a trail crisscrossed with bamboo.
 The sun is hiding and my legs are tired.
 The wind rustles and another weevil
 climbs up to the summit of my knee and
 down the other side, for the life of him
 just like a human would have done it. All
 alone, mind you. Or was I with him?
 A bird hurls by like a flung stone;
 a second herd of cows crawls like ants across a hillside;
 even the laws of nature sway in the breeze.

A jet roars across the sky
 so we're still in that world
 in which the sky is crisscrossed by jets.
 Clouds tumble down, break open on mountains, spill across the plain.
 As the wind changes direction
 the screaming laughter of children
 near the visitors' center
 changes to the ribbiting of frogs
 discussing the availability of water.
 A dish antenna atop a bald hill
 gathers messages from far away.
 Birds babble on.

Cool clouds slide across a blue patch of sky.
 It gets cold here at high altitudes near the equator
 when the sun goes behind something substantial
 like those dense clouds over there or a mountain
 or the earth.

I rest here on the hillside in the chill.
 The watch she gave me for Christmas still going strong.

Has the wind picked up enough,
 has the sun sunk low enough,
 has the writer written long enough,
 is it time to bring the human indoors?

The strangeness of being “alone” in a foreign country, always with some bellyache or other.
 But the bellyaches you get over, and you’re almost never really alone—what about Kish,
 Mark, Pat, Claudia, Maria Paz, and Tony? Not to mention Michael Longhair, Michael Tall,
 and their girlfriends Lourdes and Jo; Jon Lovejoy and Gavin Moore; Beto the Israeli, Alison
 the Irishwoman, and their little daughter Kayla the Ecuaterranean; Sixto the language school
 director and Segundo the forest ranger; Sandi at Microsoft and Miles from Seattle . . . not to
 mention, either, the whole Piaguaje family back in the jungle.

In late afternoon light
 the field below is an alarming shade of green,
 and the walking man has an alarmingly good sense of balance.
 What the hell is it, anyway,
 that makes the crow fly delirious with cunning,
 and the hummingbird fly above me like a purring cat?
 Picaflor—colibri—minion of the Aztec
 tribal god Huitzilopochtli
 (whose name means Left-handed Hummingbird)—
 what makes him vibrate, willful, determined,
 with nothingness?

This bamboo stroked my head when I passed underneath.
 Wow, what a gorgeous birdcall.
 A brook rushes softly below.
 And still, in the background, busses honking.
 But here, it’s so peaceful.

It’s so peaceful here
 I quickly write a haiku,
 capture the moment.

Thinking intently,
like Jorge Luis Borges
writing a story.

Soak up the rainfall.
Be all that a plant can be.
Photosynthesize.

I walk down the path
counting syllables on my
fingers. They're all gone.

Shelf fungus grows on the posts of this barbed wire fence.
The flash goes off when I take pictures now.
I'm nearly back at the cabin where I'll sleep.
There's a bit of a pale sunset visible.
And another airplane—
"A screaming comes across the sky."
Here on earth,
a stand of trees has leaves with dark patterned
jaggedy magician silhouettes.
Leaves like the hands of praying mantises
gesturing, underneath the sky.

Warm in the sweater she gave me
I complete the poem under halogen light
with hands shaped like leaves
shaped like hands shaped like leaves.
Humans and plants shake hands
here at Pasochoa Nature Reserve,
here at
Pa
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* * * * *

Bags End News
 No. 120 September 22, 1987
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Shlela Gos too Dreemland (Part I)

This iz another of thoz
 long hard storys that I reeli
 dont understand awl ut. I wil
 try ~~my~~ mah best too tel it
 t it.

Shlela told me she waz
 hoping along in Bagend 1
 day an she waz thinking
 about Gershwin. She startid
 too go down a ramp too
 get too the levil weer her
 thronroom iz wen she relized
 sumwun waz neer the botom
 of the ramp. He waz sumwun
 Shlela had nevr seen befor.
 She dont lik strangs so she
 startid hoping reel fast down
 the ramp an she yella



Bags End Book #2: Sheila Bunny Goes to Dreamland

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

Introduction

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.

Sheila Bunny Goes to Dreamland

Part I.

This is another of those long hard stories that I really don't understand all of. I will try mah best to tell it right.

Sheila told me she was hopping along in Bags End 1 day and she was thinking about Gershwin. Sheila is the biggest jazz fan I know. She started to go down a ramp to get to the level where her Throne Room is when she realized someone was near the bottom of the ramp. He was someone Sheila had never seen before. She don't like strangers so she started hopping real fast down the ramp and she yelled, "Hey you!" real loud. I guess she wasn't careful cuz she fell down the ramp and hurt herself.

Me and Sheila's little sister and mah adopted sister Margie Bunny were the 1s who found Sheila. She looked like she was asleep at the bottom of the ramp.

"Boy! She was so sleepy she didn't even wait to get to her throne before she fell asleep!" I said.

"Lazybug Bunny! Wake up!" Margie scolded. Margie is mostly a pink bunny with fluffy white ears.

We tried to wake Sheila up but she wouldn't. Then I noticed a bump on her head and I got scared. I told Margie to stay there and I runned to get Doctor Greenface.

Doctor Greenface is a little green-furred guy, just a sorta round puff of a guy, but a real good doctor, and he lives in a little room that's just right for him. I can hardly get mah nozebone in his room tho so I knocked on his door and yelled for him.

He came out and said, "Hi, Algernon. What's wrong?"

I told him about Sheila and then I pretended I was a horsey and rode him to where she was.

The first thing he had me do was to get the Blondys and have them float a sheet to carry Sheila on. The Blondys are these three little blonde-haired magic girls named Tammy, Sammy, & Simi. They know how to float because they don't know the Law of Grabitee.

Margie was crying, "Bug Bunny? Bug Bunny? Wake up!" She forgets the difference between cartoons on TV & real guys, so she always calls Sheila Bug Bunny.

"Margie, Bug Bunny got a bump," I explained.

"Bump Bunny?" she asked.

"Yah. Bump Bunny," I said.

Well, the Blondys carried Sheila to her bed in the Bunny Family apartment, and boy! were her mommy Pat & daddy Pete upset! Pete cancelled Bags End School, & both he and Pat stayed by Sheila's bed all the time.

Sheila told me later what happened when she fell down and got unconscious, which is what Doctor Greenface calls going to sleep after getting a bump on the head.

She said she saw black for a minute and then she woke up in a strange place. The first thing she noticed was that the air was different colors in different places. She hopped through the patches of blue, green, red, yellow, & a lot of other colors. Some of them she had never seen before.

Sometimes the ground was hard & sometimes it was soft. As she hopped along looking for someone to tell her where she was, she went through dry water, sticky snow, & tall purple grass that would disappear before her & reappear behind her.

The changing scenery was strange too. For awhile everything was white. The sky, the ground, and all around her.

Then it looked like she was walking through a real big city except whenever she tried to touch something, her paw went right through it. She told me it was like walking inside of a movie.

Finally, she left the movie city & came to a small forest. She was hopping along, looking at the trees & stuff, when all these bugs came out of nowhere & landed on her. They were laughing real loud & talking in a language Sheila had never heard before.

Sheila got mad & started clicking the bugs off with her paws. Every time she clicked a bug off, tho, it would fly up in the air & go BOOM!

Well, Sheila didn't like that so she tried rolling on the ground to get

the bugs off. They held on very tight tho.

"Listen, you dum bugs, if you don't get off me I will blow up all of you!" she yelled.

The bugs paid no attention, & Sheila thought she saw more bugs coming. She started hopping real fast to get away. I guess the bugs got tired cuz they all flew off.

After fighting off all those bugs, & traveling for a long time, Sheila was tired. She decided to have a rest & think about what had happened.

"I think I must have knocked myself out. Am I dreaming? I must be. This is just a bad weird dream, & pretty soon I will wake up," Sheila thought. She was pretty satisfied with that answer when she saw that same stranger she had seen in Bags End!

She started hopping really fast after him. Suddenly, he started waving his arms & he flew into the air!

Without thinking about it, Sheila waved her paws & she flew into the air!

As she flew higher, the air felt more like water & she felt like she was swimming.

Well, she swam & swam through purple air, blue air, green air, & yellow air. The stranger was much faster & soon he was out of sight. The air got so hard to swim in that pretty soon Sheila couldn't go on. She decided just to go down to the ground.

But it took her a long time to get to the ground because she had been so far up. When she got there, she discovered something really stange.

Part II.

While Sheila was having her adventures in Dreamland, all us guys in Bags End were really upset because we didn't know why she wouldn't wake up.

Peter Bunny asked me to run & get Princess Crisakah. Princess Chrisakah, or Crissy for friendlier, lives near Bags End in a fantasyland called Imagianna. She lives in a castle & everything, more like a regular fantasyland than crazy old Bags End. She lives there with her best friend Boop, who looks like a turtle, but isn't.

The Blondys went to Oz to get Glinda the Sorceress & Princess Ozma, & Leona Lion got her daddy Aslan from Narnia, but even these really magical guys couldn't wake Sheila up.

I guess a lot of people must have heard about Sheila's sickness cuz pretty soon there was a long line of guys & fellas to see her. I heard that even Sheila's jazz hero Miles Davis came. Lots of guys from Oz came, like Dorothy Gale, Scarecrow, Cowardly Lion, Tin Woodman, the Wizard, & a whole bunch of others. Toad, Mole, Badger, & Rat came from the River. Christopher Robin came with Pooh Bear, Rabbit, Eyore, Kanga, Roo, Owl, & other guys from the Hundred Acre Wood. Peter Pan & Wendy came with the Indians & Lost Boys from Neverland. Wilbur the Pig came with lots of Charlotte the Spider's children. The Mouse & his Child came with the Toy Elephant. The Little Prince came. Alice & a whole bunch of Wonderland guys came. Never before have all these guys & fellas all been at Bags End at the same time.

Rich Americus came from The City & he met up with the Sargent Pepper Band when they came. They wrote a song hoping Sheila would hear it & wake up. Miles Davis played the trumpet part. The song went:

You used to hop around a lot
 when you were just a baby
 & everyone knew you were coming
 when they heard your happy "Ragut!"

Then you discovered that
 you love jazz
 & so you made your band
 & in the band battle of
 New Orleans,
 you blew the others away

You've reached for the top
 and bottom of
 Bags End
 And been Mayor many years
 Whether you're playing checkers
 or reading a comic book
 or taking a nap
 or arguing with someone

You're our Sheila
 Our special Sheila
 with purple eyes

We love you
 Please come home.

Mah adopted person mommy Miss Chris wouldn't leave Bags End even to go to school. Finally, Missus Mommy came looking for her. When she saw the sick Sheila, she wouldn't leave either. She loves Sheila too.

Meanwhile, in Dreamland, Sheila had just come down from where she had been flying high in the air. What she came down into was a circus.

It was a strange circus though. There were many unusual creatures but none of them were in cages.

Some of them were reading books, some were playing musical instruments, some were just sitting on chairs & resting or talking.

There was the Bubble Boy whose whole body was made of bubbles. He told Sheila that he had been made by a guy who had made a magic bubble potion.

There was the 100-year-old Little Boy. He told Sheila that he had never grown up but he wasn't just a short person, cuz he still looked like a little boy. Sheila asked him if he still liked kids books. He said no, he had read them all. He told Sheila he was reading Dostoyevsky, whoever that is.

There were all these little animals made out of clouds. Sheila said you couldn't really pet them cuz your hands went right through them. She told me sometimes parts or all of the cats, dogs, horses, tigers, deers, & other animals seemed to disappear. They told Sheila that they were fuller & there was more of them in the wetter weather. In the dry weather there were only a few animals, & they were very thin.

The cloud animals told Sheila where to find the leader of the circus.

Sheila found him sitting under a tree. He had long white hair & a long white robe. He smiled & introduced himself as Otalp. Sheila told him the story of her adventures in Dreamland.

"I suspect the stranger you have been chasing is the key to your leaving Dreamland," Otalp said.

"Do you have any idea what he wants?" asked Sheila.

Otalp nodded. "I think the reason he was in Bags End was to get you to come here."

"But why?"

"His name is Reltih. I think he wants your purple eyes." Sheila has these magical purple eyes, tho it's hard to say what their magic is.

Before Sheila could ask, Otalp explained that Reltih had taken over Dreamland a few months ago, & was looking for people from Outside to come there.

"But if he controls Dreamland, why does he want more power?" Sheila asked.

Otalp said, "There's the rub. He wants to gather enough power to enable him to cross over the borders of Dreamland to conquer Outside."

Sheila told me that Outside is everything beyond dreams. It's kind of hard to understand.

"Shouldn't the people in Dreamland fight Reltih?"

Otalp told her that Reltih had used his power to weaken everyone else in Dreamland. He explained that everyone in Dreamland had been created in someone on the Outside's dreams. They continued to live as long as someone dreamed about them every so often.

But Reltih was preventing this, so everyone in Dreamland was slowly fading. And Reltih was growing even more powerful because he was making more & more people on the Outside only just dream of him.

Well, Sheila told Otalp that she was gonna make a plan to save Dreamland herself. At the moment, tho, she didn't know what that plan would be.

Part III.

Sheila had been unconscious for almost a week & nobody seemed to be able to help her. Dr. Greenface said the only thing left to do was to wait & hope that she waked up.

I decided I didn't want to just wait & hope. I decided to go see Godd.

I don't visit Godd too much but Godd is always happy to see me.

I found Godd reading a comic book Leo gave him & falling asleep. Leo is the janitor of Bags End, and a really big comic book guy.

"Hey, Godd, wake up!" I said.

Godd woke up & said, "Hi, beagle, how are you?"

I told Godd about how Sheila had been unconscious & nobody, not even all those magical guys like Ozma, Glinda, Aslan, & some others, could wake her up.

Godd said, "I know what's happening with Sheila but I can't help her. I can tell you that she isn't dying, & there's a good chance she will wake up."

I got mad. "But you're Godd! You can do anything! You made the world & stuff! How come you can't save my friend & your friend too?"

Godd sighed sadly. "Sheila & I often have this conversation. You're right that I did make everything, but making the world isn't like building a house from blocks. Creating live creatures means there is responsibility involved. Bags End is 1 of my favorite places, but even my friends there must be treated in a certain way. I am sorry, Algernon."

"Stuff it in a sock, ya dum Godd!" I yelled & then I runned away. I

cried a lot later.

Meanwhile, in Dreamland, Sheila was preparing for her showdown with Reltih, the guy who had taken over Dreamland & was trying to gain enough power to cross its borders & conquer the Outside.

Sheila's friend Otalp warned her that she wouldn't get much help from anyone.

"First of all, Reltih's gaining his power by weakening everyone else.

"Second, Dreamland doesn't really have cities. It's hard to measure time here, because some places are always day & some places always night, & some are both, & some are neither. Some people here you can't see & there's few roads between places.

"And, to tell you the truth, the most important reason Reltih has had such an easy time of it is because few people know or care what he is doing. Up until now, Dreamland has had no ruler."

So Sheila decided finally that she would have to do the job on her own. Otalp wished her luck.

"By the way, where do I find Reltih?" she asked.

"In Dreamland, you either find what you're looking for or you don't. That's all I can really tell you," said Otalp.

Sheila said, "Well, goodbye," & left.

She hopped & hopped through more strange places. She hopped through the Sea of Empty Faces which she told me is made up of thousands & thousands of people dressed up in clothes the color of the ocean but who have blank white faces. No eyes, no nozebones, nothing! They passed Sheila along with their hands. Sheila didn't like that after while, so she broke free of the hands & hopped on their heads to the shore.

Then she told me about this horrible place she went through. She called it the Cute Zone. It was a town of small houses & buildings all decorated in lavender & pink, & trimmed with white lace. Above each doorway was a sign that said: "Another Fine Euphoria Technologies Product--Be Happy!"

The people were even worse. There were dolls & furry animals of all kinds. Some smelled like roast beef or sauerkraut (O! Yuk!), some said things like: "Can I load your floppy disk for you?" & "Let's watch MTV together! Everywhere!" Sheila said it was cuteness as far as the eye could see & far more than the stomach could stand!

Sheila said she went up to the guy who looked like the mayor & asked him what this place was all about. The mayor said it was a place called Failed Toy Ideas Town.

A long-haired doll came up to Sheila & said, "Want to picket the White House & protest human rights violations in Central America, South Africa, & Eastern Europe?"

Sheila gave the doll a grouchy look & said, "I heard someone say the draft is coming back. Better start dodging!" The long-haired doll runned away screaming.

Another doll came up to Sheila & said, "I am running for mayor against this corrupt person. Want to see my film showing him kissing the Miss Walla Walla, Washington doll? Or my proof that he plagiarized The Tibetan Book of the Dead?"

Sheila said, "Want to see my collection of the shrunken heads of unorthodox political candidates?" That guy runned away too.

I don't know what any of that stuff means. Anyway, Sheila left & then soon she found Reltih. He was indeed the guy she had seen in Bags End & chased afterwards.

He was sleeping in a car. Sheila said it was a silver-colored Emperor. He had on some raggedy clothes & old shoes. He was asleep in the front seat.

Sheila took a close look at his car. The back was filled with boxes & old newspapers & orange juice cartons (O! Yuk!) In the front seat, Reltih's legs were stretched over a laundry basket, & he held a spoon in his left hand & an empty container of ice cream in his right hand. O! Yuk!

"Wake up, Reltih!" Sheila yelled.

Reltih woke up. He wore thick glasses & had bulging eyes. His hair was kind of long & all tangled.

"You're-you're-you're-you're Sheila Bunny, aren't you?" Reltih stammered.

Sheila stared at him for a moment. "You're Reltih? The one who conquered Dreamland & wants to conquer the Outside?"

"No! I want to lead a People's Revolution just like I have led here!"

Sheila told me that at this point she realized something was very wrong with this whole situation.

Part IIII.

Well, every day would come & go without Sheila getting better. Nobody knew what to do except to wait & hope.

Then a great day came! Sheila's mommy Pat came running out of Sheila's bedroom yelling something.

"She talked! She talked!" Pat cried.

Well, Pete calmed her down & she explained that Sheila was mumbling in her sleep.

Me, Pat, Pete, Margie, & a bunch of other guys went in & stood around her bed.

Sure enough--Sheila was mumbling something!

"Dum dream! Dum dream! I'm gonna boost someone!" she said.

Well, we all stood around for a long time & that's the kind of thing Sheila kept saying again & again. Even though things looked better, we knew we had to wait some more.

Meanwhile, Sheila was dealing with Reltih.

"OK, Reltih, let's start driving," she said.

Reltih smiled nervously & twirled his black hair with some of his fingers. He had to move things out of the way to give Sheila some room on the seat. He did it but very slowly. He moved 1 piece of paper at a time & when he came to the orange juice carton (O! Yuk!), he picked it up, looked inside, drank from it, & threw it out the window.

Sheila got mad & said, "Don't litter!" Then she picked up the carton & handed it to Reltih. Reltih threw it in the back seat. Then Sheila pounded on the passenger door & said, "Let me in!"

Reltih opened the door & when Sheila got in, they drove away. They entered the streets of a city. They passed an old diner. They passed a big building that had a sign on it that read "Rosie O'Grady's Good Times Emporium" on it.

They drove finally to a bunch of buildings that had a sign in front that said "Normal School." On the lawn of 1 of the buildings was a big metal thing, bigger than Reltih's car. It looked like:



They got out & stood looking at it. "This is my machine for controlling dreams," said Reltih. "I am gonna take control of the Outside & pretty soon the means of production will be turned over to the people."

I don't know what that means.

"I have heard things like that before," said Sheila. "Where's the controls?"

"I won't tell you!" said Reltih.

Sheila got a real grumpy look on her face & said, "If you don't help me fix the mess you have made in Dreamland so I can wake up, I am gonna throw everything out of your car & write a fan letter to the Republican Party & sign your name!"

Reltih's eyes got real big. He giggled a little. He twirled his hair again. "O-O-O-O-OK, I will fix everything," he said.

He played with the big metal thing. Nothing happened, but he told Sheila everything was OK. To make sure Reltih didn't make more trouble, Sheila got in Reltih's car & drove it right into the statue. Reltih was upset & he started calling Sheila names. I think some of the names were reactionary, fascist, nationalistic, & other words I don't know. Sheila said she was gonna give Reltih a good hard kick, so he shut up.

Now Sheila had to figure out how to get out of Dreamland. Reltih didn't know how to help her. Sheila was tired so she decided to rest for a minute in Reltih's battered car.

She woke up a little later. She was back in Bags End!

When the Bags End friends & everyone else found Sheila was awake, there was so much excitement & noise that Sheila got mad & went into her Throne Room & locked the door.

There was a big party later & Sheila even showed up to give a little speech.

"Good to be back. Well, goodbye," she said, & then she left.

I asked Sheila later what she thought about her adventures in Dreamland.

"It was ridiculous. I suppose Dreamland was like it should be. I won't sleep the same way again tho. Now you better leave. I have a royal nap to attend to."

Boy! That Sheila. She's quite a fella!

The Season of Lights!

Part I.

Not long after Sheila returned from Dreamland, she told me she was gonna go to the City to get Emmi the Bag Lady Artist for the Season of Lights. I knew I had better act fast.

"Can I come with you?" I asked.

Bags End News
 No. 133 December 22, 1987
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

The Seesun uf Lites! (Part I.

Wen Shlela told me she
 waz gonna go too the Citi
 to get Emmi the Bagladi Artist
 for the Seesun uf Lites, I
 nuw, I had better akt fast.

"Can I com with yu?
 I askd.

Shlela slowchd ferthr down
 in her thron. No, she sed.

Wen Shlela has her mind
 set on somthing itz almost
 imposibel to argu her intoo
 anothr way. I desidid too
 put on mah sadest beegel
 fac, numbr 59, an beg her in mah
 sadest voyc, numbr 41x.

"O, pleez, Shlela, pleez, pleez?
 It woud bee sech a grate stori

Sheila slouched further down in her throne. "No," she said.

When Sheila has her mind set on something, it's almost impossible to argue her into another way. I decided to put on mah saddest beagle face, number 57, & beg her in my saddest voice, number 41x.

"O, please, Sheila, please, please? It would be such a great story for mah newspaper. Please? Be a benevolent despot, woncha?"

Well, Sheila wasn't easy to convince, but I think I got her when I said it would make a great chapter in the biography I was gonna write about her.

"Come on, Boswell, let's go see my pal Crissy so we can get started," she said, hopping down from her throne.

I don't know who Boswell is.

So me & Sheila went through the door in Bags End to Imagianna. While we were walking over the hills & through the fields of Imagianna, Sheila told me she figured we would find Emmi in plenty of time for us to get back for the Season of Lights.

"Why don't you just have Crissy use her magic to bring Emmi to Bags End?" I asked.

"Because I wouldn't want to be yanked from 1 place & plopped into another without being told, & I am sure Emmi feels the same way. Besides, I am not sure Emmi will come. I have to ask her."

By this time we had gotten to Princess Crissy's castle. Sheila knocked on the front door & Boop, who's not a turtle but looks like 1, answered. He bowed to Sheila.

"Welcome, Your Majesty. Welcome also, Algernon. Shall I announce you to the Princess?" Boop likes protocols, which are fancy ways of doing simple things. He's a nice guy, tho, & Crissy loves him a lot.

"No need, Boop. She knows we're coming," said Sheila as she hopped right past Boop into the castle.

Boop look frustrated but he didn't say anything cuz he is a little scared of Sheila. To make him feel better, I said he could announce me if he wanted to.

"Thanks, Algernon," Boop said as we went in.

Crissy was wearing her dark sunglasses & her jeans jacket that says HONORARY MEMBER OF SHEILA'S KOOL JAZZ BAND on the back. She gave me a big hug & a kiss, & then we all got down to business.

Now Crissy didn't like the idea of Sheila going back to the City. But when she heard I wanted to go too, she almost got mad.

"I am going to put both of you in danger!" she cried. "Sheila, you better take me with you. If you do get hurt in that world, I can't help you. Only the abilities of the people in that world will be able to help you. But if you take me, I can pull us out in a second."

Well, Sheila didn't like that idea but she knew Crissy was stubborn & would only allow us to go in a way she felt most safe.

The next thing for us to do was put on our people disguises.

Sheila had told me how when Crissy does magic she doesn't use a magic wand or magical words or nothing. But it was still weird when before I knew it, me, Sheila, & Crissy looked so different. Sheila sort of looked like a boy but she had long hair. Her clothes were all baggy & stuff. Crissy looked strange too. She had gray hair & wrinkles & she was sort of bent over. When I looked into her eyes, I still saw her same mischievous look, so I knew it was her.

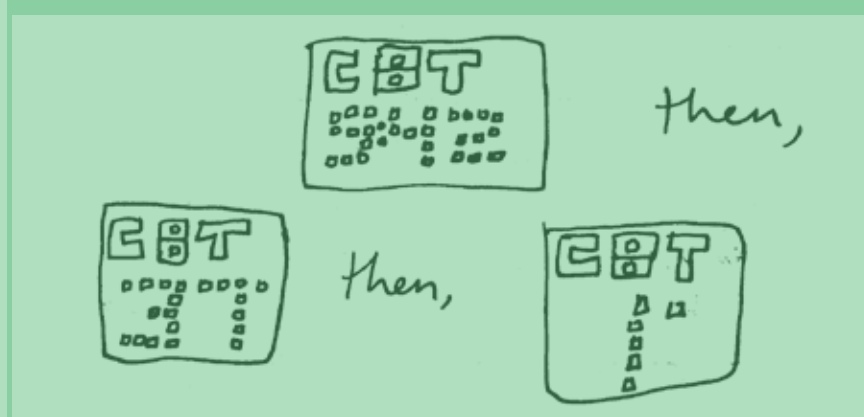
Then I saw mahself in a mirror. Mah nozebone was almost all gone & what was left didn't have no fur! Mah earbones were kind of like flat coffee cups (O! Yuk!) at the side of my head. I had on 2 sweaters, red & orange, &

this dirty blue jacket. My pants were a sort of stained green. Mah tailbone was missing & when I looked down to the ground it was like Miss Chris was holding me! I got a little dizzy & almost fell down. Crissy smiled at me & asked me if I was alright in this old lady's voice.

Sheila was anxious to go. She walked toward the giant glowing square in the middle of the room. Me & Crissy followed. It felt so strange walking with only 2 legs. I kept wondering what to do with mah arms.

We found ourselves in the same cement park that Sheila told me she had been in the last time she came to the City looking for Emmi. Sure enough, the floor & benches were cement & the trees grew out of cement bases.

The sky was cloudy & the streets were pretty empty. Sheila led the way & we passed a lot of stores & places. There was a sign hanging off one building that read:



I think we even passed the store that's got the fellas in the window who say hi to Ramie cuz they cheered as Sheila passed, & Sheila said quietly, "Carry on, subjects."

Well, Sheila started to get frustrated cuz she couldn't find Emmi. We went back & forth a few times on different streets. Finally, when we were walking down the street near the park where we had arrived, & Sheila was thinking of looking in the Museum where she had found Emmi before, we heard singing.

Swaying & staggering down the street toward us was a guy with a dirty brown beard & a long grey coat. He sang:

Alameta sesta bob
Illia boona
Caladamad

Seskawincha dilya
doo
Bangamang lee!

It was Sheila's friend from the last time she came to the City! He said some more things in Gibberish language & Sheila, who has been learning Gibberish with Allie Leopard, spoke some Gibberish with him.

"Come on! He knows where Emmi is!" said Sheila excitedly.

Part II.

So we followed the guy with the dirty brown beard & long grey coat. As we walked through the City, the Gibberish guy sang a song. It was sort of a traveling-&-going-to-get-someone-song. It went like this:

Wilya Wilyo Wily-ee-a!
Dolya Dolyo Doly-ee-ah!
Bing Bing Bing Bing Bong!
Dong Dong Dong Dong Ding!
Mutafaluh Scafalah Doolee-!

I kind of liked that song.

Anyway, we walked along until we got to this busy corner. At 1 corner across the street was a sort of construction site where big machines were moving things around. At the other across the street was a big building that Sheila said had the Memorial Shops in them.

The Gibberish guy led us to the construction site. There, standing in front of an empty restaurant, was our friend Emmi!

We ran up to her & she recognized us almost right away. We were so excited that we forgot about the Gibberish guy until he started singing again:

Awwwrivorvorvor vor
Vorrrideniclay oday
Oday Oday Oday?

Deeriwenowenowen
Owenoreeereee
DeeDeeDeeDee!

He started wandering away until Sheila called to him. I think I understood her. She wanted him to come back for a moment. When he came back, Emmi whispered to me what Sheila said to him.

"The first time I was here, you were kind to me when I was in trouble. And this time you have been an even greater help. I brought something for you as a small gesture of thanks."

Out of her pocket Sheila took a little bottle of carrot juice & a bag of Sheila Snacks. O! Yuk!

The Gibberish guy gave a big smile, a nice low bow, & he wandered away, singing again.

"Why are you around here, Emmi? I would have thought you would be in the Museum or the park."

Emmi smiled. "This empty place that they're tearing down used to be a restaurant where I came to draw. I met your friend Ramie here. Well, really, I saw him watching me draw. He looked nice."

"But why are they tearing it down?" asked Sheila.

"Well, they are putting up a new big building, fancier, newer. The City is changing. That's not bad for everyone, but I personally will miss a lot of places they're taking down."

Emmi pulled out of 1 of her bags a drawing she had made of the empty restaurant.

It looked like it does now. Lots of dirt on the floor & things, junk, lying around. The only thing that was different was there seemed to be

ghosts in the picture. There were ghosts of people behind the counter, at the tables, & walking around. I think there was even a ghost of Emmi drawing a picture of a little boy nearby, & I think I saw Ramie sitting nearby too. I liked it a lot.

"I called this May 7, 1985 to commemorate the first day I was in the presence of someone connected with Bags End," said Emmi with a happysad smile.

Sheila then told Emmi about how we had come to get her for the Season of Lights. She said she would like to come with us. So we walked up a quicker way that Emmi knew back to Cement Park. We were almost there when we saw another old friend, Rich Americus! He was sitting on a low stone wall outside another empty restaurant. He was playing a guitar & singing softly.

When he saw us, he looked up & smiled.

"I wanted to come back here to the old Luna T's Cafe & play a little," he said.

Rich must know Emmi cuz he gave her as big a hug as me, Crissy, & Sheila. I asked him about that.

"Emily & I go way back. She used to come into Luna T's when I played with my band, & she would draw while we played."

"Richard would never let me pay for anything. He always bought me my coffee," Emmi said.

Rich smiled. Then all of a sudden he looked sad. "It's not the City it once was. A lot of nice little places I used to go into are gone. Now there's just a lot of tall buildings. The City is not as inviting as it once was."

I asked Emmi if she met Rich at Luna T's.

"No, we met when Rich would wander the streets dressed as a street person."

"Why did you do that?" asked Crissy.

"Well, I wanted to know what it was like. So I dressed in poor clothes & wandered the streets. I saw how people looked at me, how they didn't let me into many places. I used to go to the library & sit with the poor people near the front window in the reading room. A lot of them went there just to be warm but some really read stuff."

Rich wanted to wander around the City for awhile & we followed him. He showed us the places he used to go before they were gone.

It wasn't really depressing listening to Rich & Emmi talk. Rich talked about old men he had known & Emmi told about grumpi store owners. They laughed a lot, & so me, Crissy, & Sheila did too.

I sort of had the feeling I was walking through 2 cities, the one I was actually in, & the one Emmi & Rich described. It was just like Emmi's drawing.

Finally, Crissy brought us back to Imagianna & then she made me, Sheila, & herself back into our proper shapes. Then we all walked back to Bags End.

Sheila led us to a certain level of Bags End, & thru a door there. There were some steps to climb up to a wooden platform, surrounded by trees. There were candles all around the edge of the platform. All of the Bags End friends were waiting.

The Season of Lights this year was very simple. Rich played some songs & we sang along. I felt very happy & rather sad.

Bags End News

No. 142 February 23, 1988

Editor: Algernon Beagle

King: Sheila Bunny

Written Down By: Lori Bunny

On the Rode With Shlela!

(Part 1)

IF yur no mah pal an budy Shlela, "thatz King too yu, pal Buny, yur no she haz got restless pats. So evry so awften she takes a bunch uf Bagzends friends on a trip. She told me she iz redy to tak another 1.

Shlela haz bin reeding On the Rode biy a gyl namd Jak Keroak. Its about theez gys whoo lik too driv awl avr Amerika an vizit theer friends. Sumtims thay hav a lot uf fun, sumtims thay get in trubel. The uf the things thay lik most iz jaz, wich Shlela likes mor than anything els.

Now uzelli Shlela announces

On the Road with Sheila Bunny!

Part I.

If you know mah pal & buddy Sheila "that's King to you, pal" Bunny, you know she has got restless paws. So every so often she takes a bunch of Bags End friends on a trip. She told me she is ready to take another 1.

It happened because Emmi had brought with her a library book she thought Sheila would like.

"Crissy can get it back to me when you're done," Emmi smiled with her nice & smart old lady blue eyes.

The book was called On the Road by a guy named Jack Kerouac. It's about these guys who like to drive all over America & visit their friends. Sometimes they have a lot of fun, sometimes they get in trouble. 1 of the things they like the most is jazz, which Sheila likes more than anything else.

Now usually Sheila announces her trips on The Sheila Show on TV, but this time all she said on her show was that she would be interviewed on Commander Q's radio program that night. Commander Q is this mysterious DJ guy who does a really good show to listen to.

"OK, Sheila, where are you off to this time?"

"Well, it's kind of hard to explain but I will try. In On the Road, Jack Kerouac & his pals were looking for America, what it was really like. I think they found more answers than they expected.

"Well, every time I go off exploring Bags End, I get different answers that make no sense. I went toward the top & I found people who knew me & people who didn't. Down below I found a utopian community which had destroyed itself, & only a few survivors who were going to try again. None of it makes sense. Oz had borders but there are places not discovered in it. I don't even know if Bags End has a top or bottom!"

"So are you going to try & find the top or bottom, or are you going to find Bags End?"

"I don't know really. The only thing I know is that I want to know about Bags End. The only way I will find things out will be to explore it."

"Are you gonna take your BunnyCycle?"

"No, not this time. Ramie borrowed a car from his friend. It's a 1978 Emperor. An appropriate name for a car I will be using. I rode it in Dreamland, too. Ramie has strange friends with strange cars."

"Who is going with you?"

"Well, I can only get so many people in the car so I could only choose a few. I will be taking Miss Chris, Princess Crissy, Boop, Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow, Alexander Puppy, Allie Leopard, Ramie to drive, & Jill Boot. O yah, & Algernon to take notes."

I was really happy to be going along. I went to Imagianna to tell Crissy & Boop but it turned out that they already knew. They were excited as me.

When the day came to leave, Sheila told all the people going along which door in Bags End to go to. There were a lot of guys there waiting to say goodbye. There was a road, & there was the Emperor.

All the travelers were dressed real nicely. Sheila had on her purple sunglasses & her fedora hat. My brother Alexander, who is sort of a tall yellow puppy, had on new overalls & there was a button on them that said "BUMP!" Allie told me later that meant "Bump language should be taught in Bags End!" Silly brother. Sargent Lisa, who is this strange little red-haired baby with bright blue eyes, was wearing her new army uniform. On the back

of her jacket there were words that Sheila told me said "Support Bwags End Army--Or I Will Thwow You in the Bwig!" Silly sergent. Boop was wearing a Dallas Cowboys hat Ramie had given him. Miss Chris & Crissy had on blue jeans & jeans jackets & they looked a lot alike except Miss Chris's jacket said on the back "Chrisakah Fan Club" & Princess Crissy's jacket said "Miss Chris Fan Club." Jill Boot had on nice new shoelaces which is like new clothes for her. Ramie was wearing a t-shirt that showed what sort of looked like a Lazybug convention. Ramie, Lisa, Sheila, & some other guys were sitting in circle, all sound asleep. Allie had on a jacket which he told me had a story on the back. He said each word was in a different language & the story was about the Tower of Babel in the Bible. Your old buddy Algernon had a new notebook to write stuff down in.

We said goodbye to everyone & Ramie started driving. On both sides of the road was nothing but flat grey land. Up front with Ramie sat Sheila, Miss Chris, & Jill Boot. The rest of us guys in the back.

For awhile we sang songs. We sang "Can You Hear the Silence?" by Rich Americus & the Noisy Children, "Sacrificial Bonfire" by XTC, "Wasted on the Way" by Crosby, Stills, & Nash, & "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong.

Then stuff started happening. Ramie stopped the car & we got out. We saw the land we were on was divided into a lot of different colored squares like a checkerboard.

Suddenly a giant voice boomed out: "You have entered the domain of the Checker King! The only way you may pass through is to beat me in a checker contest. Let the contest begin now!"

Before we knew what had happened, there were giant red checkers all around us & in the distance we saw giant black checkers. We heard a small rumble as the first black checker was moved.

What the Checker King didn't know was that in our car we had Sheila Bunny, the Checkers Champ of the Universe. She had this strange little smile on her face as she told us what to do.

"OK, everyone but Ramie & Crissy pile out & stand in two groups round the middle checkers in the front row. I will tell you when & where to move the checkers."

We couldn't see the Checker King, but we could sure hear him. His booming voice said, "I think it's fair to tell you what will happen if you win or lose. If you win, I will allow you to pass through my domain. But if you lose, I will smite you! Now, move or forfeit your turn!"

"What does smite mean?" I asked.

"It means having your whole body-bone stomped on," Sheila said.

"Ow!" I yelled.

Everybody but Ramie, Crissy, & Sheila got out of the car. We all waited until Sheila told us which checker to move & where to move it. It was heavy but we managed.

The Checker King was very good cuz he kept capturing more & more checkers. Sheila played good too, but it wasn't hard to see she was losing.

"Bump-Bump Bump Bump!" said Alexander. Allie told us that meant he didn't want to get smited.

The car was nearby. Sheila was using it as a checker, & so she heard what he said.

"Nobody's gonna get smited! Everybody get in!" Then she drove the car closer to the last checker row on the Checker King's side.

"Get ready to king me!" she yelled.

But even as Sheila was happy over this, the Checker King was jumping over her only other checker.

Part II.

"YOUR MOVE!" boomed the Checker King with a car-shaking laugh.

"Bmp-Bump-Bump-Bump Bump?" asked Alexander.

"He says we should tell the Checker King that we are pacifists & don't believe in violence," said Allie.

"That won't work, I am afraid. I do have a better idea," said Sheila. She whispered a question to Princess Crissy, who said, "Sure, I can do that." I wondered what they were whispering about.

Sheila told Ramie where to drive the car next. The Checker King took his turn & then Sheila moved again. Ramie held her out the window & she yelled, "King me!"

The Checker King put a checker on top of the car. Before he could move again, Sheila yelled, "I challenge you to a game of Flying Kings!"

"Good!" said the Checker King. His voice sounded like a cannon blast. "Your defeat will come all the sooner!" He made his move & I looked out the window to see how many pieces he had left. He had 4 kings already & he had 3 more pieces on the board.

But having 4 regular checker kings on your side is nothing compared to having the King of Bags End. In a few turns Sheila captured 2 of the regular pieces & 1 of his kings. Crissy had made it so the car could fly. If I wasn't scared of losing, I would have had a great time flying through the air.

Even with a Flying King on our side, tho, it wasn't long before the Checker King had us cornered. Now all 4 of his pieces were kings & any way we moved, he would jump us & win.

"MOVE NOW!" the Checker King yelled. He was shaking like an earthquake with excitement cuz he thought he was he was about to win. I was shaking like a beagle who was about to get his whole body-bone stomped!

Then I heard Sheila whisper to Crissy & Ramie. "OK, when I count 3, carry out our plan. 1 . . . 2 . . . 3!"

The car went up in the air like we were gonna jump a checker, but instead it kept going higher. We sailed through the air & we were nearing the other side of the Checker King's domain when suddenly the Checker King yelled & the air was filled with checker-bombs. They weren't hitting the car tho. They were piling on the roof to try to force it down. It was working too when Sheila yelled, "Crissy, make the car flip!"

The car spun in the air, & all the checkers fell off. But Ramie lost control of the steering wheel. We had made it past the Checker King but we were gonna crash!

There was a flutter of wings in the front seat, & this white bird flew out the window. We watched it as it flew straight toward the ground ahead of us. At the last moment, it turned into a huge mattress!

We hit the mattress a moment later. We survived the crash! Crissy was back in the front seat, smiling a big smile, before we knew it.

Sheila told me later that sometime she was gonna go back & give that Checker King the sound thrashing in checkers he deserved. She said she had been distracted into almost losing by all us guys being around. Hmmm.

I have been to a lot of crazy places in mah life, but the next place we drove to takes the cake. O! Cake! Yuk!

There was nothing but grass & some trees on either side of the road for the longest time. Then all of a sudden there was a rumble like that silly fella Godd was playing marbles again. A second later, the sky was filled with rain. And snow. And lightning bolts. And some fog. The funny thing was that it was sunny. It didn't feel warm tho. A stranger thing tho was that most of the rain & snow & stuff was falling very slowly. The strangest thing of all was that there were some snowflakes & raindrops & lightning bolts that weren't falling at all. They just hung there in the air.

"This must be a Lazybug Storm," Sheila muttered. She told Ramie to slow the car & we watched the storm for awhile. Pretty soon the car stopped completely & I guessed Ramie was asleep at the wheel. Sheila told me he's a suggestive guy, whatever that means. Probably that he likes to sleep a lot.

The air was getting pretty filled with snow & lightning & rain & stuff when a loud LOUD grumpy voice from everywhere said, "The weather is getting lazier & lazier. Air, clear NOW!"

There was this loud sound as the rain fell, the lightning hit the ground, the snow fell, the fog cleared, & the sun made the air warm again.

"Good work, Godd!" Sheila yelled out the window. She told Ramie to drive on.

Part III.

Ramie drove the Emperor through a lot of nighttime. A lot of us guys fell asleep. I woke up just as the sun was waking up. We weren't driving on a road no more. We were driving on a beach. The ocean was washing softly onto it. Sheila told Ramie to stop so we could get out & look around.

Everyone ran down to the water. I didn't go too close cuz beagles sink. That silly Alexander kept bumping the waves. Sargent Lisa wanted to organize a hike but Sheila told her to be at ease. Allie, Miss Chris, Crissy, & Boop were splashing in the water. Jill got mad at the water & was kicking it. Ramie was asleep in the car. Sheila had disappeared for a few minutes, probably to explore.

Sheila came back & she wasn't alone. She was walking with a man who looked a little older than Ramie looks.

"Everyone, this is Charlie Shaman. He writes fantasy stories."

Charlie smiled. "Sheila was telling me about Bags End. It sounds wonderful."

"Except for too much bumping," I said.

"Except for the dwaft-dwodging swoldiers," said Lisa.

"Bump Bump, Bump-Bump!" said Alexander.

"Alex said except for the lack of Bump language class in school," said Allie.

Charlie was laughing. "You guys are funny. I bet a lot of good stories happen in Bags End."

"Well, the beagle here does write a newspaper every week," said Sheila.

I showed Charlie some copies of Bags End News I had in the car. He liked it a lot. I asked Charlie if he had any of his stories he could show us.

He frowned. "To be honest, I haven't written any yet. That's why I came here to the Immortal Sea."

"Where?" I asked.

"This is the Immortal Sea. William Wordsworth mentioned it in a poem. He wrote:

Hence in a season of calm weather,
tho inland far we be,
our eyes have sight of that Immortal Sea,
which brought us hither,
can in a moment travel thither,
& see the Children sport upon the shore,
& the mighty waters rolling ever more.

You're the first bunch of children I have seen."

"Where did you come from?" I asked.

"I come from the year 2091. Sheila told me that all of you are from 1988."

"Aren't there any children left in 2091?" asked Miss Chris.

The man smiled sadly. "Oh, to be sure there are. It's just that so few of them play."

"But who are you gonna write stories about?" asked Princess Crissy.

The man looked confused. "I just wanted to find children to tell my stories to & maybe they could give me ideas. I don't live in a fantasyland, y'know."

"Neither do me & Ramie," said Miss Chris. "We live in Connecticut."

At this point, Sheila decided to explain to Charlie. "Most people think that there are true, real things & things that people make up are not true. Some people even think that imaginary things can exist in the real world. The truth is that both are real, but they are separate. Bags End is 1 of the few places where both real & imaginary people & places exist all together. It's not usually like that."

"Does that mean if I make up stories, they become real?" asked Charlie.

"When you create a person or a place, you have created a new world. It's a world you can travel to in your imagination. You have created something new, something which did not exist until you made it up. When Baum made up Oz, when Milne made up the Hundred Acre Wood, when Grahame made up the River, they brought something brand new into being. But they had something you don't have. They used the imaginations of children they knew to help create their new place. Baum had his sons, Milne his son, Grahame his son. Instead of wandering around here, you should be back home, finding the children who still play & making up your stories with their help."

Charlie smiled. "You guys are right. I am glad I met you! Thanks a lot! See you sometime, I hope!" And all of a sudden he disappeared!

"Sheila, where did he go?" I asked.

Sheila grunted. "Only his mind was here, Algernon. When he decided to go home, it only took a second. Minds travel a lot faster than bodies, y'know."

Sheila said we should get going, so we all piled into the Emperor. Miss Chris woked up Ramie, and we drove on.

Part 4.

After we left the Immortal Beach, we drove for a long time. It was dark again, & a lot of us guys were falling asleep. This included Ramie, who was supposed to be driving. Sheila told him to pull to the side of the road so we could sleep safely.

I was sleepy, but not asleep, so I asked Sheila if we had found Bags End yet like Kerouac & his pals finding America.

Sheila didn't answer me right away so I thought she had gone to sleep. Then she said, "I was hoping that in looking for Bags End we might find out who made it & why. What I am beginning to suspect is that somehow Bags End is an extension of our personalities. It's as though Bags End was made with us guys in mind."

"Does that mean we're gonna find Tuna Fish Mountain soon?" asked Miss Chris in a tricky voice. She's a fool for those sandwiches.

But: "O! Yuk!" I yelled.

The next morning we waked & started driving again. There was not too much to see for a long time, that's happened a lot, until we saw in the distance a big group of trees. We drove right up close to them but they were too bunched up to allow us to drive between them.

And all of a sudden, the trees began to shake in kind of a scary way.

"What should we do, Sheila?" asked Miss Chris.

Sheila looked up at the roof of the car with 1 of her purple eyes closed, like she always does when she's thinking.

"Ramie, I want you to start driving alongside them until we find a space big enough to drive through," she said.

Ramie was gonna start driving when I yelled: "Stop!"

Sheila looked back at me. "What's wrong?"

"Those trees are really weeds!" I said excitedly.

"What do you mean, Algernon?" asked Princess Crissy. She likes weeds almost as much as I do.

"I have this book about weeds that has pictures of them. Those really big trees are wild black cherry, the skinny ones are black locusts, & the ones with the tiny leaves are called weed trees."

"Algernon, it's nice that you got to see weeds that you've only seen in pictures of, but they're in our way," said Sheila in a nice voice for her.

"Listen, Sheila, mah friends the weeds in Miss Chris's front yard told me about a place where lots of different weeds live without noone bothering them. They call it The Weed Patch. I think those trees are guarding it, & if we walk through them, we will find the Weed Patch!"

Well, I was so excited that Sheila couldn't say no. She told me to get off her & stop begging with sad beagle eyes (number 6). Then she told Crissy the same thing. Crissy does a great sad beagle eyes imitation.

So everyone got out of the car & we walked toward the guard weeds. I went a little ahead of everyone else & said, "Hello, all you weed guys. Your King, Algernon the First, da-da d da-da da-da!! has come for a visit. And I brought some pretty important fellas too. This is Sheila, King & Emperor of Bags End. And this is Princess Crisakah of Imagianna. These other guys are Miss Chris, Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, Boop who is not a turtle, Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow of the Bags End Army, mah silly bumping brother Alexander Puppy, & Jill Boot. Treat them good just like me."

The branches of 2 of the guard weeds separated & we went through. There I saw 1 of the best things I have seen. There was this huge field of weeds of every kind I have ever seen.

"What this pwace needs is a lawnmower," muttered Sargent Lisa.

The weeds heard this, & didn't like it, cuz all of a sudden Sargent Lisa fell down & was rolling down a hill that hadn't been there before.

"Hwelp! Hwelp! Stwupid weeds! I will have you thwown in the bwig! I will have you removed by chwemicals!" Lisa yelled as she rolled.

She finally stopped & slowly crawled back up the hill. Miss Chris

brought her to the car so she wouldn't get in any more trouble.

I said hi to all mah pals the weeds. I even introduced some of the weeds to Sheila and the others.

"This is moth mullein which is less famous then the great mullein, its cousin. And this is Japanese honeysuckle, which has nectar some people like. O! Yuk! And this is goose grass which some people think is crabgrass but it's not."

"Hey, that's Queen Ann's Lace! I remember it from summer camp!" said Ramie.

I think Sheila was getting bored, so I showed her a weed I knew she would like.

"This is called jazz trumpet cuz if you pick off its flowers, you can blow it like a trumpet. Try it, Sheila."

So she did. Sheila played a little tune by Miles Davis called "Tutu." It was good.

Then I told the guys I would show them a magic trick. Crissy lended me a hankercheek & I put it over a small weed which had a flower that almost looked like a face.

"Hocus-pocus!" I yelled & when I pulled away the hankercheek, the weed was gone!

"How did you do that?" asked Allie.

"It's real easy. Watch!" I put the hankercheek over the empty space & said "Abracadabra!" & when I pulled the hankercheek away, there was the weed! Then I told them it was a Jack-in-the-Box weed & everyone watched while it popped out of the ground & back into it.

I had a lot of fun visiting mah pals the weeds. Allie Leopard learned a little of their language. He said it wasn't too hard.

Just before we left, the dandylions shot some of their seeds high into the air. They came down with little notes attached to them. Sheila told me they said:

"Weeds have always been condemned without a fair trial."--F.C. King.

"This thing of considering all weeds as bad is nonsensical!"

--Joseph Cocannouer.

Mah feelings exactly!

Part 5.

After we left my pals the weeds, we drove for a real long time. It seems like a lot of this trip was driving. Sheila said that even in a fantasyland good adventures & interesting fellas to meet are few & far between.

We had been driving through this forest for a long time when we came up to these two people. They looked nice enough. One was this guy with long hippie hair & raggedy clothes. He had a beard & he carried a book Allie told me was called Handbook for Fantasyland Revolution. The other person was a girl in a fancy dress with a neat haircut. She had a book too that was called Free Market Policies in Imaginary Lands, Allie said.

The hippie guy & the girl were talking a lot & laughing a lot but Allie told Sheila they were talking two different languages. Sheila told us all to wait, & just she & Allie got out. We heard her talking to Allie.

"I think these two people like each other a lot because they don't understand each other. Tell them who I am & ask them if they want you to tell them what they're saying."



Allie told me later that he introduced Sheila as Emperor & King of Bags End, & her faithful followers on a journey to find Bags End. Then he asked them if they wanted him to translate between them. He told me later what they said.

"No, man, like we're happy as we are. We can say enough by pointing & smiling & frowning," said the hippie guy.

"I gave him a ride. That's how we met. He was hitchhiking & I picked him up. We got into an accident & my car was wrecked. We didn't even know where we were till you told us," said the girl.

Sheila told Allie to offer them a ride. They said sure & got into the back. They were real friendly even to mah brother Alex, who bumped them to say hi.

Both these fellas seemed real interested in Bags End. With Allie's help, I asked them where they got their books. They told me there's this library for visitors to fantasylands. Sheila was interested in that but the guy & girl didn't know how to get to it.

We came to a fork in the road & the guy & girl asked us to let them off there. I hated to see them go cuz they were so friendly. The hippie told us to go in peace with all life forms, real & imaginary. The girl gave us advice about long-term investment in fantasyland stocks & bonds, whatever those are. The last we saw of them, they were walking down the road, arm in arm, laughing, each not understanding a word the other said.

So we drove on. As we drove, Miss Chris taught a song she had just made up. We sang it again & again:

We'll keep looking for Bags End,
keep looking for Bags End,
till we reach the end,
the end of the road, my friend

We aren't looking for
a pole or a fountain,
or the top of some
big mountain

The place we long to see,
is a place that may not be
A place that may just be
inside you & me

But it's fun to have a look,
a journey like a storybook
Such things are always worth
the time they took

After awhile, the road went from being smooth like a highway to being a dirt road. We started coming up to all these people. Some were dressed real nice, some were like the hippie we saw before. Some people were dressed in old-fashioned costumes, & Allie told us a lot of different languages were being spoken.

"And the funny thing is that some of the languages are being spoken like they were hundreds of years ago!" he said.

After awhile, the road got so crowded that Sheila said we should get out & walk. I could tell she was real curious about where everyone was going.

So we all got out & walked, or hopped, or whatever. Sheila told us we gotta have partners to make sure nobody got lost. Miss Chris took Sargent Lisa, Princes Crissy took Boop, Ramie took Jill Boot, I took mah silly bumping brother Alexander, & Sheila led the way with Allie.

Finally, Sheila couldn't wait to find out what was going on. She tapped this guy on the knee & said, "Where's the show, Joe?"

The guy had on dark sunglasses & was dressed all in black.

"It's the Festival, man. Dig, everyone is gonna show. I heard my man Miles & the Duke were gonna blow, so I checked my connection. I said, 'you gotta get me a ticket.' He said, 'You don't need a ticket. It's free & nobody's raising money for nothing.' Dig, man?"

"What did he say, Allie?" I asked.

"That's jazz talk, beagle," said Sheila. "He said there's some kind of music festival going on. I didn't know about it but if Miles Davis & Duke Ellington are going, so are we." That said, she started hopping real fast.

We came up to this big sign at the side of the road. Sheila read it to us.

THE MUSIC FESTIVAL including:

Duke Ellington	John Cougar	Men at Work	Stevie Wonder
B.B. King	George Gershwin	David Bowie	Elvis Presley
Miles Davis	The Monkees	Mozart	Johnny Cash
Jimi Hendrix	Sgt. Pepper Band	Shostakovich	Simon & Garfunkel
Harry Chapin	XTC	John Philip Sousa	Bob Dylan

& many more!

FREE! Put on to benefit noone
but for everyone's enjoyment!

When us guys heard who was gonna be at the Festival, we all started running real fast, as fast as our paws, feet, & heels could carry us!

Part 6.

When we got to the big Music Festival, Sheila told us that Don McLean was singing "American Pie" with Buddy Holly. O! Pie! Yuk!

There were all sorts of people at the Festival. Sheila warned us to stay close together. Then she told about all the different groups I didn't know about who took turns playing on the big stage at the front of the crowds.

"That's Mozart playing a 2-piano song with Billy Joel. And that's Elvis Presley singing with Elvis Costello on guitar. And there's Simon & Garfunkel singing with Bob Dylan."

When David Bowie came on the stage, I told Crissy I wished the Blondys were here. They are blonde like him & so big fans. Crissy smiled a tricky smile & I heard behind me a baby Blondy voice yell, "Yeah, Bowie!" And there were the Blondys!

Then John Cougar was singing with Bruce Springsteen & I wished Betsy Bunny Pillow was here. Crissy did her tricky smile magic again, I guess,

because I could hear a familiar whispery voice yell, "Cougar!"

Later, Elizabeth, who is Sargent Lisa's older sister, showed up when Stevie Wonder was playing a song.

Sheila got to play a song with Miles Davis & your old buddy Algernon got to sing with his buddies Men at Work. We sang "It's a Mistake." Great song, I say.

The Sgt. Pepper Band played with XTC & my friend Lucy Lamb showed up. She & Ramie got to go on stage to sing "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds."

Miss Chris was happy when the Monkees sang some songs, & Lisa & Alex were both excited when John Philip Sousa did a Bump Marching Song.

We stayed for a long time at the Music Festival. Finally, when everyone had seen someone he liked, Sheila said we had to go. I guess Crissy sent back the Bags End friends that she had brought cuz Betsy & Elizabeth & Lucy & the Blondys were gone when we got back to the car.

Everyone was pretty tired & the road was still crowded with people so Sheila said we would stay where we were for the night.

When we woke the next morning, the sun was just coming up & the road was empty. All that was left of the Music Festival was a small sign that Sheila told me said THANKS FOR COMING!

Ramie was still asleep & Sheila decided he could sleep a little longer.

"Sheila, have we found Bags End yet?" I asked sleepily.

Sheila was quiet for so long that I thought she wasn't going to say anything.

"Every time we go on 1 of these trips, we learn a little more. I guess I would like the whole thing summed up in a sentence.

"But it doesn't work like that, does it? I have a feeling we will be on the way home soon."

Ramie woke up in a few minutes, & we started off.

The place we went to next was a sunny, hilly place. The road went up & up into the hills.

The farther we went into the hills, the less trees there were. There was a cave at the end of the road. This interested Sheila cuz when Ramie asked her if she wanted to turn around, she said, "No, stop the car here."

We got out & Sheila led the way toward the cave. She looked inside & then went to Crissy & said, "Crissy, the cave's too dark to explore. Do you have any ideas on how to get a light?"

Crissy smiled & looked around for a minute. Then she picked up a big rock & handed it to Ramie.

"Let's go," she said.

I guess Ramie figured what I figured, that Crissy did some magic to the rock, cuz he walked right into the cave. The rest of us followed. Sure enough, the rock in Ramie's hand glowed just like a flashlight.

"You're lucky to be able to do magic like that, Crissy," I said.

"I would rather be a beagle," she said with another smile.

Sheila & Ramie led the way down the cave's tunnel. We walked & walked for a long time. At first the tunnel seemed to go up but then it started to go down & down. Everyone was real quiet cuz noone knew what was gonna happen.

"This kind of reminds me of Fraggle Rock," I whispered to Miss Chris. She smiled & nodded.

Finally, we came to this big open place. It was dark but Crissy's rock glowed stronger & stronger to light it all up.

The place was covered with grafitti. It was strange cuz the pictures were of Bags End friends!

The story those pictures told were what Sheila had been looking for, I think. It was all very surprising too!

The Grand Finally.

When all us Bags End guys began our trip on the road with Sheila, most of us didn't really know what Sheila meant when she said we were gonna look for Bags End. How can you look for some place you live in? Sheila didn't agree. That's why she has gone exploring other parts of Bags End so many times.

Now we were standing in a cave that looked like it might give her a lot of answers.

Sheila told me that what we were in was called a cavern, which is a big open place between tunnels. This cavern was covered in graffiti. It seemed to tell some sort of story tho. I walked over to where Sheila & Allie were standing. They were talking real softly.

"I think there are answers here, Allie. But the ways the symbols & pictures are arranged can tell lots of different stories. I think the real story must be discovered the way a puzzle is solved, by putting the pieces together right."

Allie nodded but didn't say anything. He had that look he gets when he's trying to figure out a new language.

I looked closely at what Allie was studying. It was a picture of a room. There was a fireplace & some chairs, but what was really interesting was the big cupboard in the corner.

"Hey, Allie, that looks like that picture in that book you found that time you & I went exploring Bags End ourselves! You said it was kind of like a Bags End from a long time ago-ago-ago-ago!" I yelled. My words echoed around the cavern & 1 of them bounced off Sargent Lisa-Marie who was asleep against the wall. She woke up & muttered something about rude echoes.

Allie just nodded.

Then Sheila let out a yell. "Those are my Daydream friends! What are they doing outside of my head here?"

Me & Allie looked closely at what Sheila was pointing at. There were pictures of a tall guy, a smaller guy wearing a baseball uniform, an old lady with big glasses, a creature that looked sort of like a tree & a cat at the same time, & a soap bubble that was shaped like a little bird.

Sheila could only stare for a minute. "These are friends from my dreams," she said slowly. "But I never saw them in Bags End & I never told anyone about them. The tall guy is Presto. He taught me all about jazz & even how to play jazz trumpet. The guy in the baseball uniform is named Froy. In the baseball league of my dreams, he is the best player. The lady I call Granny cuz she reminds me of Miss Chris's granny. I like her but she's a little crazy. She always says that she is dreaming & the rest of us are in her dream."

There were a lot of strange & wonderful things to see. Ramie got excited cuz he saw a picture of Miss Chris & Sheila buying him at the Toy Tall Boy Store.

"Hey! There's a music store next to my toy store," he said.

"I remember they were playing Gershwin the day we came," said Sheila.

"They were always playing someone like Gershwin or Mozart or Vivaldi," said Ramie. "1 day the owner came in & Fred the toy shop guy made a joke about

the music shop guy falling asleep cuz of the music he plays. He called him a lazybugger." Ramie smiled. "He was British, of course. The American way of saying that is Lazybug."

Then I heard Boop call anxiously for Princess Crissy, his dear friend. "Princess, look here, at this picture! What could it mean?"

I stood with Crissy as she studied the picture. It was of an old lady & an old guy who looked like a turtle. I couldn't be sure who the lady was until I looked closer at her face which had a tricky smile & tricky eyes. She sort of looked like Crissy had when me, her, & Sheila had gone to the city to find Emmi.

The turtle-like guy looked nicely at the old Crissy just like the real Boop looks at the real Crissy. The old Crissy even had on a t-shirt which Crissy told me said "Honorary Member of the Retired Beagles' Society."

"I think it means that you & Boop will always be friends, & Crissy will be just as tricky when she's an old guy," I said. Crissy smiled a tricky smile.

I remembered I hadn't seen mah person mommy Miss Chris in awhile so I looked around for her. I found her in a corner by herself. She was looking at some grafitti that kept changing! I was quiet & watched with her.

All the pictures had a big person & a little guy, & the little guy was usually holding a friend. The big guy, a mommy or a daddy or a big brother or sister, was telling the little guy or girl a story. Sometimes the story was told from a book, sometimes not. The little boy or girl sucked his or her thumb or held close the friend. Sometimes they sat in a rich people's house, sometimes in a poor one, sometimes under the stars.

"Universal image of generational myth transference," muttered Sheila as she hopped away.

"What did she say?" I asked.

Miss Chris smiled. "Children have always gotten big guys to tell them stories.

O.

I heard Lisa laughing a lot & when I asked her why she pointed to a picture. There was the Army of Oz with all of its officers & its 1 soldier. The soldier in the picture was Hawkeye from M*A*S*H.

"That's pwetty fwunny," said Lisa.

I asked Allie what he thought of all these pictures.

"Well, I don't really know. Some of them disappear & some of them don't. Obviously we like the 1s we're in. I think this cavern knew we were coming somehow. I keep thinking there's more to it."

"You're right, Allie," said Sheila. She had just hopped right up to us. "Come on, everyone, it's time to move on. Jill, stop kicking that picture of the shoe store! Alexander, stop bumping the wall!"

Allie pointed to a small tunnel in a dark corner of the cavern. Sheila led the way.

We entered a much smaller, darker cavern. It wasn't totally dark, cuz we could see shadows on the wall. What was strange was that we were making them!

The shadows were sort of like people & other creatures. They were walking, dancing, even flying on the wall. I was real surprised when some of them leaped off the wall & started dancing around us! I even jumped on my back like I was a horsey!

"Beagles don't carry passengers, fella," I muttered grumpily. The shadow got off me.

Sheila got mad, yelled about Plato's myth of the cave making lousy participatory drama, & hopped on. Everyone followed.

What happened next was really weird. The next place we went to was misty but not wet or nothing. I almost felt I left mah body cuz it felt like I was floating, & it's a well-known fact that beagles sink. I knew everyone else was there even tho I didn't actually see any of them.

Then I thought I heard Sheila say, "I don't want to play checkers. I should have figured you were behind that Plato myth gag. And the wall of grafiti. If you were gonna play a joke on me, use some imagination, like you did when you invented watermelon. What a tricky invention a watermelon is! Sweet but full of seeds you gotta spit. Like a field full of flowers filled with sharp rocks."

Then I heard another voice, in my head sorta, if I had a head, that said, "No tricks, Sheila. You know that there are many ways to get to Heaven. You stumbled into 1."

"Have a halo & some wings?" offered another voice, a tricky 1.

"Listen, Clemens, you have used that joke too many times. Besides, I have seen how winged angel daredevils are getting quite popular," Sheila said.

"Passing fad," muttered the tricky voice.

"Sheila, is this really Heaven?" asked a Miss Chris voice.

"Yes, welcome to Heaven everyone. This is Godd & this is 1 of his best pals, Sam Clemens. Sam gives Godd some of his best ideas, tho usually someone on Earth doesn't like them. We have to move on, Godd. Can you show the way out?"

I felt mahself moved along, sort of. Then I felt mah body again, like putting clothes back on. Then we were standing near the Emperor.

"Pile in, everyone!" said Sheila. So we did. Ramie drove us back down the hill. Everyone was kinda quiet for awhile.

Finally I said something. "Sheila, did we find Bags End?"

"I don't know," Sheila said. "I think I just found more material for superficial philosophy about how we are Bags End & there are many answers & all that.

"Well, I know there's more. I got offered some pieces of the puzzle, others are held back, hidden. There's more to it all, I know that. I will find it all someday."

Another epic trip down the drain. I wasn't very happy cuz Sheila broods over this kind of stuff for a long time. She never gives up.

The trip was made jolly again by a nice surprise. As we were on the familiar road back, almost home, we stopped to watch this puppet show going on at the side of the road.

And, O! mah ego! It was about us Bags End guys! There was a Sheila puppet who liked jazz, & a Alexander puppet who bumped, & a Lazybug Ramie puppet, & even an old buddy Algernon puppet who writes a newspaper. There was a Betsy Bunny Pillow puppet who tried to free the Bunny Pillow puppets. There was a tricky Leo the Dark Man puppet who liked comic books, especially 1 about the Bags End puppets watching a show about them put on by regular Bags End guys. It was a real good show. We clapped & cheered.

I think Crissy must have done some magic cuz we were in Bags End in a real short time. She just smiled her tricky smile, tho, when I asked her.

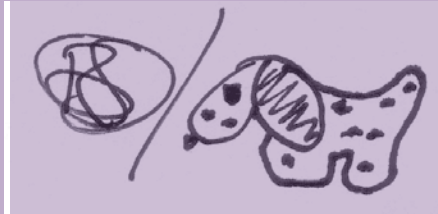
We got a big welcome back from the Bags End fellas who stayed behind.

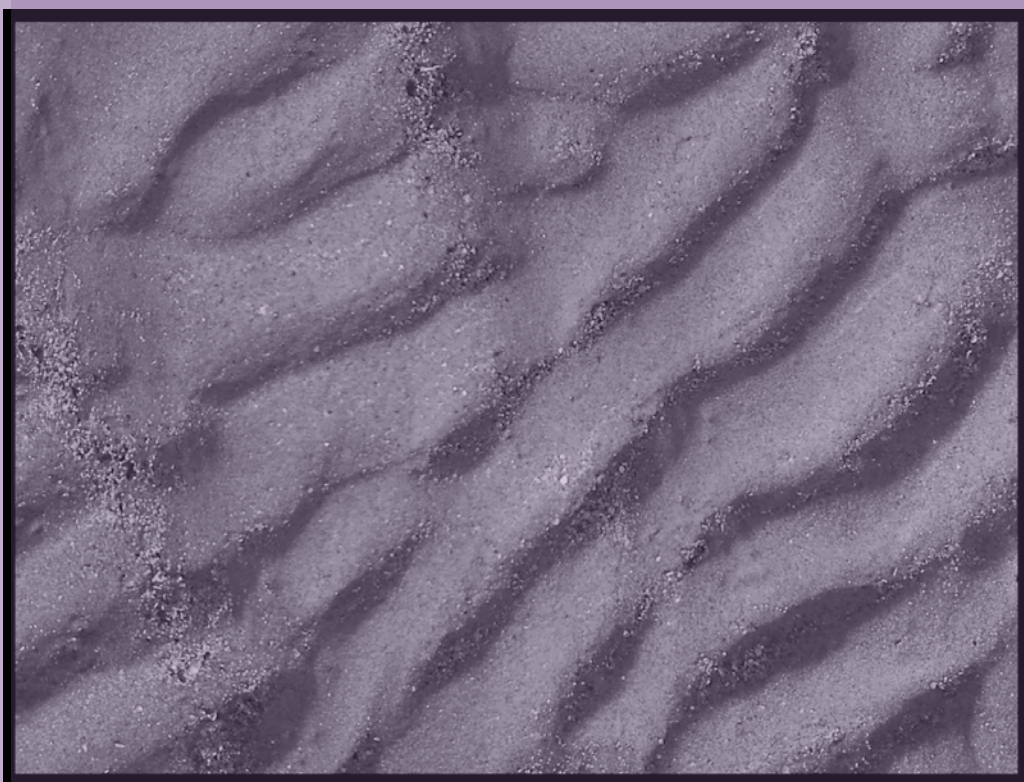
It was a strange trip we went on. I know Sheila will go on looking for whatever she is looking for. She's curiouser than any cat I ever met, even tho she is a bunny.

Princess Crissy & Boop went back to Imagianna in a day or 2. I even went with them cuz our teacher Mister Owl said there weren't no school so we

could rest from our trip.

I thought about the trip a lot & I found out something about mahself. I don't really care if I know the answer. Sheila wants to know it all. Sometimes I want to too. But not always. As long as Bags End stays like it is, I don't really care if I know how it got to be this way. Sheila cares though. Good for her.







Judih Haggai

here i am
even at four am
mind jumps

* * *

secret hour
no one but me
out in the open

* * *

awake! awake!
let's get a head start
this old body

* * *

again before birds
i venture into morning
one lone scout

* * *

birds are back
yes, morning, again
till now, secret hours

* * *

silence breaks
birds and toilet flushes
neighborhood greetings

* * *

dusky blue
melody of morning bird
before duets

* * *

underground
trees whisper to trees
fungi messengers

* * *

face to the wind
the beat of clouds dancing
morning bike ride

* * *

alone
on the wrong side of the street
i watch my bus pass

* * *

they say “breathe”
who does what they’re told?
death by stubbornness

* * *

blurred lines
where i start and where i stop
still, i say “i”

* * * * *



The Fate of All Norns

As he rose up out of the ashes of his own . . . *fuck, what do you even call it?* Visionary incineration and re-ignition of ash is what he thinks he saw. Purification and putrefaction are imperfect words but contained the most clean way to conceive of it. The shapes that occupied their roles were undeniable. *Fuck* . . . the Gravity Well . . . the manifested shapes and their destiny. The role of the shapes was witnessed. Colors from space that no eye had seen and the faint chords of Erich Zann's song completed the complexity of that weird dichotomy of kept and keeper and keeper needing kept.

Something was shifting. *Is it real? What does it mean? If it is real, will it manifest in the Traveler's reality?*

He'd been traveling on a fairly regular basis for the last four years. It was wyrding work. The long march of chaos magick, and dangerous explorations into all places of "The Deep," left him calm in the way only known when one is doing the important work.

But a wider picture was only guessed at, and the fact of being a pawn he found frightening. *I have been brought to these many places to chart and experience, but never allowed to own, never allowed to know what or why the work.*

In the beginning, it started with visions of the "Little Doctors." Exam time. That stuff seems almost like kid stuff, looking back now, but initially it could be quite violating. Initially, he would either experience fantastic imagery or be downloaded, information processed, and then uploaded back into his being. After came the additional information based on his original information, and his progression.

He made his first leap in this arena. He started to question why it was that some exams were performed in a more thorough way than some others. *Did the Little Doctors have different agendas? Was there a hierarchy of angels? Who was, in fact, bringing who through?*

The desire to chart this world is undeniable. The things seen and experienced stops one on every occasion when trying to describe them. Faust's Mephistopheles stopped Faust cold when explaining to him about the language spoken beyond men, and how that language and its value was worth even more than all of man. To speak of a thing imperfectly, and without hope of understanding, is the desecration of a perfect thing. This is the burden of Adam's sons.

The Traveler must shoulder the burden of Adam humbly if there is any hope of finding the next level.



Victor Vanek

It was about two years in when he met the first credible member of the Guild. Procurement of the tools and strange components eventually led him to the sleepless disciples who talked of black spices and dangerous shortcuts. Would he be able to ever pierce the Wall of Sleep and pass through the garden Door of Dreams?

The last of his occult belongings were traded for a quantity of black spice and some torn pages of velum. Gotta' say . . . velum is never a good sign, and almost never comes from the usual suspects that occupy this part of the hidden world.

He and another occultist allied themselves and, with the help of the black spice, went once again to try to open the garden Door. Progress! This one had a wild talent and recklessness which ended with the accidental absorption of the talent's soul. The hungry passage was noticed by the Bardos in this level.

A chink in the armor was won.

The next mazes were more manageable to the Traveler. The forms started to resonate loudly, and seemed to be infrastructure of sort, with no Bardo challenging his travel. Unusual. Could this be the Gravity Well?

He pulled up and drew back into his first existence. "What a frail shell!" he thought. Still, the silver cord tied him here. His root was here. This was home. The flood of impulses and desire to hide this fragile body, to take comfort with his Mother was almost overwhelming.

Recitation of the first rule once again established order. "Do not speak imperfectly of the perfect. Silence and surrender is practicing perfection. Practice until perfection. In perfection there is practice."

It must be charted. *It is my place and I went unflinchingly into Void to play my part, whatever the fuck that was.*

The Traveler and his kind were the youngest of the explorers. That said, the first of his kind found her way here about 50,000 years ago, and worked more territory than many that came after. Belief hadn't set so strongly in the first wave, and that gave them a strength that stiffened the resolve of those still giddy with pride for taking language into the unknown, and investments of real power into fetishes. The first wave was a powerful time and the strength of that era fertilized the weed of intelligence.

Adam's sons will not go easy, but their fate was the fate of the widow and those born in winter.

The Fate of All Norns is the Song of Songs. Humankind's only gift is to sing of its mortality, and that is all.

* * *



Victor Vanek



Victor Vanek

If I Had a Cloak of Feathers

Ya'know, the world is full of goddamn shit poetry about birds.

It's easy to see how this has happened over the last 50,000 years or so, with all the "not bird" that the human body is. Those little fuckers with their weird ancient grace stun suckers like me every day. I'm a jaded middle-aged man, not easily impressed—but find myself standing by the windows at least an hour a day wondering about the conversations that occur between the blue scrub jays. I find myself rooting for the common sparrow and even became taken by the starlings that live in the old woodpecker hole.

The starlings. Starling are a rampant invasive species, and considered to be a nuisance bird to orchardists, and thief of cavity-nesting native birds. I at first sighed at the arrival of the starling couple. They claimed the flicker cavity the red-winged woodpeckers carved the year previous. One of the starlings that live in the two-year-old flicker hole has now impressed me so much with its songs that I now wonder why I ever bitched about it.

Starling are a mimic and regularly steal songs from other birds the way the faerie steal human babies. My starling neighbors' seeming favorite song is that of meadowlark, which happens to be number one on my Top 40 playlist of birdsong week after week. To my surprise, starling works up quail chuckle on a regular basis too. I never knew how impossibly happy a nest-stealing lot of Keystone Cops could make me.

Now I'm not Catholic—humanist actually—but St. Francis of the beasts has come into my mind again and again in this last year. The relationships I hold with those I love is mostly long distance. It's rare that I have a visitor, but I have had to salve and occupy my mind still, for want of human contact.

It's been an unintentional thing, my love for all the creatures that visit my recently bought house. I wait and watch. I throw down sunflower seed for the western squirrels, and wonder about their territorial struggles. My grand dame squirrel that sits on the fallen wooden fence is at least two or three now, and is obviously much more slow than she was last year. Her pups from this year now stand in the very same spot she has stood every single day for the two years I have been watching her tribe. Water is precious around here, the soil where I live sand, but I find myself watering not my walkway, but the hidden front bit of struggling grass where the burrows are. Terra cotta dishes are filled every day, with my plastic watering pot, in the two territories of my handsome and destructive neighbors. I'd pay fucking money.

When I come home from work: first I fill crows' bath and throw down a cup of whatever cat or dog kibble has been on sale the week before; then scatter sunflower seed and cracked corn for the baby sparrows and squirrels. I water whatever is left in my pots that hasn't been in a cage match with those little fuckers, and make mental note of the things they don't like—and daily swear to God I will never buy the kind of soil that I refilled my planter boxes with this year.

Crow and her last year's runt are my favorite company. I watch for them in a way that I have



never watched for a human friend.

Momma Crow I first became aware of last spring when I started finding weird shit in the bird-bath. Bones from somebody's picnic one time. One day I found three tiny corn tortillas afloat in it. I laughed out loud with that one. I started to watch.

She's a rather sizable thing. I want to call her a raven but am pretty sure she's just Crow. Up until last year she was always solitary. I know her uniquely because of a rather severe limp she has. I realized last summer that she was really casting around for seed and cracked corn and looking a bit overworked and desperate. That's when my ear picked up the cry of babies out in the back lot. I read a little and then started to leave out the dog kibble.

Her manner noticeably changed over the next few days and, in the following weeks, one at a time, the black birds fledged. One followed her, then two. Good and obviously strong birds kept her company for a short while, and then divorced themselves from her. A couple weeks after all that—came the runt. I remember being delighted with the arrival of this new bird. These birds are so intelligent, and aware to the watching eye, that it would be difficult to not have some degree of attachment for these sleek underdogs. The way they look at things is not like other birds that I've observed. Where the small birds seem to run on pure unquestioning instinct, Crow is watching and making judgments about what's going on in her immediate surroundings. One of the crow behaviors that I've been impressed with is their patience.

Crow's runt has continued to keep her company for what would be a whole calendar year now. Reading about it, I guess some will keep their parents company for up to five years, and live as long as twenty. I started calling the runt yearling "Bonehead" for some of his silly behaviors. I goddamn well love those moochers. Never in my life did I think my head would be filled with worry and concern for crows. They are my black beauties.

In the evening, as a testament to just how smart Bonehead is, I will watch him out in the shade of the dwarf crab-apple, wandering around and taking in his surroundings. I realized one day—he's bored! He will pick up sticks and tiny fallen crabs and float them in the bath. When I water in the yard by dragging my hundred feet of shit hose around—cursing kinks and asking God to please let my jostaberry live—,Bonehead will sometimes come close to me, wondering what in the world I'm doing. I'll water a certain spot in the yard, and sometimes he will perch in the mostly dead tree above my head, and start talking to me. When that happens, I gotta tell you—the loneliness that I often feel evaporates, and I feel I'm with my real kin.

One of the most beautiful things that I've observed of these two crows is that, on rare occasions, when the two are close to each other, Bonehead will bring food to his ma, drop it at her feet, and humbly ask to be fed. Sometimes Crow will do it. Sometimes she shines him on. The few times I've seen it, though, it fills me in a way that I haven't really known before, and I'm glad for it.

It's been so unexpected, all of it. The way my relationship with all the critters has climbed in an ever-peaking crescendo is an unexpected gift that I didn't even know existed two years ago

when I got my own house. I'm surprised, too, with the level of attachment that I feel, and the easy release that happens, when a beast is taken back to the source. I'm proud of myself for being able to let go of those fallen creatures, via respecting their complex relationships, short lives, and need to eat.

I've got a few feeders out under the apple trees, and ground feed the thirty or more western quail in the winter. In doing that, I attract the attention of some of the raptor birds. I've had a rather large red tail hawk hunt and kill other tweets on several occasions. I had a sharp-shinned hawk hide in the blue spruce daily this last winter and take gold finches and black caps that dared to feed. I flushed the black caps and finches out of the rose bramble, while they were feeding one day, and was front row to hawk taking a black cap almost right in front of my eyes. It was so elegant and fast that I came to respect the raptors that I used to curse regularly. Every creature eats.

These tiny beasts of air just do it for me. The little moochers soak up everything I leave out for them and never say: "Thanks, Victor!" They never hold still long enough for me to get a look that satisfies me, and they never let me any closer.

Crow, she is my siren. All black and dressed in feathers, she is my flapper girl. She does come close to me sometimes, but only when she wants. Her mind is as impossible to penetrate as any flesh-and-blood woman that I've ever known, and she's ten times more beautiful.

I just wish I had a cloak of feathers to woo her properly.

* * * * *



Victor Vanek

**The Idiot's Song**

They're not in my way. They let me be.
They say that nothing can happen to me.
How good.
Nothing can happen. All things flow
from the Holy Ghost, and they come and go
around that particular Ghost (you know)—,
how good.

No we really mustn't imagine there is
any danger in any of this.
Of course, there's blood.
Blood is the hardest. Hard as stone.
Sometimes I think that I can't go on—.
(How good.)

Oh look at that beautiful ball over there:
red and round as an Everywhere.
Good that you made it be.
If I call, will it come to me?

How very strange the world can appear,
blending and breaking, far and near:
friendly, a little bit unclear.
How good.

* * *



The Panther*In the Jardin des Plantes, Paris*

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
has grown so weary that it cannot hold
anything else. It seems to him there are
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides
is like a ritual dance around a center
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly—. An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone.

* * *

Going Blind

She sat just like the others at the table.
But on second glance, she seemed to hold her cup
a little differently as she picked it up.
She smiled once. It was almost painful.

And when they finished and it was time to stand
and slowly, as chance selected them, they left
and moved through many rooms (they talked and laughed),
I saw her. She was moving far behind

the others, absorbed, like someone who will soon
have to sing before a large assembly;
upon her eyes, which were radiant with joy,
light played as on the surface of a pool.

She followed slowly, taking a long time,
as though there were some obstacle in the way;
and yet: as though, once it was overcome,
she would be beyond all walking, and would fly.

* * *

Archaic Torso of Apollo

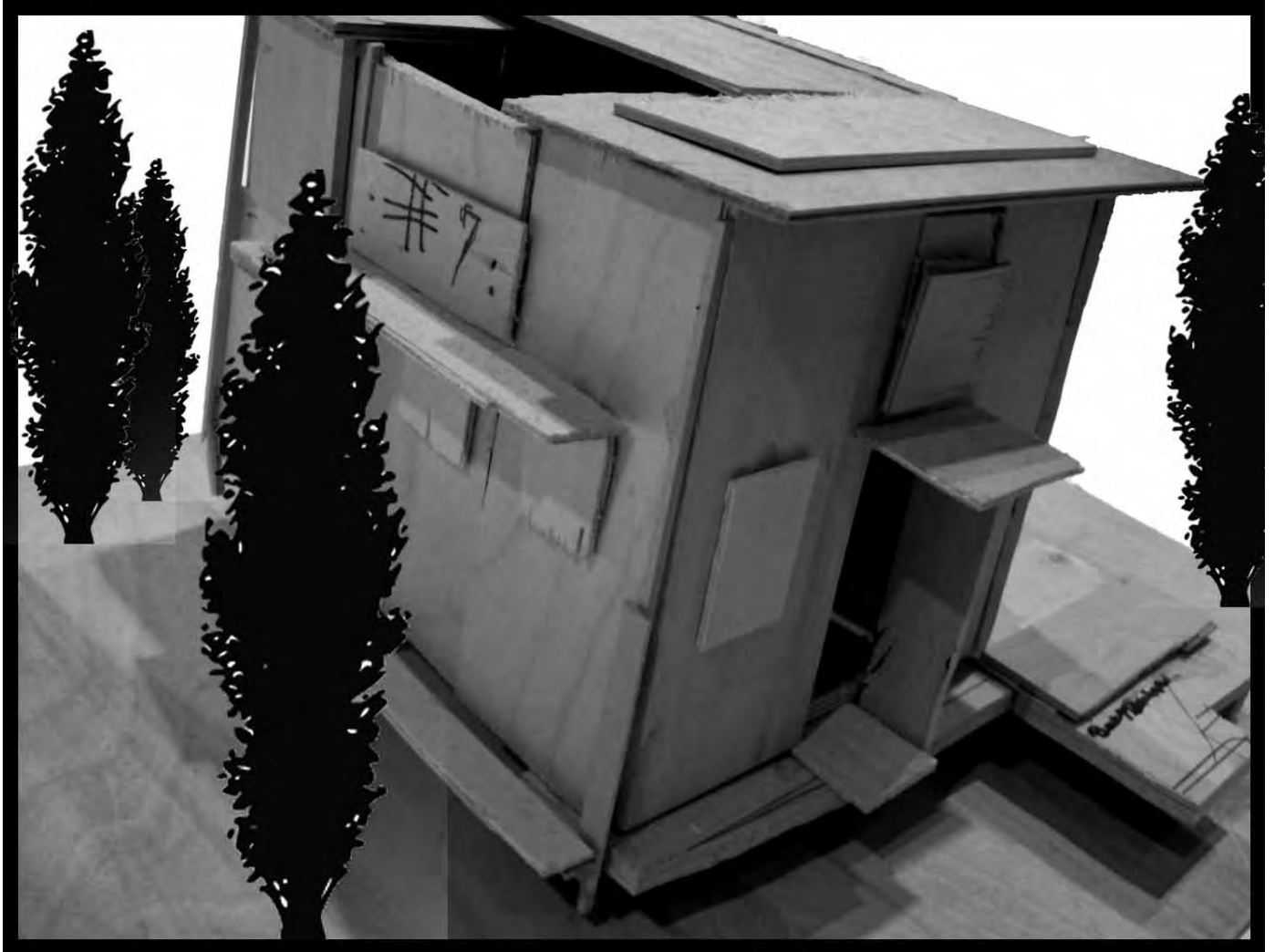
We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,

gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Tenth Series

*"But I'm tryin', Ringo.
I'm tryin' real hard to be the shepherd."
—Quentin Tarantino, Pulp Fiction, 1994.*

xxxvii. #1 House

*"In the call of the wind, in the ways of the sea,
you won't believe . . . what's out there . . .
tracing the great green pathways."*

—Great Lake Swimmers, "The Great Bear," 2015.

I didn't number them when I first
came here. Didn't understand each was
gift, & invitation to me. Mine to accept
each time, each day, each hour, nod
& accept. Learn how to return. Learn
how to say thank you with my beat & breath.

I'd left my old world as it was leaving
itself. I had no skills for this green
world, new to me. I didn't know it could
adapt, & re-adapt, & outlast men.
Books told me this had happened many
times. Books didn't tell me how it would
feel to *witness it*.

I wasn't what I became. Still a young man,
then, still jostling among ancient ideas &
the ones of my day, their shiny lures, their
pretensions. Science, when it didn't trick
mysteries to numbers. Mysticism, where it
acknowledged my dreams & cock & skin color
all in the mix, & the mix itself little divined.
How monkeys can build cities, burn them down,
half blame the stars in the sky for their
own violent souls, half try to knot up that
magic lasso to ride them like the engines of angels.

I didn't bring the right things to these
 White Woods, & too much. I was a city man,
 & had stayed till I could deny their
 collapse n'longer. I had to *believe* that
 nobody was coming to help, restore order,
something. I had a knapsack of books,
 clothes, a compass I'd gotten as a boy.
 My reclusive uncle. Its case's inscription:
 "Get out to the green more, Rod. *It's coming*."

I thought someone was living here. It wasn't
 abandoned, molded over, empty. Maybe
 they're still coming? I had no choice.
 Where I'd left was burning or dead.
 Where I'd left I couldn't return.
 I was tired. I hadn't slept in awhile.

It's one big room. The rain is harder.
 It's dark now. I learn how to make a fire.
 A box of wooden matches. Old newspapers.
 Open the flue, lets the smoke out. I'd watched
 my uncle do it. Seen it on TV.

I brought eggs. I have bacon. Some vegetables.
 Might not see the first two again awhile.
 So on my cold rainy first night in these beautiful
 White Woods, I raise myself up a good omelette.
 Still thinking the door will crash open, &
 a voice, maybe a gun. "Whose fire in my house?"

The table's where I get my mix together,
 found the pans. The fireplace where it
 bubbles & cooks. The old armchair where
 I eat, savoring every chew like I hadn't
 when the market was still a block away,
 open all night.

The bed where I crawl to when I've eaten,
 breathed, written most of these lines, &
 under the comforter, a weird kind of quilt,
 patches all shapes & colors. Chunks of fabric
 here & there, like a language in this, a story?
 song? Orange yarn, maple leaves,
 small pine cones, pages from old books soaked,
 & dried, & soaked again, till a pulp,
 a grain, fibers.

I slept that first night, supped, dry,
 safe feeling by no logic of the city or
 the life I'd known. And no promise
 I hadn't just gotten lucky once. I wasn't
 my uncle. I'd been *chased* out to the green.
 I wasn't happy. I missed the city, *its songs*,
its stories.

I missed my lost chance to become a man
 in the city, by its will, by its rites.
 The rain harder & this old shack held dry,
 yet swayed with all these Woods. *I was so lost.*

xxxviii. *Two Armchairs*

[*Their village gone, destroyed? A group of people
 travel together, embody their lost home:
 trinkets, memories, seeds. Travel a flat featureless
 landscape along a wide dirt road. Every fortnight
 or so, exhausted, more hungry over time,
 they boil water for a tea that allows them
 to cluster dream, & live anew in their lost home,
 touch & remember its many details.*]

Wha. What? I wake in this strange bed
 under its half-bestial quilt. That . . . *that*.
 Me & my ideas for film, plays, books.
 They just came to me. I'm riding a bus
 home, along a long avenue, slow, rush hour,
 sense of futility, hard to breathe.
 Then, something, & not so hard. An image.
 An old woman in a village, its center green,
 she shambles half-dead up to a microphone,
 click-clicks, noise-noises, *hmmmmmm*—

But here, now. I didn't know what I was
 then, & that's all over here. Irrelevant.
 I think. Is it? Or do I continue to look?



Conclude: eggs & bacon, vegetables. They won't last
 & I wouldn't know where to store them. So I cook
 away my easy former life. What I can keep
 has to be keepable here. This isn't much to go
 with, but not nothing. I'll bring what I can.

Here's one of the first that made people laugh.
 My brothers. I was the youngest. Too smart
 to be coddled. I made up for being younger by
 reading everything in sight, daring us to places
 in the city we oughtn't.

Anyway, we were caught. Mean-looking cop.
 Construction site. One sniff told me girls
 were in that shack. The cop's eyes were
 hazy like pills. My brothers were just scared.

"Daffy Duck & Bugs Bunny are in a picture frame
 we enter, all of us," I say, as the cop
 has us cornered against a high fence.
 He twitches confused to my words.
 "We're walking along this desert road,
 hoping for a ride. Bugs says it will take hours
 to get one but then a wagon appears &
 crash!" I clap my hands & the cop backs
 off just a step. "There are onion rings
 everywhere & *run at him all at once! Now!*"

Like that. He sort of caught us anyway
 though we all hung on while he swung.
 Then a voice, a girlish voice, called for him
 so sweetly & impatiently, we took that
 distraction & fled. Laughing. *Laughing.*

A strange mind. A quick tongue. Reckless.
 What did this add up to? I left home
 as my brothers had. Took a job that was
 like a slow poisoning. A windowless office
 all day, numbers & letters & symbols on
 the walls, ceiling, floor, the desks, my
 hands, you could only catch what they
 were slyly, half-glances, quick. My wit
 won me the job but these figures were
 just for those who thought they could escape
 what was happening to the world. Hide
 deep or far enough away.

One day I simply walked past that building
 & didn't stop. I still see the numbers &
 letters & symbols on the back of my hands
 sometimes. Maybe they have some secret
 worth. Maybe they like me. Maybe
 I can use them here?

"Tell us another, Roddy,"

"What?"

"Come on!" They laughed at me, loved me
 like brothers do. I was staying in an empty
 building across some railroad tracks. Freight
 ran by twice a day.

Came when I signaled, didn't know why
 I'd quit. "When they found her in the
 large shower, she was in a silver & blue
 sweat-jacket, nothing else. Her two friends
 didn't know what had happened to her,
 or what she had in her pockets."

"Go on, Roddy!"

"Come on!"

"What?"

"Is there more?"

"Not of that one."

They laugh & pull hard on their tall boys.
 I love them. I tell another.

"There is a third world market, stalls,
 animals. One man seems to be covered
 in roots, vines, spiders. Unperturbed.
 He stays at the entrance to a whole other
 world down below."

"What kind of world?"

"It's a hotel for the very rich, there's a great
 staircase in the center of the lobby. Men
 in tuxedos, women in shiny low-cut dresses,
 servants. They bring everyone little dogs."

"Dogs?"

"Little ones."

"Roddy!"

Writing these down here, like I never had,
I'm crying a little. My brothers are back
there, if at all.

Food's gone. I take a chance & wash
the dishes with some of my own water.
Just in case. I liked doing the dishes at home.
The hot water. Soapy sponge. Visible love.

It's morning. I can't stay. It will feel like
hiding & eventually I'll starve of fear &
stupidity.

So I pack up & walk outside. Late summer,
even in these Woods. Sniff. Clean. Lots more than that,
but clean is good. City hadn't smelled clean
in a long time. I don't know which way
to go, maybe that's good too. Not know. Go slow.

My boots are new, tight, be wishing for
my old sneakers till they break in.
Waterproof, these, & thick socks I'll have
to clean. I guessed about these but
OK. The books I kept. The clothes. The compass.
At least the boots & socks.

Close the wooden door & on my way . . . somewhere.
I don't know why but I don't mark my path
away. Acute memory? Not returning? Dunno.
Maybe I need to figure these Woods out better
than one small shack. Maybe I don't want
to confess how scared & lost I am.

There is bird-noise, I can't say which ones.
Telling of my intrusion? Maybe. I am.
I hope I'll make fewer headlines in time.
There are no paths. None.

Try to remember another one. My brothers
came less often to my squat. Maybe
I signaled them less often. I don't know.
Maybe my stories turned dark, living outside
the city but for the freights. They don't
laugh. I guess I'm not trying.



“It’s a story you’ve heard before.”
 “That’s OK, Roddy.”
 “We love the old ones, man.”
 “The great house on the treeless hill.
 With its attic that opens out to other worlds.”
 “Sure! That’s a good one.”
 “Tell, Roddy.”
 “I’m in its basement, vast corridors &
 rooms. I’m curious, not afraid. There
 are filing cabinets along the halls. I open
 some. Nothing at first. Then.”
 “What?”
 “I find a blue Kool-Aid canteen.”
 “Really?”
 “Yah. I open it up, & there’s a small canteen
 inside, & a smaller one inside that,
 & a smaller one inside that. And inside
 that one, these glowing blue pebbles.”
 “No shit.”
 “I hold them in my hand as I keep walking.
 Endless corridor, till I come to a group of people
 sitting in folding chairs, watching a film
 against the wall. Silently watching,
 but its just colorful blobs & swirls, &
 low grinding music.”
 “*Shit*, Roddy.”
 “I come to a room where there are these
 Creatures, mostly little brown & tan bears,
 sort of in a heap. I straighten them out.
 Nobody has been in this room in a long time.”
 “Creatures?”
 “Yah.”
 “Creatures, Roddy?”
 “Yah.”

Oh, yah, wow. They were spooked at that
 story, left quickly, didn’t finish their tall boys.
 That was the last time.

The forest floor is thick & soft with needles,
 there are cones, nuts. I walk & walk.
 Drink my water low. Eventually, too soon,
 I tire. Maybe mid-afternoon. No finding
 that shack now.

I haven't seen water either, & that's
 got me worried more. Keep walking
 because stopping now would be terrifying.
 It's a Woods! Has to have water!

It became like a dream, those hours
 of that afternoon. Knowing it was wrong
 but walking off the panic. Walking hard.

Dizzy, tired, staggering, I probably would
 have collapsed anywhere, but something.
 Someone. Words in my mind. "You were kind
 to us. It's only a little further." The little
 Creatures? Bears? "It was only a story.
 You were heaped in a pile."

Here I was, this armchair on this shack's
 porch. Another shack. A leather bucket of water,
 a ladle. I drink & drink, too fast, vomit,
 am OK. This old green armchair holds
 me like a fond lover. I sleep.

I dream but it's a remembering.
 When I left the railroad shack, when
 the stench of the city, the noise of
 its disintegration, neared, & neared,
 I left, I followed the tracks away,
 from early morning, hours I walked
 & all I came to was worse. I came
 to piles of corpses, huge piles, dead or
 nearly. Bound together, in some kind
 of plastic.

I wake. Armchair. Bucket of water.
 I'm still exhausted, blurry with terrors
 then, now. Talk aloud. Like it will help.

"I start to rouse the bodies, they are alive,
 I push & hit them, get them to roll off
 each other, help each other out of the
 plastic, stand. Stagger along behind
 me. I sense enemies, near, see a cave,
 maybe a tunnel. I make these crowds
 stagger along. Fifty, a hundred? I don't
 know.

"I feel like I am them, they are me.
They are all me. I am the world."

I pause. Another ladle of water.

"Still think you're the world, Roddy?"

Oh. *Shit*. Another armchair. The grocer,
 his all-night market near my apartment.

"You're here?"

"Do you remember my name?"

"Akbar? Muhammed?"

He laughs. "Fyodor. And no, I'm not here."

I blink rapidly & he fades a little. I panic.

"Wait!"

"It's OK. We can talk again. You'll learn
 better how. For now, close your eyes."

Fearful he'll go but, still, I do.

"Listen, Roddy. I tried to tell you what
 was happening. *I tried*. You didn't want
 to hear me."

"I'm . . . sorry?"

"You're still here. You made it out."

"Yes. I don't know what I'm doing out here."

"But you made it. *You're here*. How?"

"There were voices. Creatures."

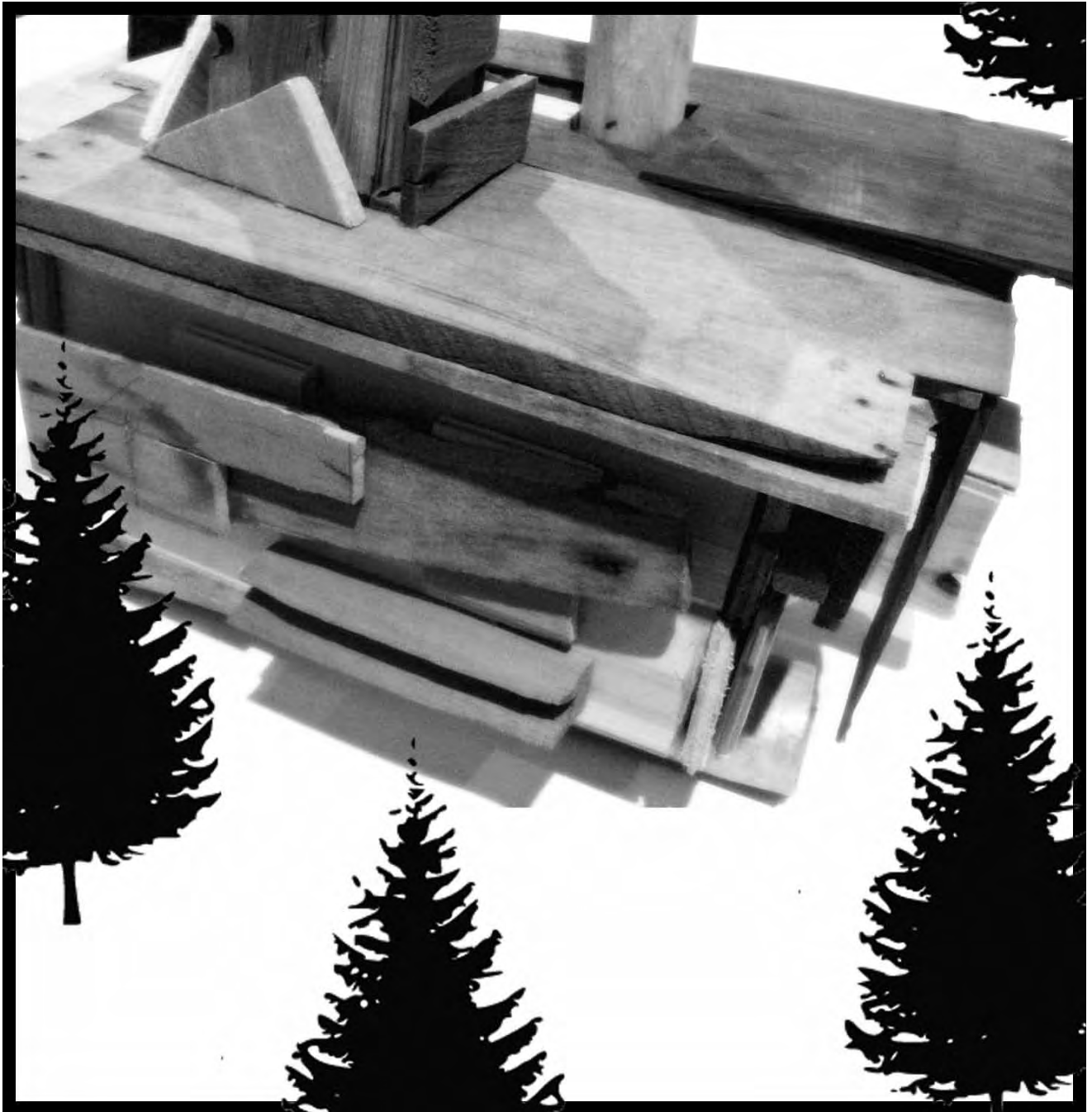
"Listen close, Roddy. This place is your
 second chance. They like you. They'll help
 when they can. But you have to learn,
 to change. *You're not in the city anymore.*"

Fyodor says no more. I open my eyes.

He's gone. Dusk is giving way to night.

I sit a long time in this armchair, like

I am tonight, many times since.



Eventually, the exhaustions of walking & fear
 push me through the door, nobody
 is there. Feel my way to the bed, &
 on it a quilt too. Again, objects &
 fabrics sewn into it. It's warm. It's what
 I have here of familiar, besides
 the voices & apparitions. I grip it like
 it will go. I probably cry. *I saved nobody.*
 I kept moving long after the last of them fell again.

xxxix. Mailbox House

There's mail today. It doesn't happen every time.
 I've stopped asking who or how. I read them
 slowly, wishing they were me. But nobody
 lives here, like the others. Still, the letters.

The first time, I'd left that other shack &
 again, not marked my path. I'd slept
 till late afternoon but had to go. This
 wasn't working. *I don't belong here.*

The Woods sloped down, & down. I moved
 uncaring, just to move. Came to the stream
 strangely sudden. Silence of these Woods,
 then this chuckling flow, its glaring gems.

There was a log close to the water but,
 no, twas like a telephone pole. Smooth,
 sheered at both ends. Set down my knapsack,
 sat down with this new, unwanted mystery.

Listened to the stream's wordless music.
 I had nothing to think forward to,
 & the past didn't count much here. *Something.*
What? Listen. *I don't belong here.*

Opened my sack. Pulled out my compass.
 Its arrow spun & spun. *What else?*
 My books? *Useless.* But there was one.
 A book I'd kept when our foolish talk
 of marriage, & everything else, ended.

I was so much taller than you, but
it never felt like that. Nothing about you
felt less than me. That long green hallway
to your bedroom, its weird fixtures.

I kept this book, it's held together by rubber
bands, no cover. I remember its title:
Aftermath, by Cosmic Early. Took it,
with my bag of clothes, toothbrush, that last morning.

It'd sat on your bedside table, unremarked,
every time I visited, even when I moved in.
Its cover was a golden labyrinth embedded
inside a great tree. I remember: *Aftermath*.

"That's now," I say aloud. "Us, my life,
the world. All of it's aftermath."
Feels nice to talk aloud. Whatever's
listening. Whoever. "Aftermath!"

Bend open the book, its old, stiff pages,
& read from a page: "We carry her from
the shower back to our room, cover
her in the big bed we share. Her smile,
vacant but beautiful: 'he was advising me what's
to come, holding me, murmuring in my hair.'"

Turn to other pages: "In the Woods,
along train tracks, looking for something,
a spring day. The ground is moist,
the others are near, I think, I hope.
Maybe down to the stream again,
tinkering with the wires? Who would
we call out to anyway? Who's there?"

I close the book, breathing hard,
looking around. I'm alone, my listeners
quiet, whatever they are. Stand up,
stuff the book away, nearly toss
it in the water. Don't. It's what's left
of those nights when your sweet crooked
ass raised high to me, wanting what
I had, what I was, *moaning for me alone*.

Cross the stream, climb the hill beyond.
 Climb & climb. I don't belong here, tis true.
Here I am. A hill has to end, doesn't it?
 I climb. Come to the crest. Sit,
 sadly winded for a young man. Breathe,
 relax, take a look from this tall place.

Smoke, or black clouds, or both, over
 the city I left, where it probably is,
 or was, on the horizon. Clench my
 teeth not to cry. Look nearer but all
 Woods to see. *This isn't helping me.*

Then I see it, maybe a hundred feet
 downhill from me. Something red, yes,
 a bright, sure red. A freshness about
 this color. Not a feather or something discarded.
 Hurry down the hill, scraping, careening.
 What am I expecting? The black cloud
 still hangs there distant. *It's still all gone.*

It's a mailbox, the rural kind, big & silver,
 shaped like loaf of bread, the handle
 on its side painted bright red. Handle's down.
 No outgoing mail. I pull open its door
 anyway. There's a letter inside. I take
 it out, hold it in my hand. Then I notice
 the shack a couple dozen yards away.

I stayed in this shack a long time,
 not overnight like the first two.
 Its bed small, crudely nailed together
 frame. A quilt, like the others, many
 kinds of feathers embedded. Crow.
 Peacock. Robin. I still haven't identified
 them all. I moved right in. Knapsack,
 unopened letter, me & all.

The letter kept me there. Wanting
 to read it, afraid to. This was as close
 to a human dweller in these Woods
 as I had found. I didn't open it
 a long while. Used that stream for
 my drink & washing. Slowly ate
 through the granola & jerky in my bag.
 Very slowly. I had little appetite anymore.

The envelope was addressed simply:
 “*To Iris.*” Bigger than my cover-less
 paperback, heavy stock, tanned
 unevenly in color, as though toasted
 somehow. Hardly sealed. I waited.
 I delayed. Finally, I climbed back
 up the hill, wearing layers of clothes,
 winter coming, watched the sun set,
 the distant black cloud smudging it ugly,
 & waited for the full moon to come.

It contained a single sheet, folded
 in half. The handwriting strange, as though
 the writer not used to the chosen tongue.
 Written with a fountain pen, or perhaps
 a quill. Maybe a burnt end of twig,
 in dark dip of blood. I read it aloud,
 hoping this excused my boldness somehow.

“My Beloved, This letter will find
 you when I cannot. I hope you are
 still the lively, beautiful rebel I knew.
 On this full moon’s night, I let you go
 & keep you both. Not knowing what world
 you’re really from, or where bound.
 I am only a mortal man. I love you.
 This you know as you depart me.”

Roddy is shaking now. There’s a little more.
 He again reads aloud. No choice.
 “You will try again & again to save
 this world. You will choose again &
 again to let go of all what & who
 you love. I am not the first. I am another.”

He stops reading. He, that is I,
 stopped reading the letter. He put
 it back in its envelope. Still unfinished.

He returned to the shack, fell asleep
 fast & hard in the bed, right on
 the feathered-up quilt. Letter on
 the floor. He, that is I, didn't leave
 that bed a long time. I didn't understand
 where I was, that these White Woods
 tells those it loves, those hurting & lost &
 in great need. I thought I was alone.

A dream. A powerful dream. In it,
 time flattened, time diminished, time shrunk.
 As though I cupped my hands to collect
 water in the rain, & then watched it
 evaporate in the sun thereafter.
 There were Creatures all around me.
 Always have been, but they were
 plain with me, in my bed, sniffing, close.

Urging me my task, the sheet of paper
 before me, on the bed, the quill &
 jar of ink beside me. Nudged & nudged
 me to write. I watched my hand
 dip quill in jar. I watched my hand
 begin to write. My hand was small
 & elegant, a girl's or woman's, not
 mine own. I wrote slow & fast.

"My Beloved in return, I've come
 here to rest, to heal. I need this body
 a little longer still. I am still damp
 with your kisses, impressed by your caress.
 You are flesh among my flesh,
 you are bones among my bones,
 your heart my blood's rhythm,
 your breath my chest's rise & fall.

"There's more to know than our love,
 than what I am, where from,
 where bound. Stranger strengths
 bide this world, & we are like lovely
 notes among their long, long tunes.

“Even now, there is a dear, confused
 young man writing this letter from me
 to you. He is shocked to see these
 words appearing on this page, writing
 deep in his dreams. He doesn’t
 understand himself, dreams, these
 wonderful White Woods, or the world
 as a whole. He sees only his old
 burning home & thinks his life gone.

“But we know more than this, my
 Beloved, you & I both do. We may
 never touch again, but he will
 be our new way to touch, & in return
 we will give him this gift to those
 he remembers & loves as well.
 Our love will go on, Beloved, as love
 always goes on.

Yours ever,
 Iris”

I watch my hands that are hers
 fold this letter into its envelope
 & we leave the bed & the hut
 itself, walking to the mailbox,
 placing the envelope within,
 addressed I do not recall, sealed
 with her soft lips on my face,
 & I pull the handle on the mailbox
 up, a signal for whatever postman
 runs this strange route. The Creatures
 have followed after me, but when
 the letter business is done, handle
 pulled, they disperse to their homes,
 or holes, or wherever Creatures
 of the Dream go when they go.

Awake. Morning. Fall out of the bed
 hurrying to the mailbox to see.
 Nothing. Handle is down, door closed.
 Open. Tis empty.

Does Roddy believe it didn't happen?
 No, Roddy knows it does. I know
 like my usual soft, clumsy city boy
 hands. Return to the hut,
 look around, find a lantern,
 light that up. A bed. A table
 & chair. Woodstove, some pans hung
 on the wall. *There*. A small desk.
 Under clothes & extra blankets &
 what-not.

One drawer. No, two. One within
 the other. Paper, still, color of
 burnt toast. Envelopes the same.
 Small jar of ink. Quill? Pen?
 None. I think. *Think*.

The quilt. Sit on the bed with it
 in my lap. Very carefully slide
 a crow's feather from its pattern.
 Will return it each time I'm done.
 Done doing this strange deed.

Up on that hill, wait till another full
 moon, I write the letter most pressing
 from my heart. To my brothers.

It's short. I don't know what words,
 or many. "I'm OK. I'm safe.
 I hope you are. Maybe I'm where
 I was always coming, maybe I'll
 find what I am, what the best
 of me meant, laughing with you all
 those years. Maybe. I don't know.

"I love you always. Be safe.
 Thank you.

Yours ever,
 Roddy."



Letter brought to the mail box, handle
 raised. Checked the next day, &
 of course it was gone. I've kept the deal
 with Iris & her beloved. Read them,
 write them, mail them. The dreams
 tell me no more than this. The Creatures
 not a word either, of course.

Maybe I do belong here, as I told
 my brothers. When I climb the hill,
 I notice the distant black cloud
 is pretty much gone. Whatever
 that means. Whatever Iris is.
 Whatever her Beloved is. Whatever the world
 is. Whatever I am.

xl. Narrow Ways

Knowing there are places in these
 White Woods I can go, can find,
 & there are strange Creatures here,
 perhaps to my side, I wake up
 less suffocating to my straits.

I'm alive, I'm free of the city, its corpse
 I could not help. The helplessness
 I felt for so long. I wake up &
 tie my boots, shoulder my knapsack,
 move on. I'm let to be here, for now,
 maybe my smarts can seal it for them.

Little things, very little, but me starting.
 I step lighter on my path, among
 what comes rather than through. No paths
 to mine eye but maybe to others?
 I have to learn how to learn here.
 My city tongue I keep for sentiment,
 but another kind here. Five senses.
 Ten fingers. Something in the gut,
 something in dreams. I know nothing. *Begin.*

I think it will be a long day, taking
 my small steps to learn, when over
 a small hill & a look down, there's
 another shack. I move closer to
 examine, ready to run, surrender.
 I can't fight much so little option.

I walk around it. A tall narrow
 door. One. No windows. Spooky?
 Maybe. How to tell? "Go inside, Roddy,"
 I say aloud, for me & whoever around.
 Nobody tells me to stop. I leave my knapsack
 outside. A whim. My gut. Still tuning in.

Squeeze in. Push, pull, push, arrive.
 It's dark. In the roof a single circular
 cut lets in a fist-thick beam of light.
 The place is bare. Empty. I'm still not
 sure there's not a why.

In the corner. Folded purposefully,
 another of those quilts. I pick it up,
 hold it in my arms. Purs. Purs? I nod.
 Purs.

It's a tall cabin, tall & narrow. Listen.
 Listen *slower*. "Sit, Roddy, in the beam," I whisper.

I sit cross-legged on the floor with
 my purring quilt, in the beam.
 My head down, nestling my friend,
 feeling warmth. Breathe slower.
 Feel my blood & bones drink the heat &
 the light offered. Feeding me.
 The world tender to me when I let it so.

Gut says look up. *Now*. Eyes closed.
 Not enough. "Eyes open," I whisper,
 going blind a moment. Then adjusting,
 by my body, by my smarts. The world
 doesn't need to burn my eyes for sport
 or food. I look up but slant, *there*.

I stay as I am for hours, until
 the shaft disperses to passing
 daylight, until my friend seems inert.
 I study the furs woven into it,
 her, him. Nothing killed to do this.
 Sheddings, shavings. I hold this friend
 longer anyway, giving some, giving more.

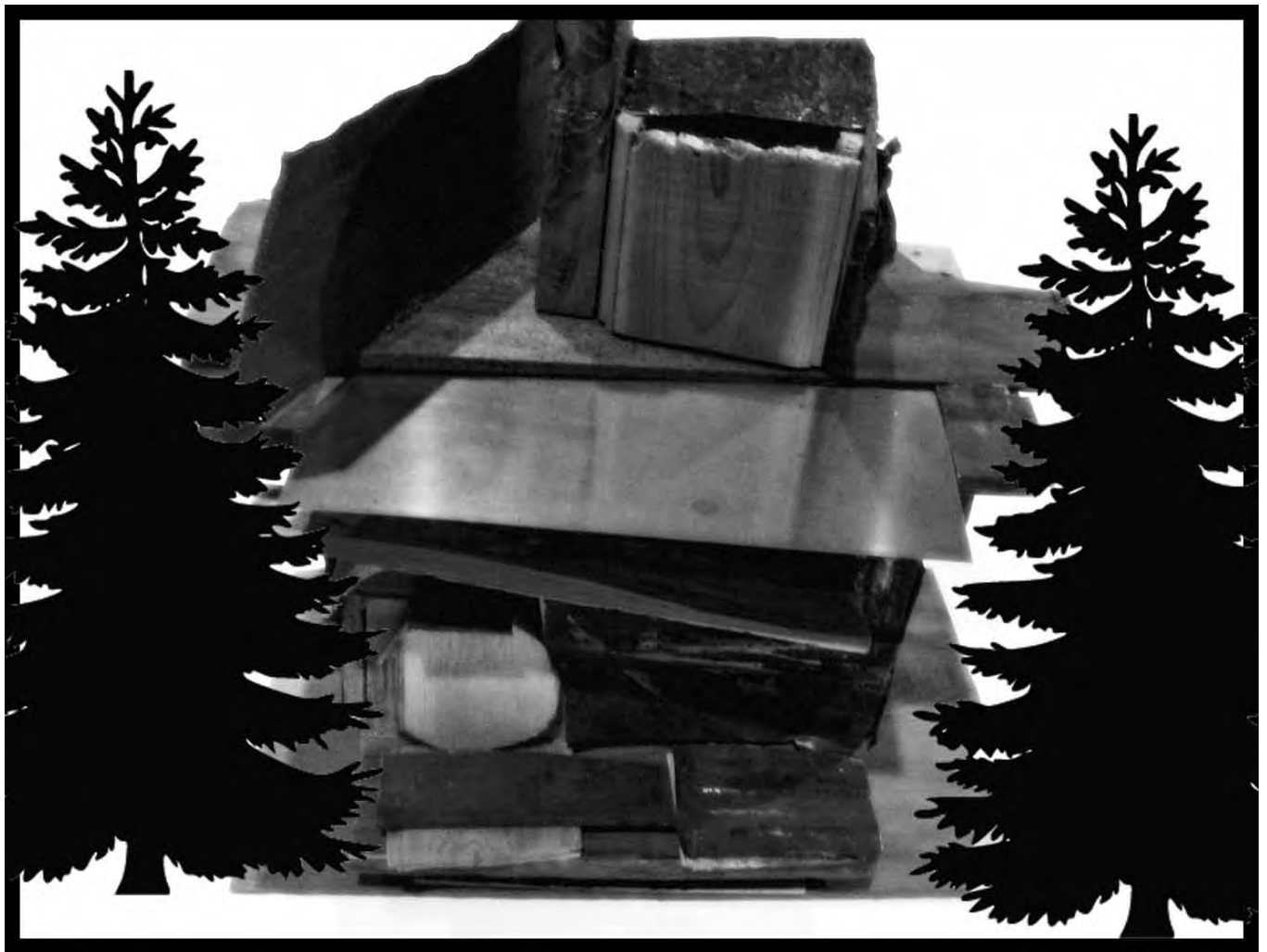
Eventually, stand. Put my friend
 well-folded into that corner again.
 Depart the doorway but it's no impediment,
 just a sliding move & shift between us,
 easy, loving, "thank you, thank you."

My knapsack waits & I pick it up.
 Make to move but don't. Evening
 air is cooling these White Woods.
 Others watching me. *I'm watching me*
too. How do I do enough? How do
 I meet these gifts I am being given
 with sweet good in return? Where
 is my sweet good, my shaft of light
 to salve as I have been? Where is
 my purring heart? How do I become
 what love is greening my heart?
How do I learn to bloom here?

xli. Modern

Wake suddenly. Again. I'm getting less
 tired, more awake, longer. My body
 adjusting to constant, subtler awareness.
 The danger is *not paying attention*.

I'm in a big bed in a dark, big room.
 A red-fringed floor lamp in the corner.
 Dark clothes bureau. Long wall mirror.
 Heavy curtained windows. A woman
 lived here. Iris? I wonder.



She lived with him here, as I lived
 with you. You would have liked this quilt
 I am under, it jingles quietly with woven
 stones & coins.

It's raining. Hard. These White Woods
 comforting into itself, drinking, dreaming.
 I am let to think of you, the rain draining
 me within to you. How the exhaustion
 I am recovering from is letting you go.

You were older than me, a teacher,
 a painter, a singer. I wore bright eyes,
 read the books you said, dreamed I had
 something but unschooled cock to give you.

Your house was big, like this one,
 unseen around me. Filled it with
 flowers, music. Your many lusting students,
 your fellow artists. Why is it all
 so vague now but your moan as
 I fucked you, "*make it hurt, make it new,*
make me feel, make me feel!"

Of course I came home early & another
 with you. Of course you invited me
 in. "We share what we have, what
 we are, Roddy, or the world lessens,
 like it has." Of course I tried for you.
 A rigid cock in my mouth, I thought
 of your moaning & sucked the cum
 raw from it. Your turn, found I had none.

Lying here now, that dramatic year
 far & gone, I remember what you
 were. What you said. What I
 couldn't hear then over the shout
 of my cock to fuck you, *fuck you, fuck you now.*

You brought me out to the great garden
 behind your house. Was it your house?
 Were those visitors or did they live
 there too? I never knew the size
 of it. I wonder now more than remember.

The garden. It was *vast*. Miles of
wild blooming freedom, more than
I'd ever seen. *Green in a graying
human world.*

"How?"

"How all this?"

"Yes. *How?*"

"A White Tiger. A White Bunny. An imp.
Many others."

I could not reck your words but you
said more. "You'll see them again,
Roddy. You can't imagine it now,
in this moment. All you can see
is my good breasts in my low cut
blouse. Dressed for you? No, I wasn't.
But were we sniffing each other already
that first day you came to me
at the Pensionne? Yes. I kept talking
for you to listen later. Now.

"I took you to my bed then because
you were destined to be long alone
in these White Woods. You had to feel as
a man tender to another, kissing her,
sharing her power, potent, helpless,
can you hear me now, Roddy?"

"I can," I speak eyes closed into
the darkness.

"Do you feel me again like that first
afternoon in the garden?"

"Yes."

"Do you feel my body near yours?"

"*Yes.*"

"Excited again?"

"Yes."

"Look beyond me. Look where I am pointing."

I look. Miles & miles of blooms.

"*Look.*"

In the far distance, hardly distinguishable
among blooms, there he is. Black stripes
on white fur. Oceanic blue eyes. A White
Tiger. Gazing toward me like I'm something
worth the seeing. Like I could be a friend.

“Look there, Roddy!”

In & out of the wild colourous blooms
hops, great hops, a White Bunny,
& when I look below the levels
of the blooms, as I didn't then,
as I do now, what but a tiny
cackling thing, black & white panda
bear the size of a thumb print, one
of her, then none, then many?

“Do you still feel me, Roddy?”

“Yes.”

“My body? My want for you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you understand me better now?

Do you forgive?”

A young man doesn't forget how
that first kiss tasted, for all the years
wanting it. How her blouse comes off,
nervous, smiling, realizing something
in him worth wanting too, that *everyone*
wants, everyone longs.

“*Everything*, Roddy. Not just men & women.
One plus one sums to one.”

I am crying long & loud in this strange
bed, under this strange cover. Jingling &
shivering, crying. What other choices
could I have made? The sweat on
your eyelashes. Your laughter. Your breathing.
I felt borne by the universe to spend
into you, & again, & again.

The rain's stopped. It's still dark.
I stand, naked. How did I come to this
house? Leave the bedroom, find it at
the top of the long wooden stairs. Living room
with fireplace & framed pictures. Kitchen
with a thousand knives & pans.

Bookcases still heavy with leather volumes.
A phonograph in an ornate case.
A guitar in a corner. A small piano, covered.

Not the Pensionne, no. And nobody
 here either. Left for me? I don't know?
 Finally, I step outside.

My knapsack is in the front path
 to this house. My clothes tangled &
 unruly upon it. It's like I found this place
 in a fever, stripped wildly, hurled into it.

The morning comes as I dress. As I
 remember no more. As I sit on
 the front door's stone step, I pull out my
 book from you. *Aftermath* by Cosmic Early.

Close my eyes. Listen to what you said
 of him, as I was undressing you,
 as I was roaming your body for how
 my touch could heat you blind,
 you were talking, talking.

"He was my first lover, Roddy.
 He gave me this book that I'm giving
 you. *The green's coming*, Roddy."
 Your words mixing with the moans
 I cause of you. So I could too.

Hold the book in my hands, listen,
 watch how the light creeps
 in among the branches & leaves.
 I suppose I don't notice the Creatures
 at first. The White Bunny, her fiercely
 intelligent, kind eyes. A small grey
 hedgehog close to her side. And nibbling
 at my bare ankle, the tiny panda bear.
 Through some trees, there! That White
 Tiger. *Yes*.

I don't confuse their small or quiet
 for timid or weak. They live in these
 White Woods. They are welcoming me,
 the White Bunny nudging herself into
 my lap, the imp gnawing my palm,
 & into my grasp too. The hedgehog looks
 at me cautiously, nears. The White Tiger
 still at a distance, watching how
 I am with his friends.

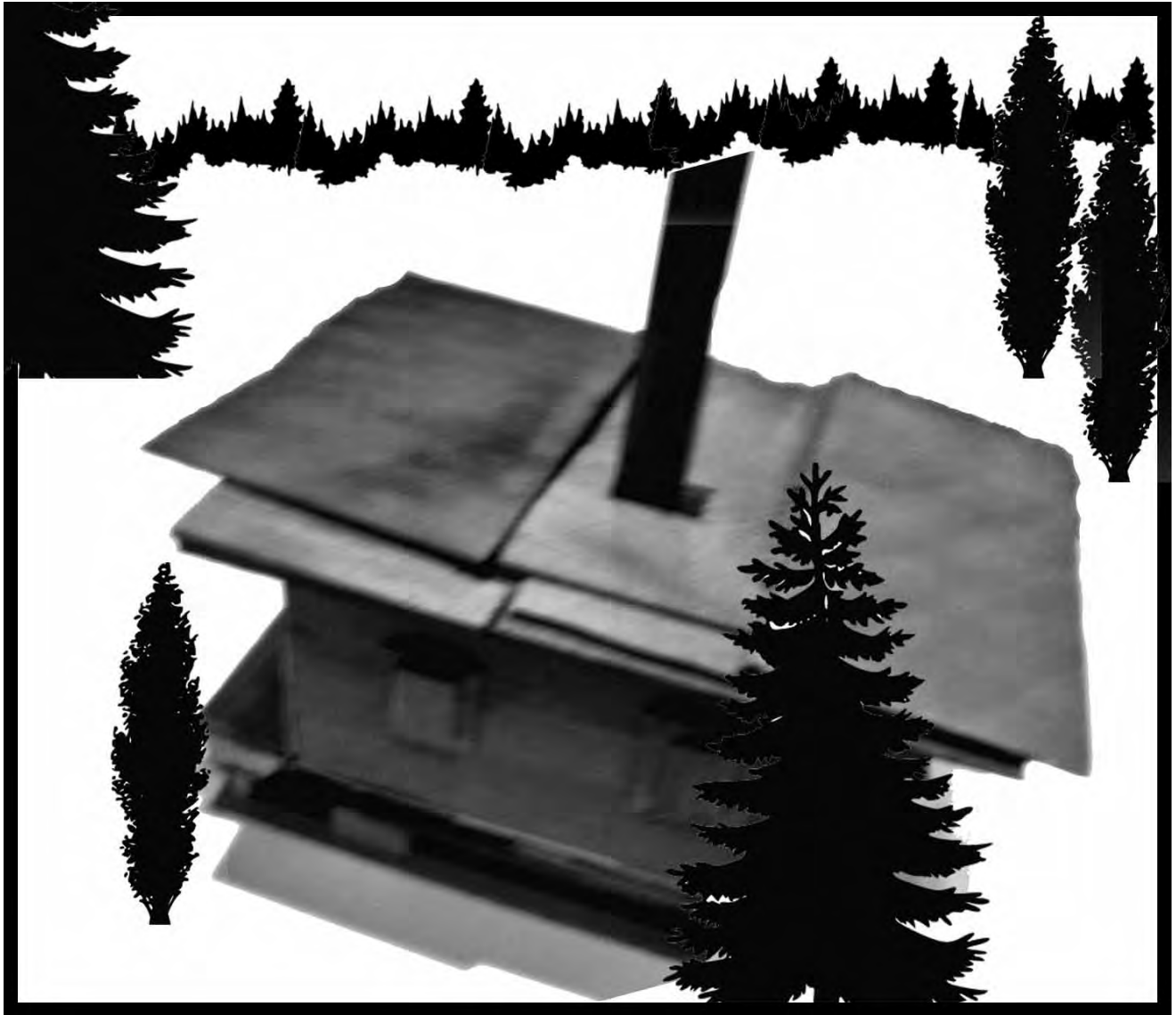
I suppose we all nap together awhile.
 My knapsack a pillow, my arms
 their rest. I wake later morning,
 my grasp empty, the Woods noisier
 than I've known so far. Is this how
 a man returns to the world,
 his hands out, to surrender, to learn,
 the growls, the twitters, the buzzes
 closer to him than before, letting him in,
 letting a little more?

xlii. Tribute

Along the morning I find I am limping
 a little, new boots still, & a branch
 long enough to lean against. I'll keep
 this cane years after that limp, these boots
 long sweet skin to my bones.

There is a sort of chalky rock I notice,
 draws well on tree bark, on trunks.
 Finally I begin to mark my path
 along. It is my method until I learn
 the *Hmmmmmm*, until the Creatures
 teach me better to know.

They are nearer than before,
 moving soundlessly aside me,
 a flash of brown fur, a stray whisker,
 a nose raised & sniffing. I come
 to no further human dwelling for
 days. Yet they guard me, these Creatures
 of the Woods. Come nightfall there
 will be clearings with plenty of
 dry wood for fire, piles of leaves
 for a bed. Deep in sleep many
 will nuzzle into my arms, sweet music
 into my dreams.



I learn the foods of the Woods by
 experiment, by what feeds me,
 by what roars my guts sick & weeping.
 I learn, by color, by scent, by taste.
 By the shade of its leaves, the way
 it clusters by trunk or stream.

I learn how to eat less & less, &
 my body both withers & strengthens.
 Water I still need. Sometimes I am
 slow to leave a stream, aching
 with thoughts of thirsts to come.

I keep along. Wondering of those places
 I'd stayed out here. So many &
 now none?

Maybe I hallucinate at times. I see
 faces ahead of me. You, my teacher,
 my long lost lover, holding out your hand,
 laughing, "you're free, Roddy! Free!
 You can live & die happy out here!"
 I run for you, run hard, my stick
 keeping me from my own fool missteps
 at times, but never catch you.
 Never once.

I think of my brothers, how far I've
 gone from them. Just their faces
 as I pass hungry again into sleep.

"What happens next, Roddy?"

"Yah, what's next?"

"I don't know."

"You don't?"

"What?"

"I'm sorry. I don't." I pass out,
 crying. *I'm sorry.*

I don't have long left when I come
 over the grassy hill, see the farmhouse
 down below. Fields for plowing. Barns
 falling down in the distance. White Woods
 at more a distance here, though still
 visible. But something here keeps
 them away. I'm starving. I approach.

Three steps up to the house's side
 door, middle step missing. Push in door
 & come to a madly cluttered kitchen.
 Like someone left in a hurry, but decades
 ago somehow. My hunger gone, I push
 through the door to the next room.

Mirrors. On the walls, on the ceiling,
 below my feet. I am shown in a
 thousand guises, very old, infant
 young, like I was some man's bride,
 like I was the Beast who would consume
 them together. Balance thrown,
 dizzy, I growl, I cry, I push through.

Come to a different room. A library
 of sorts. There is a fireplace. Armchair.
 Walls of books. A writing desk. A closed
 journal.

I open its thick dusty cover to its
 title page. "Tribute." Turn its pages,
 wondering. Hopeful?

Sheets of figures. Columns of them,
 rows of them. Sometimes angular lists
 of them. Sometimes displayed like
 a checkerboard. Page after page.
 Splotches of numbers. Bleeds of symbols.
 Like my own hands. They glow dim &
 then brighter.

Push to its last page. These words:
"Transcribed the divine word."

I lift the book & carry it with me
to the armchair. Holding it like
a pillow, or a Creature, but infinite
sadder, I rock gently into sleep.

Long times after, I can't say how long,
I come to waking in the darkness.
Soft hands are taking the book from
my grasp, returning it to the desk.
Feeding me bits of fruit & nuts from
a dimly perceived bag. A water sack
to my lips. No words. I keep my eyes
shut mostly. If a dream, I accept.

"Why am I here? Did I come here
to perish & fail?"
"No, Roddy," the voice strange, my teacher's,
my brothers'? A Creature's at last? Braided of all these?
"How do I endure?"
"They are here to help you, Roddy."
"Why me?"
"Because you're here. They are your hope.
You are theirs. That's how the world saves."

A lingering breath near me, & gone.
I feel fed, wonder how. Stand, move
clumsily back, through the darkened room
of mirrors, the cluttered kitchen.
The rooms are exhaling me now,
for now. Down the steps, avoid
the missing one.

My knapsack on the grass. A full moon
upon all. A miracle spread of stars
sings wide & long the sky. I breathe in
& breathe out. Again, & again.

Make toward the distant White Woods.
Creatures joining me as I go.
White Bunny. Hedgehog. Little imp,
cackling. Brown bears. Small giraffes.
Shiny-eyed fox & leopard & owl &
unicorn. And we are not silent.

It catches in my throat, even before
 I hear it, the subtle, silvery music
 of these White Woods I'd known,
 & not known, before. But I pick up
 on it now, croaking a little but then more,
 more. It is like the *Hmmming* I will
 know so much better but, even this
 first night, it tickles & kisses inside
 my blood & bones, leads into my heart
 & lungs, & pushes out my lips, pushes
 & pushes until I let a little & then much more.



* * * * *





Love in Puerto Rico

[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | 92 | April 2015

V.

We find our place by accident. It is a doorway off the street with a sign the size of a cigarette package. Incredibly, there is a parking place twenty feet away. A rusted iron gate made of half-inch bars is ajar just off the sidewalk. We go in. A tile-and-marble staircase leads up into darkness. On the second landing, a door is open to a smoke-filled room. A rotund balding fellow is shuffling about in what used to be a white t-shirt, now stained with food and lathered in sweat.

“Hello. Hello. We’d like a room please.” Attracting his attention.

“*Como?*”

“A room. A room for the night. El rento.” That’s stupid and I know it.

“Ahhh. A room. *Uno noche?*”

“Yes . . . one night.” Guessing what he said.

“*Sí. Hoe-K then. Want see room?*”

I don’t give a shit. Just want to shit. “Yes, please,” she says. *What the hell are we going to do if she doesn’t like it?* There’s no other place around. It’s getting dark. We’re starved. I’m sick. We have to take it.

We walk down some corridors and he unlocks a rusty padlock on a ten-foot-tall door. Inside is a single room about half the size of a gym with a ceiling twenty feet up. The walls are made of fourteen different types of paneling and plywood, some painted institutional green like an asylum. A single ragged cloth-wrapped wire runs up from a cracked switch that promises to shock the hell out of you in some foreign voltage. This controls the distant paddle fan hanging limply above. Proudly he twists the knob and the fan reluctantly begins to turn.

“See. Aero condition,” he proudly announces. It is about 103 in the room. The fan pushes the hot air down as if a slow blowtorch. I wonder if this technology marvel will increase the room cost. A solitary double-bed stands in the middle of the room under the fan. Twisted black bedposts. A raft in a sea of elaborate tile work on the floor.

There are two sets of doors—that are really large shutters—that open out onto a deck with an iron railing. Beneath the railing are coils of barbed wire, apparently to keep out a criminal Spiderman. It is cooler out on the tiny platform with the updraft from the street. The porch hangs out from the building, suspended in space. I like it. This place has character. I feel like I’m Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*. She has a bewildered look. A mix of horror and astonishment.

“We’ll take it. It’s wonderful,” I blurt out. An icy stare drills me from the woman.



Charlie Beyer

“Eet iss fine then. Come with me,” the proprietor says.

VI.

Forty-five dollars later—and ample instructions in broken English on the bathroom, the keys for the front gate, the room padlock, and the mystery key—, we are issued a half-roll of toilet paper. Back in the room, I marvel at the ancient tile-work paving the floor. A mix of Spanish and Moroccan design. Some Spanish greatness here . . . where conquistadors once strolled.

Then back out onto the porch where the people move about below, uncaring of my eagle’s perch. The cars below cram bumper to bumper at a crawl up the narrow street, honking all the way, fists waving in the air, curses in an alien language. It is delightful. All the foreign and exotic I could have wished for. The pastel three- and four-story buildings lean over the skinny street in either direction, iron designs and odd corners jutting out everywhere. Little festoons of concertina wire hang like dust bunnies where some imagined burglar might clamber and trespass.

The ceiling fan paddles a draft of molten air on her, lying on the bed, pouting, sweating, saying nothing. *What the hell is with that?* Where is the excitement, the commentary, the enthusiasm? What a pisser. A letdown companion. A dirt-bag moron. I head down the hall to the Caballeros bathroom. White wet tile paves the huge room. A battered sink, a toilet all alone on the other side of the room, a yellowed bathtub shower with one water handle. No soap. My body wrings itself out again like a kitchen dishrag. Roaches skitter in all directions, mimicking the people of the street.

VII.

Hunger. Four in the afternoon of Day 2. Thinking a quaint café with crafted iron-work and different-colored pastel walls. A nice menu in English announcing ethnic dishes of . . . what? I have no idea what the hell they eat around here. Haven’t seen a single café anywhere. No Mom-and-Pop corner bistro, no mystery meat taco stands. Nothing. Just beer. Huge billboards decrying beer with ample white women, barely clad, cuddling beers to their breasts. Every two blocks, an open-air beer cantina. A counter, a few tables, a few chairs, two walls, and twenty skinny shifty-looking men drinking beer. All standing. *We need food. We are cranky.*

“You’d think there’d be a Denny’s or a Shari’s around here somewhere,” she says.

“I don’t see *any* family restaurants,” I comment.

“All I want is a steak. Medium rare.” The chronic whine in her voice.

“Do you see any goddamned steaks out there? I haven’t even seen any cows.”

“Just because you haven’t seen any cows doesn’t mean there aren’t any.”

“Does it look like these people eat steak? Looks like they’d be lucky to eat dog. Do you see any dogs?”

“You don’t have to be such a racist. We’ll just eat what they eat.” A punctuated pout in her voice.

“Yeah, well, you just tell me what the fuck they eat!”

“I don’t have to tell you shit!”

"That's cause you don't know shit."

Death silence. Frown lines cutting down her chin into the neck. A straight-ahead stony look.

"There's a damn McDonald's. You want a burger?" I groan.

"Yes."

VIII.

So again, another meal in the ubiquitous Micky Ds. Same crap, different planet. Nobody speaks English in these places. You have to flail your order to a sloe-eyed teenager. At least that's the same.

"*Quatro cheeseburgers, uno dinero menu.*" Pray the broken Spanish works with my waving hands.

"*Como?*"

"Ummm, *carne*. Cheeseburgers?" Pointing wildly at the menu now, but might as well be pointing out the star Sirius in a rainstorm. Holding up four fingers, I get out four dollars and wave them around. Now a spark in their eyes. Rich Americano. I have their attention, but not their comprehension. Eventually the manager comes out of the back to translate the piddling order. We scarf the mush in the car and feel better. Back to being polite now. Until the next crisis.

Thinking fruit and vegetable stand. That would be nice. Where's the iconic colorful market? Or a goddamned grocery store will do. Not a one in sight. Haven't seen a single grocery store yet and we've been over 70% of the roads on this weird island in the last few days. *Where the hell do people get their food?* What the hell do they eat here? Oh, for just one Safeway deli. *Where's the food?* Where's the Chinese take-out? There's only these strange ramshackle roadside stands. These are built out of an assortment of odd boards and sheets of rusted metal. Not unlike a kid's first tree fort.

A typical stand is hollowed out of the right-of-way thicket of jungle brush. Looks like a green cave. Trash is festooned in the bushes all around. The shack wares are only an odd assortment of plastic milk jugs, partially filled with colored fluids. What is this stuff? It exudes an aura of bacterial contamination. *Who buys this stuff?* What are ya going to pay for a glass of this mystery fluid? Twenty bucks to an obvious tourist maybe? Twenty-five cents to a local, I suspect. We're not thirsty. I have sufficient bacteria already. The gaunt proprietors leer at us as we pass. The juice doesn't seem to be doing jack shit for them. We need something to grind in our teeth. American filler and fat.

Another stand goes by, lathered in snagged plastic bags. Plastic bags waft playfully in the air currents of the highway like lost balloons at the fair. Plastic bags are all over the beaches and floating in the water, mimicking dead jelly fish. The bags are hung like fruit on every highway bush, drifted into aero-terrestrial mounds on the edges of all parking lots, flapping in the breeze in trees. This is the true Puerto Rican flag.

* * * * *

Colin James**Under a Doggerel Moon**

All the spears had been chucked
arrows shot
blunderbusses
contaminated by the filth
of their intentions.
Mary sat on a hill
legs apart.
She had refined her choices,
thankfully.

* * *

The Argument for a Parallel Universe

Lipstick stains
 compliment your cartwheels
 anguish debates these
 which am I having?
 Doubts abound
 about why
 your look
 has given me up
 to that other beauty
 I came here with
 who pretends not to notice.

* * *

Drag It or Push It Expeditiously to Passenger's Salvage

One of the most egregious examples
lay in a corner unfolded
beneath a mitered shelf
above the standard apocalyptic drain
leading down some precarious steps,
supposedly engineered by a lost civilization.
Possibly alien according to High Forehead.
Experts hold forth yet again for this one
chance at being right.
Echoes repeat the importance.
The world has lived down here unbeknown,
where tasks go unreported or appreciated.
Animals graze on moss as thick as your eyebrows
and sex is a term not relied on.

* * *

Something Other Than Desire

You were wrong about the Palmer Casino,
you were wrong about Bigfoot,
and now you're wrong about this.
You're just fucking wrong.
That Bigfoot reference
may have been irony.
I'm not saying that it was,
but it may have been.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“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, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

There is a TV Show

There is a TV show called *The 6 or 100 Mill*, in which a group of people is given \$100 million to spend in a year's time. What's unspent is lost to them. There are seeming random rates of interest on the expenditures as well. In one version of the show, they *each* get \$100 mill to spend; in another, it's a pool of \$100 mill & they all must agree on spending.

There's a crucial scene in the TV show where one of the players is out in deepest Alaska wilderness, bleeding, a helicopter crashed nearby, its pilot dead or gone, radio smashed.

Would you play it safe & buy stocks? Would you travel the world? Would you buy your loved ones houses & cars & clothes? What if you knew that any one expenditure's interest could spend you dry?

Watching Again *Northern Exposure*

Watching again *Northern Exposure*, which ran on CBS-TV from 1990 to 1995. A truly magical place it created, a small town, Cicely, Alaska, where lines of race, gender, age, education, class, are blurred to benign indistinction. Funny as hell too.

Like a favorite book unrevisited for many years, & the shock of old love for it met by new love for it. I know, I think I know, that it doesn't last, its quality erodes by the end, but I feel beyond obliged to read it through to the conclusion. It's a beautiful thing some people made a long time ago, & I'm utterly grateful.

A Spot of Woods Between Two Roads

A spot of woods between two roads, & in it a trailer. He lives there, collects strange things in it, comes & goes late at night. He's piecing himself back together in this trailer, uncertain what the whole will reveal, or resemble.

I knew him as a young man, wore a silly moustache, watched Marx Brothers movies over & over. Liked genealogy as a hobby. But somewhere along the way, he forgot *himself*, & so is using those genealogy skills in a new way.

When I Think of My Friend

When I think of my friend Jim Burke III, who died suddenly December 1, 2011, it is with a sense of growing distance between us. He remains who he was, much I knew, some I didn't, but I continue to move along my days. I miss him but it's more like how I miss many things. He exists as a mass of clearer & cloudier memories.

I saw him off in his car from where I lived that 2011 nor'easter-wracked Halloween weekend. Just over a month later, I was at a funeral where I think his ashes were in a container. Last morning I saw him, after a rough previous night, party gone south, he was playing his guitar softly. He was driving home another friend in need. He was good & decent & talented to the end. I wish I could have kissed his cheek before he was incinerated.

Some losses change a person, be they deaths, romance, friendship, jobs, major illness or injury. I don't live better now because of Jim's sudden death or absence, but I am aware in a way I was not. Spend your life or squander your life. Either way, or both, *it goes*—

Firefly Arts Festival

I almost went to the Firefly Arts Festival up in Vermont this July, my return to the Burning Man community I parted from in 2009. Decided I could not get, in sane time, my No Borders Free Bookstore project done & ready. Next year, if I can do it right this time.

I've stayed on the Firefly mailing list online, to remind & remind me that it's occurring & I didn't do what was needed to pull it off. To goad & inspire me toward next year.

I miss the Burning Man environment, miss it a lot. Where Art rules & commerce does not. Also, Firefly being in Vermont brings back my good memories of the Bread & Puppet Festival back in 1998, where, in long night, I danced & tripped & died & was reborn.

I hope to feel all of these good vibes & memories when I go next year, when I figure out the

many steps to get it right, & *walk every last one of them*. July 2016 is my goal now, 7 long years after I last left Black Rock City, Nevada. Making it to Vermont next year will be *miracle earned*.

Many Musics Inspiration

My *Many Musics* poems in this issue were very much inspired by the exhibition “When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination & the American South,” showing this past winter & spring at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Some strange beastly quilts by Marie “Big Mama” Roseman; some little wooden houses by Beverly Buchanan; some weird artwork writings by J.B. Murray; foremost among others.

Like the Francisco Goya show at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston last winter, I took copious notes, I took pictures, I let these awesome, mysterious arts nudge me along to my own ideas. The new poems came over five consecutive Saturdays this past spring, two on the last of these. I wanted to keep doing the best work I could in continuing *The Tangled Gate* mythos, & I think I did.

My task this summer will be to continue the story of Roddy & discover how he continues to live in the White Woods, & how eventually he meets up with the other brothers who journey to the Island to enter the Tangled Gate to save the world.

My Old Gadgets

Many of my old gadgets needed repair lately. My MacBook Pro, Eurydice, needed a new logic board & hard drive. My cell phone, Gumbee, needed a new ribbon to be able to slide open & closed. My iPod, Polly, needed a new hard drive. In each case, I sniffed out a repair shop & got the work done.

I believe if one has good tools, they should be treated with care & be repaired if possible. I had to take long trips on transit, wait & worry, yet paid gladly. There are good craftsmen out there, if one looks.

I believe also in the good juju of treating one's possessions with care, like one's home, one's body, one's loved ones, one's workplace or classroom, one's world. I'm inconsistent in all of these but I'm tryin', Ringo. *I'm tryin'.*



Showering with a Kind Man

Remembering showering with a man who is kind to me, & advises me what's to come. This did & didn't happen. I remembered this man in a dream, his kindness, his advice.

Who is or was he in the world that this was solely our crossed path? Did he dream of me, his affection for me, good wishes, how & why he chose to advise me?

Bags End News 30th Anniversary

Bags End News, stories from which are now featured in *The Cenacle* every issue, celebrates its 30th anniversary this month. I've begun a 30th anniversary issue—one in which, by happenstance, Algernon Beagle travels on an important recovery task—to Oz, Wonderland, Narnia, Hundred Acre Wood, Neverland, among others—, & receives many good wishes.

The challenge is to write about these places so important to me, to the Bags End mythos, & render them what they are both separated from, & related to, Bags End. No pastiche. Algernon will be narrating, of course, & so this makes it easier. His voice & thoughts are his own, no matter the place.

30 years is 60% of my life, nearly 400 issues. I hope what this means will unfold itself more as the new writing occurs.

Our Friend Victor

Our friend Victor, whose phenomenal writings are in this issue, came out to visit us back in April. We toodled around Massachusetts a bit, having weird, funny adventures. Talked & talked for hours on end. Laughed & laughed & laughed. He's one of the smartest, sweetest men I've ever known. Friends going back to 2001 or so. Real, vital, current friends.

Sometimes makes me think of all the dear friends who, unlike Jim, still are around, somewhere, A few blocks away, a few towns, a state or two, or even a half or whole continent. But one & all farther than miles can count. My fault, your fault, it does not matter.

Doing the 20th anniversary *Cenacle* in April brought up a lot of old emotions, in looking back at old issues. A sense of futility at how some things are just lost, & everything else is vulnerable. It's no wonder many people believe in a Heaven where all lost will be recovered. It's comforting to believe this, versus entropy & dust.

I can't say what's right or wrong but just wish there was some good tool or magick to re-ignite old friendships. I don't know anyone who has that answer, or is immune to these losses.

Tonight I wish you all well who friended me, then & then & then because, really, what better choice is there?

Labyrinthine & Many Musics Anniversaries

Labyrinthine & Many Musics also mark anniversaries this month, each of them now 9 years in the making, & counting. *Lx* is 2457 pages, & *MM* thus far contains 582 poems. Open-ended, ongoing, as back in 2006 I decided that there was no point to keep succeeding one new project with the next.

Just give them good names, & go. From Seattle to Portland to Boston, they've come & come & come. I love them dearly, & many of my happiest hours are spent in their pages (some in this issue!).

Really Good Juice

It was some really good juice we drank, such that all that night, on every surface in the house, I saw moving numbers & letters & symbols, constantly moving, me unable to focus long enough to identify any of them up close.

It was fascinating. Walls, floors, my hands. In the bedroom, jungles appeared, & a bicycle floating in mid-air. Why? What was my mind doing? Was it a kind of strange play? I was not scared. Gone the next day. Months later, still haunts me deep.

I Wrote These Pages . . .

I wrote these pages in our house's downstairs rec room, on the green couch here. We've had this couch since 2004, living in Seattle. It's old but very comfortable. Newer couch up in living room, very nice, so this one sat on less often. Jellicle Guild meetings & such.

I wanted to, or had to, really both, write these *Notes* tonight, & chose here for the same juju I mentioned earlier. It's quiet in this house. One pays for room, quiet, green. There are old calendars up (*Peanuts & Fraggie Rock*), old movie posters (*Wizard of Oz*), old pennants (Mohawk Trail, circus, Dallas Cowboys). My LPs in cabinets in the corner, & ancient stereo system (got receiver fixed recently too).

I had no ideas what to write this time. Before tonight, some failed tries, some semi-useless notes. Instead, I just let it roll. Some notebooks nearby, some dream journal pages. Mostly, me, past 1 a.m., need this to be written, & wanting to capture, share, some of the flavor of the last

two months. Kassi's long since been asleep, wasn't feeling well today. So I just wrote & wrote, black pen (good juju), old notebook (same), green couch (even more). Polly iPod, of course (juju-iest!).

By the way, & in closing, I don't know what I'd do with \$100 mill & a year to spend it. I don't know if I'd start slow & build up, or spread it around (though probably) & invest (maybe), or just pay off mortgage & student loan. It's a puzzle to not know since most of our lives grapple hard with money; it's nearly always the factor of importance that time itself is to us.

I guess I'd wish people better health & longer lives than more money. Less regret, less loneliness, less uncertainty. Less bitterness, remorse, confusion. More music, more dancing, more green.

Maybe I would just help the others spend their \$100 mill for awhile into the year, to learn, to observe, to comfort. Oh, & I'd make sure that if someone was going out to the remote Alaska wilderness, & they didn't check in, we'd have a way to track them. Easy smart thing to do.

Ⓢ 6/01/2015



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Joe Coleman**Rest in Reeses' Peaces**

Lord,

let me choke on a chocolate bar,
or drown in an ocean of honey,
that those who grieve my loss may say,
"His passing was tragic—but funny!"

Then lay me out in a caramel coffin,
with a marshmallow pillow 'neath my head.

Dress me in garments of butterscotch,
and I shall eat sugar the days I'm dead.

Tuck some toffees into my pocket,
plus a few peppermints (for my breath . . .),
a Raisenet rosary in my fingers.
I'll sleep in a sweet diabetic death.

When I draw near to the pearly gates,
St. Pete will greet me with Hershey in hand,
give me a harp and halo of licorice.
I'll enter the promised Candyland.

Amen.

* * *

The Affection Parameters

I love you enough,
 I truly do.
 On a ten-point love-scale,
 I'm feeling "2"
 (which, for me, is impressive
 and quite a lot . . .).
 I love you. I love you.
 I love you not.
 Yet *maybe* I love you . . .
 I love you,
 —a bit.
 That's the best I can offer,
 so just deal with it.

Love: up to a point
 beyond which—no go!
 It's tough to express this,
 and harder to show,
 my non-darling sweetie.
 My non-turtledove,
 my heart overflows with conditional love,
 which is cautiously partial,
 and maybe sincere.
 My nearly beloved,
 you're my demi-dear.

I'm not touchy-feely with words as a rule.
 I find you are likeable.
 You're semi-cool.
 I will love you a long time,
 until I move on.
 But for now, I DO LOVE YOU.
 I swear I do (insert name).

* * *

Moth

A dusty solitary moth
is darting through his darkest night.
He finds himself attracted,
helpless,
to the candlelight.
He's drawn.

He flies to the glowing flame.
My instinct is the same.
I fan my wings
to extinguish it
in a futile
fiery game.

I get so close
I start to burn.
My name is Moth.
I never learn.

* * *

Career Day at P.S. #177

Shepherding in an urban environment presents unique challenges, the greatest of which is finding a pasture. The urban shepherd will also contend with considerable frustration as he or she teaches sheep to wait for yellow lights, obey pedestrian signals, and stay inside a crosswalk.

Sheep are easily startled by carhorns and motorcycles. They run into traffic risking injury when their feet get caught in manhole covers. Fortunately, sheep instinctively know how to tuck and roll . . . thereby avoiding being struck and killed by motor vehicles.

While wolves and coyotes have been forced out of downtown districts due to skyrocketing rent, the urban shepherd must always be prepared to defend the flock against packs of butchers: the sheep's most dangerous remaining enemy. Occasionally there are disputes with urban cattle ranchers as well.

A particularly stupid sheep may, from time to time, wander off, following somebody in a sweater. Such losses are compensated for by the particularly stupid office worker who, now and then, will infiltrate the flock, enhancing its appearance with a splash of colorful synthetic fabrics. It is advantageous to have office workers in the flock since they often bring their own lunch.

Sheep are fascinated by streetcorner B-ball; sheep will watch a pick-up game of hoops for hours while nibbling on litter. This gives the shepherd a chance to grab a coffee and chill before moving everybody along and resuming the search for a pasture. The job pretty much consists of keeping an eye on the sheep while looking for a pasture.

Language skills are not required since sheep don't talk. Applicants need basic math: shepherds must be able to count rapidly moving legs and divide by four to determine the number of sheep in their care. Most shepherds dress casual/comfortable. We offer competitive wages, full benefits (including dental), and a sign-on bonus if you have a sheep dog or your own shepherd's crook.

Vegetarians are preferred. For further information, speak with Miss Bo Peep.

* * * * *



Hella_Brad Live-Tweets His First Acid Trip

[Trip Report]

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- » well, wish me luck, please pray i don't get hit by a car or arrested, and we're going to do this
- » aaand it's on the tongue.
- » the bus is on time. I am listening to R Kelly to keep a positive headspace going.
- » it's a beautiful day outside today, I could not imagine a better day to be doing this. so many flowers, nice breezes
- » a cute girl just sat down on the bus and leaned up against my legs like an armrest but then realized they were legs and apologized profusely
- » it was v awkwardly cute, I think acid must be magic
- » we're at roughly 30 minutes now and I feel very happy and am having weird thoughts: "wow my fingers look so alive" "I feel like a chameleon"
- » WHAT THE HECK THIS GUY NEXT TO ME JUST POPPED THE EMERGENCY EXIT WINDOW OUT I'M LAUGHING SO HARD LET'S GET OFF THE BUS NOW
- » DAMN everything is WAY prettier without a window in between me and it
- » green things are so green, flowers are so beautiful and intricate, shiny things are radiantly shiny
- » I'm glad I showered before doing this because smells are EXTREMELY NOTICEABLE

» it seems a little early for anything visual at 45 min but all the signs on this grocery store are glowing so lets go inside

» just a tiny glow, like the sunlight sticks to it. maybe it does that normally and I'm just noticing it for the first time today

» I helped a cute girl back her car out of a parking stall in the grocery store parking lot. maybe that's why I was supposed to come here

» normally I would be too shy to do that but today I am trying to live w/ PURPOSE now let's go buy VEGAN ICE CREAM I just decided that's next

» the biggest piece of evidence that these drugs are effecting me so far has to be the differences in my signature. it looks so much happier

» there's a wedding party in this pizzeria, lets check that out. the bride is eating pepperoni and mushrooms.

» I didn't intrude on them but it was nice to see, just a bunch people in wedding clothes eating pizza. what a weird cool day

» WOW shade feels so nice I'm just gonna sit in the shade and watch how Light plays over everything in the street

» are you aware of the tremendous amount of reflective surfaces visible in the day to day world. there's so many

» like every single part of the standard automobile is capable of reflecting light and you can see those beams of light as it drives, wow

» we're at 1 hour and ten minutes so far. I'm not even sure if this is what acid is supposed to be like but SO MANY people are talking to me

» so I guess we're doing something right, here. I'm sitting in a really nice big plush armchair for a moment to get my bearings

» oops I left the bookshop w/out saying goodbye to the lady who owns it. I hope she forgives me for just sitting in her chair to eat ice cream

» I probably should have bought a book but for some reason I don't feel like buying books today and I'm trying to go with my instincts

» oh a soap attendant is grilling me about what soaps I like best I don't know what to say

» she left me alone after that

» there's so much green stuff in the world. when did all of the green stuff get here, I don't remember it showing up.

» I like it, it makes me curious

» literally every point of light in my vision is catching my eye and it's getting a little difficult to tweet. let's find some more shadow

» I forgot I have my iPod maybe let's listen to music while we walk around and look at lights

» it's getting a little insane the degree of perception I have today, I can hear levels I've never noticed before in these tracks

» I'm gonna take a break & eat more ice cream it's starting to thaw out so I want to enjoy it. we're at 1 hour 30 minutes for those counting

» I think this is the nicest day I've ever spent outside in my life

» the shadows of the tree I'm sitting under bobbed as I tweeted that and I'm imagining that's nature saying "yes that's right"

» .@Labrite34 probly how everything seems to POP in my vision. I feel like everything is important & cool to look at, I like everything a lot

» surreptitiously touching all the trees on the side of the road. oops that's a lightpost. there that's a tree. I like this.

» I found a really nice tree, I'm gonna hang around this one for a bit. a good tree to lean on and touch.

» little seed things are falling from it, I can hear them hitting the ground

» I went into a music store for the first time. did you guys know this many kinds of guitars exist. this is mindblowing

» I'm looking at all the drums and cymbals and imagining what they all sound like. boom, crash.

» did you know: there is no actual music playing in this music store and it's starting to weird me out. let's leave

» have you ever really stared at an apartment building and tried to comprehend like how many people were in there doing life stuff

» go outside and stare at an apartment building. try to guess how many people inside are reading a book. guess how many are kissing.



» just went up to a car and touched it. just ran my hands all over a strangers car. nobody saw. I've never done that before. it was dusty.

» so much stuff I've never done before today I don't care if it's mundane it's all new and that's fun

» the sun keeps getting brighter the longer I'm outside and I can see more and more light everywhere. some things are almost glowing.

» have you ever sat down in a field of grass and sat really still and watched every blade of grass move individually in the breeze

» that's what I'm doing right now only I'm not sitting still and instead of grass it's the world. I can see everything moving individually

» I'm watching this one tree right now and seeing every individual movement of every individual leaf and it's completely hyonotizing

» I could probably sit in front of this cafe and stare at this tree for hours but there's more interesting stuff to do

» a homeless man just asked me for some smokes and I told him I didn't have smokes but he could have this ice cream if he wanted

» he gave me a fist bump and said I was great and blessed me so things are going pretty great around the two hour mark

» I knew that ice cream would come in handy sooner or later

» I opened a can of soda and it sprayed all over me and instead of getting mad I laughed because it felt good and new and weird

» the soda is also delicious, I'm licking it off my hands and feeling happy to be alive.

» I went into a convenience store to wash my hands but the slushy machine was making a terrifying noise. lesson learned. let's stay outside

» sharing the ice cream with that old homeless man made me feel really buoyant like I took some of the glowing outside world into my heart

» there's a little bird hopping around on the sidewalk and no one is noticing him. I said hi.

» I wish I could have gently reminded people to look at the bird but they all seemed busy. they missed out, he was friendly & nice to look at

» I'm on campus now and it's very nice, the campus smells great. everything smells great today.

» I'm glad we're doing this.

» I think I'll do a lap around campus and then I'll they and find the frat house where I'm supposed to go for a barbeque, that sounds nice

» there are so many bird songs going on right now this is incredible to listen to I wish you could hear this I love birds

» everything sounds beautiful even the snippets of conversation I hear as I walk past people sounds like a song.

» that bike is a song. these leaves are a song. that AC vent is a song. that door hinge is a song. those wind chimes are a song. my footsteps

» I'm in the middle of campus and everything is still except for that squirrel in the tree right there hey squirrel

» everything smells so fantastic and there are so many new smells everywhere and there is a little brook of running water

» just sitting in the middle of this area behind the library and listening to nature and feeling like I'm at the center of something beautiful

» I wish the squirrels could come over to my table so I could look at them & pet them but I get their apprehension. we can't ALL be on acid

» we're at 2.5 hours and I feel like we're going really strong at this point so that's very good. I feel really in tune with nature.

» WOW JUST AS I TWEETED THAT LIKE A HUNDRED PIGEONS FLEW UP OUT OF NOWHERE AND ALL CIRCLED ABOVE ME AND STARTED COOING IN THE TREES

» I THINK I CAST A SPELL OR SOMETHING BECAUSE THAT WAS HONESTLY MAGICAL

» wow for a second that was like completely overwhelming to me, I felt really dizzy and there was so much movement, so many birds

» hey it's the wedding party from earlier they're on campus now it's nice to see them again I hope they enjoyed their pizza

» haha the wedding people came here in a weird limousine and I'm laughing really hard at how weird the limousine looks haha

» limousines have to be the funniest looking cars they must be very secure and emotionally confident to go out every day looking like that

» theres a big fenced off area in the main quad but I'm going inside because it's just a fence around some grass it seems pretty harmless

this was a good decision, there is a really nice warm

» this was a good decision, there is a really nice warm table sitting here and it's nice to just feel the sun all over me

5:45 PM - 8 Sep 2012

2 REPLY TO 3.5K LIKES

» I'm glad everyone is sending me these supportive messages even if I'm not responding to many of ny interactions right now

» I've actually gotten a weird amount of hate tweets over this but I've been ignoring them in a manner truly disrespectful to the haters

» DEAR HATERS. I APOLOGIZE FOR IGNORING YOU. I'M JUST LIVING MY LIFE. HAVE A GOOD AFTERNOON. NAMASTE.

» found a rly nice waterbottle on the ground in quad but I misspelled every word in this tweet the first time I typed it so I'm not keeping it

» just noticed the beauty of everything and also my skin feels amazing to be in and today is so great and all of that at once made me tear up

» very overcome with emotion, momentarily there, like a huge cresting wave

» that's exactly what it felt like, like standing in one of those wave pools I'd go to as a kid & letting it lift you up like you're weightless

» I feel wrapped up in a thousand cushioning thoughts thank you to everyone joining me on this trip today this has truly been amazing to share

» currently walking down the longest road I've had to walk down today in search of this barbeque, it's scope is breathtaking

» I have walked through like three distinct neighborhoods looking for this frat house. so many houses and all of them sadly not the one I seek

» very nice houses though. one or two of them I was hoping would be the house I was looking for because they looked fun to party in

» I think I see it! I think I see the place! I'm very excited by this development!

» there's a pool in the front yard and water is spraying everywhere it's pretty wonderful



» I like this but I might have to cut down on the tweting because so many people are interacting with me and it takes a large amount of focus

» @big_dick_brutal: do they know you're on a/c'd

» nope

» this house is like a maze, so many twists and turns

» it used to be two houses but they knocked out a bunch walls. there's secret stairwells and ceiling panels that slide out to reveal secrets

» "have we met?" "yes." "really?" "no. probably not. but I wondered what your reaction would be. you look familiar."

» I think I'm actually putting THEM off balance. how weird is that.

» I'm walking around the maze house feeling like I'm exploring my own mind while I sip beer and we talk about hotwiring cars

» I'm making them listen to purity ring and were all laughing while they try and get the Jacuzzi working

» maybe I should make some friends Here they seem pretty okay for a buncha crazy dudes in a maze house with a Jacuzzi on the lawn

» haha this place was trashed by a party last night and there's body paint everywhere, all ovrr the place

» "you'd think that this would be easy to clean up. I mean, it's paint... made for bodies. it shouldn't stick to things like this."

» we live in a world where there is neon paint made and manufactured for our bodies

» but we also have iPads and that juxtaposition is hilarious

» buncha tribal savages tapping away on glowing screens

» "don't swear, that lady across the street is carrying a baby"

» there are gnats dancing in the sunlight like a beautiful cascade of flickering sparks

» aww some tweets got saved in the drafts folder while I was in the soap shop here you can see them now

» oh wow this soap shop is almost overwhelming but it feels so good to be in here right now. I feel like I can smell everything

» I said I like “that soap” and she said “why that one in particular” and I said “why do I have to have a reason to like a soap. or anything”

» I’m teaching the frat guys how to juggle and the front yard is just a sea of flashing flying glittering goofy pool toys

» what a delightful afternoon

» I wonder if they just think I’m full of childlike wonder and easygoing optimism or if they figured out I’m on acid yet

» taking all the frat guys to the organic market, teaching them about vegan food, laughing my butt off

» no joke it’s cool as hell that they’re accommodating me as the only vegan guy here at the barbecue and I really like that

» phone is dying a bit these tweets may experience a brief interruption I will continue to tweet until I power down

» four frat guys walking out of an organic market with their arms full of Portobello mushrooms & me leading them like some kind of pied piper

» they’re all trying kombucha for the first time because one of them bought a jug when I wasn’t looking lmao that’s hilarious



* * * * *

 Tom Sheehan


Backstairs

Every riser has a name, top to bottom, all thirteen that throw triangle's shadows when evening begins its undertow, when it turns day on itself. *Jimbo*, the top riser, ace of aces, with the moniker my brother carried into Lake Erie in the January madness of '70, prince of all human princes so savage and unreal in memory. I kick the dark side of him nightly, rap the two-hundred-year-old oak with my steel-toed boots, shake him out of that deep sleep, bring him woodenly into the room of long memories.

The bottom riser, the up-starter, Peter's rock of rocks for us, is *Jim*, the old redheaded Marine, Nicaraguan pathfinder in old days. He brought four squared-off tics home in a red leg patch, *Central American tattoo* he called it, a raw map of his indelible jungle warfare. Even when the August moon spills its salad dressing on these boards, or falls like an October cheese on hard-jammed verticals, I hear his voice. *Steady, heads up, hold the fort. Remember me sometime dreaming for you*, come riding on the long ropes of darkness all these years hang on, bridge over jungle hanging between souls slammed apart. He left words overt as road signs, route-haunters, role-setting, square as a truing mechanism, plumb bobs of verbs, directives set by forge.

On my father's shoulders, second off the ground floor, rock-ribbed also, honey-warm, true as Mercator's bearings, mapped for life by grin and grit, is *Edward*. When I step on him, he shrugs back to let me know he is staunchly there, endless cinder, unsmashable stone, constant as old Nahant's inevitable tide. Never a voice raised in fifty years, no foul name called out at twilight, no curse or carping word, no spite or brickyard epithet, nothing less than belief.

Midway of this climb, eighth up where my eyes flatten out, rises *Cuz*, Warren of the 43rd, Patton's boldest scout, dead-eyed killer, saw Panzer tanks under hay, moved pointer-sure in Europe's field, shook loose from cover those iron fledglings, came home a missionary.

Children rise here endeared: shortstop, catcher, karate master, lost/new found artists, past mother, new mother, my seed spread. Oh fired wafers, listeners in thin nights, thirteen steps to dreams beyond oak's mere echoes.

Later, about to descend, calling out other names underfoot, kicking them up to latest versions of step-on company, wishing just one more moment of touch, the ache knows itself.

*Snowless, seeking sleep
treading the fantastic flight
awed gods playing dead*

* * *

Fate Gathers Old Barns

The motley barn here,
like an old stain gone haywire,
is a dread easel.
Knots, carved from calendar walls
like old promises, late hearths,

wait on new campfires,
warmth from Earth's quick beginning.
Only darkness says,
where night points straw-like fingers,
"Knots with deep aches fall from here."

Stars fall, fields of them,
evening leader digging deep,
yesterday's carcass
blinking at eyes' behavior,
roofs with holes articulate.

Shadows on the moon,
tilt surfaces to a smile
where I've seen mandates
dreamed in wooden recesses
envy time, chase whole ages

of transparent death;
like cedars sunk in a swamp,
drowned to Hellish black,
live longer new livelihoods,
live longer than tree derived.

For a hundred storms
this barn has never folded,
only by degrees,
beetles, termite mandibles,
carpenter ant's axe awry.

Barns go back to earth
in steadiest gait of all,
as they are attacked;
their best protection is time,
and that fails them in the end.

Going down sideways,
knees turning beams to one side
in genuflection,
its breath slows, knowing awful
authority of shod hooves.

* * * * *





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Ten

*"Try to forget me.
Try to erase me."*

—Pearl Jam, "Jeremy," 1992.

xliii.

There is a square brick building on the other side of the tracks, yet near no station stop.

If you cross the tracks to the building & push in the unlocked door, you will come to a seemingly empty room.

And yet this building is of great importance, for it is where the Gate-Keeper comes to edit his film **RemoteLand**, where he will spend sleepless months at a time on this work, sometimes nights upon nights on a single scene—

Then, done, he will cause everything to be packed back up into trunks & cases to be traveled elsewhere for his purposes.

Sometimes, tho, he will feel worn, & dull, & so need to shoot something short & complete, or possibly a fragment, & determine later if it borders his masterwork, integrates, or not—

He'll accumulate these bits & pieces until one lucky evening when he is out at his editing building, & there's mushroom tea, & a basket of fruits & nuts, cheeses, a container of taboule, to boot—even seemingly immortal filmmakers need to keep up their strength—

How, you might ask, does such as the Gate-Keeper get his ideas & inspirations? Well, it helps to have a friend like Benny Big Dreams.

Gate-Keeper would visit Dreamland whenever his **RemoteLand** filming responsibilities would yield or necessitate a break. A catnap here or there, a sabbatical.

He'd use a camera he & Benny contrived for the purpose. To the touch, & eye, it was a soft lovely wooden device, light in the hand.

"You could just record by your eye," Benny smiles, knowing his old friend's answer.

"I prefer a camera in my hand," Gate-Keeper says, knowing Benny knows.

Benny lets Gate-Keeper roam the common areas of Dreamland, where images pool & belong to no one person, being, place or time, roam & film—

"Safe travels" Benny sneers fondly—

This all to explain this night & the work Gate-Keeper is reviewing—hence—

There is a third world market, stalls, animals, noise, friendly chaos. All this generally filmed for a bit & then a focus on one man, covered in roots, vines, spiders, yet unperturbed.

The man stands seeming casually in front of a door that is entrance to a whole other place down below, a kind of hotel for the very elite, run by the poor & indigent of the city, & so Gate-Keeper follows through the door & on down into the hotel, too shiny for him here, yet an inner itch heads him on to what turns out to be a ballroom, filled to overflow, men in tuxedos, women in long bright gowns, & the speaker at the podium is human-shaped but not human—

Speaks: "One learns, not right away, that one is part of the neural network flow, that humanity as physical bodies no longer exists but is preserved & perpetuated as data which, within which, appears to be a beautiful, peaceful, green green world!"

There is clapping, lots of it, till he hushes with an urgent hand.

"But this is only one possible path forward from here. You all know this. And it is not the most likely. But that is why we are here tonight."

More wilder cheering & the Gate-Keeper grimaces & drifts along from there—

The hotel peters out rather oddly, not just a wall & done, more like trees, small, weak ones, then less weak, we were in a hotel, now a kind of menacing woods, at least menacing at first, the Gate-Keeper films randomly as he walks along.

Comes to a building in these Woods, a large one room ramshackle structure, climbs a set of broken steps, on in—

Immediately he realizes this is the wrong room & he should go. It is a fairly empty room but there's something odd here, something on the walls, floors, ceiling, on his hands: numbers, letters, symbols, words, Gate-Keeper panics & is unsure where the door is, he can't focus on the individual characters when he tries, finally pushes through the half-found door outside—

They don't leave his skin or the ground around him. Not on the trees but everywhere else.

He moves quickly through the Woods now, impatiently, knowing he could call on Benny at

any point, *or simply wake up*, but he refuses, these numbers & symbols & formulae on his arms & body & camera & ground around him—he pushes on—

Finally he blinks, blinks harder, & he's out of the Woods, & here is come to something.

The air is troubled, rippled, *wrong* feeling. It's night-time. He is out of doors. There are around him piles of bodies, silent, high piles of bodies. Are they dead?

He films, high & low, close close to the bodies, the faces are mute, devoid of living personality, there is a switch on his camera, he flicks it, & the camera can now sniff the bodies, if they are dead, it is still uncertain they are—

And there are enemies around, he realizes, he cannot stay here, he has to move, but these bodies, he pushes at them, strikes them with his camera, they are slow, sluggish, but begin to rise, to move, there is a cave nearby, a tunnel away from here, & we move along, & further, & faster, Gate-Keeper feels powerful, feels like he is *all* of these people at once, all of them is him, he is moving all of him along—

Gate-Keeper sips his mushroom tea, nibbles his cheese, & watches what he filmed.

On his left hand, the forehand, are still the moving numbers & letters & symbols, constantly moving & changing, he is awake, yet there they are.

The fragment ends suddenly & now a classroom. High school? I am myself, an ancient old man who does not look older than 45 or 50, sitting at an uncomfortable desk, in the front, & a glance around tells me they are all young. The girls in tight jeans, halter tops, mini-skirts. The boys more indifferently dressed. I don't know what they see when they look at me—

The teacher looks like the one from back in that ballroom, still human-shaped but not human. He reads from the book I notice all of us, including me, have open on our desks.

“The half-dead bodies were roused by the stranger to march with him, through the caves & tunnels, as tho a destination, as tho he could bring them somewhere & rouse them back to life.

“They limped & staggered behind him for what was likely miles until they came to a central great cavern. In its center, a very tall tree rose up high, high, & its top seemed to disappear into a blurry shimmer—

“No longer led, since the stranger had no more ideas, & was exhausted, the half-dead bodies shuffled around until they fell in random places on the rocky floor. Oddly, but surely, the bodies moved slowly toward one another, eventually mimicking the piles the stranger had originally roused them from.

“Those watching all this were very quiet, though they sniffed with great interest.”

The Gate-Keeper stops the film at this point & a train rolls loudly by, rusted cars heavily weighted with freight, shambling by. He opens the shade next to the door & watches its passing from the shadows. The mushroom tea has focused him to his work; he feels calm & peaceful.

Sits back in his armchair, the train passed, daylight nearly gone. Nods, makes a clicking noise, & candles in every part of the seemingly empty room, empty save for his chair & work-station, light up at once.

His armchair is grey & old & leans back crookedly, but he has grown comfortable with it over time, & rarely tumbles out.

Speaks to you. "This whole idea of a film thousands or tens of thousands of years old troubles you, confuses, whatever. And myself, what am I? You wonder. Where do I come from? Am I a man?"

Not very tall, somehow heavy yet also well-muscled, bald, his eyes a shocking tender blue, he gazes 'pon ye quietly, no smile or frown.

"I didn't begin at the beginning tho I ended up there. For a long time it seemed like I was picked up & flung from one time & place to the next, every so often, & I would film, & then be flung again to another time/place."

He laughs. "I have two theories about my origins. The first is that I am from one place. This would make sense, that I come from somewhere. The second is that I come from numerous places. Like the Princess you so enjoy. Known as Iris, as Chrisakah, et cetera."

Bows his head, as though thinking. Raises again. "I don't think either is so easy to prove. I am not from Emandia, or elsewhere, like her. And I am not nearly immortal, like her kind.

"I am growing older. Yet not always, not continuously. Sometimes I arrive somewhere & am a little younger. But only a little most times. Whoever flings me can only de-age me so much."

The one-room building is now fully dark, save for the many candles. Even these struggle to illuminate it. Gate-Keeper snaps his fingers & all the lights go out. The room calms.

"Oh, & my name. Such confusion. This book introduced me & then later the Tangled Gate. Am I its keeper? I don't . . . think . . . so. I think my name refers to my film. I think who titled me does not understand that films aren't literally real, & thus I keep the Gate at its entrance.

"I don't . . . think . . . I began . . . as a filmmaker either. Sometimes I think I only wish to know this. But mostly I make my film & delight in it." He turns from you, & me, & resumes his work.

xliv.

Kinley & Christina are still sitting at the Fountain, each having cupped a handful of water for the other to drink.

“What would happen if we didn’t drink? Just walked in?”

“I don’t know, Christina.”

“Dumb to try?”

“No. I think it helps, but wouldn’t hurt if we didn’t.”

Christina nods. Feels so much happier now they’re here.

“What now?”

“Well, it would be good to find Maya & see if she’s OK.”

“And if she has quills or feathers yet.”

Kinley laughs. He seems happier too.

Christina says, “That means Creatures.”

Kinley nods. “But I don’t think we should think of any of this as a linear prerogative.”

“Linear?”

“I mean, I don’t think things happen in an intended or intentional order here.”

Christina makes a face. Kinley snickers.

“I’m saying way too obscurely that we can *wish* to find Maya, & carry this wish along, but we can’t set out to find her.”

“Oh.”

“But I think we will.”

“What about the Kitty Wagon?”

Kinley laughs again.

“I think it will come along when we need it for our wish.”

Christina nods, stands, holds out her hand. “Well, we can walk right now. And it will come along some . . . other . . . right now?” Kinley is pulled up, nodding, “Exactly! I think . . .”

Going past the Fountain entails a choice. Two paths lead away from it. So: left or right?

“Which?” they ask each other simultaneously, & laugh again.

Kinley’s look is now strange. “Both?”

Christina’s look isn’t strange. “What? How?”

They sit back down on the Fountain’s edge again. Kinley thinking hard, Christina spooked.

For the first time, Kinley realizes he is not wearing the dress suit he had on for the last Realist party they went to. He’s wearing his overcoat. Checks its inner pockets. Secret Books!

Christina tries to calm. Remembers she wished for this. Wished for the Boat Wagon & Maya too, but them not yet. But this is better than those parties.

“Can they help us, Kinley?”

“I’m sure they can.”



Come Stay in Impville!



“What about all that time you spent studying the Gate from the Tower?”

Kinley nods but says nothing. But rather than her waiting while he studies the Secret Books, he hands her several.

“We need the fine brain inside your sexy body to figure this out,” he says fondly.

Pleased, & tasked, Christina nods & begins to study them too.

xlvi.

The Boat Wagon atop Calgary the Sea Dragon’s head, or shnoggin as it’s called, is borne along many miles over the sea until in the distance a bit of land comes into the view.

“The Island, Toby!” Jazz says happily. Toby nods, but isn’t so sure. Still, her hand is still in his grasp, & so he wonders if it so much matters.

Yet, too, he’s bringing her to her Master, or former Master, & to her sister Ashleigh. *What does it mean? Will they take her hand from him?*

Calgary continues to fly them steadily toward this land. *Thwup! Thwup! Thwup!* Jazz pulls him closer, nestles herself in his loose grasp.

No, he concludes, *they won’t take her from him. No.*

“What is it, Toby?” her bright eyes now upon him.

Takes the plummet, talks. “I don’t know what will happen when we get there, Jazz.”

She smiles at him, rivens him, mends him again. “It’s OK. I’m not worried.”

“Why?”

“You came for me, Toby. You’re not who you were. You’re going to protect me. I’m going to protect you too.” She kisses him softly on the cheek.

Is this romance? Is it some other kind of love? Toby has no words, or ways to explain it. He doesn’t kiss her back, cup her breast, make a move to twine with her. Instead, to stay his inner fool, he smiles lightly at her.

Calgary begins to descend to the rocky shore of the Island. “Nearly there!” his funny friendly growly voice announces.

Calgary lands us in the foamy shallow water, & the Kittees drive the Boat Wagon down his back & along his tail & back into the water. We wave & thank him, he nods & smiles & *thwup! thwup! thwup!* flies off to the sea.

The Kittees paddle the Boat Wagon to a sandy gap in the rocks. I get out & help push us further up on land. Jazz unbuckles & I help her out. Her smile at these small gestures could make a late-blooming gentleman or knight of me.

The Kittees & their Fish Friend remain in their seats, though, & I realize they aren't coming any further. I'm sad for this a bit. But nod & help them push back into the water.

"Thank you," I say, humbly.

The Kittees' blue eyes stare me steadily & the Fish says, "Keep her hand close. See you again."

The Kittees start paddling & eventually their strange little craft is on its way. Jazz smiles & throws them kisses.

I splash back to her to follow the Fish's advice.

xlvi.

One more editing session & the Gate-Keeper will spread out his mat & sleep. Simply sleep, no filming, no Benny Big Dreams.

Among his side projects is one very dear to him. It seems to have been one he's been doing a long time. A TV show.

[*Trip Town*? you ask, eager to know finally that it & **RemoteLand** are, indeed, connected. We're not going to find that out right now. Soon, though. Maybe.]

It's called *Clarendon Island* & it's a show in love with the small details of its characters. Maisie, the blonde girlish protagonist. Shane, its large-eyed handsome brown bear. The trio of Faeries who come in & out of the story unpredictably.

He will spend stretches at a time filming episodes of the show. Or, rather, stretches of story he will later edit into episodes.

How to explain? The Island is real, not a set. The performers live there, created for the roles they play, & yet aware they are playing roles. Some will, have, come & gone over the years. To other lives, to the rest of the world? Something.

So they know him as the Camera-man, not the Gate-Keeper. They don't know of his life or projects off the Island. They are always glad to see him when he comes.

Does the show go on when he's not there? Do they rest, or rehearse, or suntan on the gorgeous singing sands of the beach? He does not know. He isn't there to have such conversations, ask such questions. They are glad to see him when he comes, & all to their places, & the Writer/Director cries, "Action!"

Ah yes, the Writer/Director. They have been separate people at times, even more than one of each.

The current one considers himself an *auteur* of sorts, whose scripts are more like scriptures to be revered deeply.

The film he has now to look at is from his most recent visit. A strange one. One of tumult & change.

Nobody was on the beach when he arrived. Unusual. So he'd simply walked up the beach

into the Woods, & still found nobody. Eventually I come to the Boulevard, & guess to keep walking to the Cafe where he often works.

The shops along the way are closed up, though it isn't nighttime. There are no sidewalks, just wide street with shops on either side. No cars though. No people or anyone else right now. Nobody.

There he is, no surprise. Sitting at his usual table in that courtyard, head of dark spiky hair & large square black glasses bent low to his work. No doubt: a stubby pencil & a small blank book, colored cover shiny with spangles & stars.

Considers. Waves a hand & calls softly. "Hello! I've arrived!"

He looks up briefly, sees me, says nothing. Resumes writing. I'm used to this often being the case. He's kind of a nut. The cast complains. I nod, listen. Maisie pouts. We've considered each other more than once over time. Not yet.

Maybe when he quits to go make feature films or write novels. He can't stay perpetually. Yet I need a writer & director. It wouldn't work otherwise.

The courtyard is empty but him & many tables. The cafe adjacent is closed. Even the nearby stone chess tables are empty of players.

I take a black metal chair & sit across from him, him scribbling for life on the round metal table between us. Its strange perforated design of circles, diamonds, clovers, more obscure shapes. Nearly a language?

"Where's everybody, Abe?"

No answer.

I hit the table with my fist. His pencil, book, & glasses jump & skew.

Looks up, those bleary brown eyes he gets when composing. Barely sees me.

"We're leaving."

"Leaving?"

"Yah, going to a new Island. I'm writing the season-ending episode that explains it, sends us on our way."

I lean forward & tap his black square glasses into place. He smiles, still vaguely.

"Why?"

"They're not happy here. So we're going to travel."

"Travel?"

"Maybe one Island a season. I don't know. I'm going along for now."

"Were you going to tell me, or was I just going to show up to an empty Island?"

Obscurely, he shakes his head.

I sigh. "Is that the script? Are you done?"

“Almost.”

“Finish. I’ll wait.”

So he resumes his scribbling & I sit, well, I sat then & waited.

When he finished, he was very excited, just got up & ran off to the shore. I guessed the cast & crew were waiting there for him.

So I followed, but reluctantly. Would I follow them, was I that committed to this?

See, here’s why I followed, here’s why I bothered. It’s because I remembered watching this show when I was a boy. It was in my small bedroom, on my black-&-white TV, I got it at the Goodwill with my paper route money. It worked good, especially when I saved up too & bought one of those TV antennas you turn with a dial.

And I watched *Clarendon Island* on this TV of mine. What? Me? A boy? How from then me to me now? A boy to some kind of thousands-year-old film-making Creature?

I try to remember as I follow him to the shore.

I remember even bits of being a young man. Those paintings I did. The buzz in them. How I stopped sending paintings to my dealer but, eventually, resumed painting. But then the paintings became something else. I guess I begged the buzz a little, before it left.

For it was leaving me for awhile.

This has never so vividly come back to me like now, while I’m chasing that crazy Abe, why remember tonight? Why remember this vividly?

I asked the buzz to give me something more than paintings, something big I could spend many years on.

This is what I did: I went out in the White Woods, I knew what they were, & I brought a very full bottle of mushroom tea. More than I’ve ever dared. Way more than.

I came to a clearing I knew was magical, more so than just being in those Woods at all. In full moonlight, the clearing seemed to be shaped like a temple. The temple almost real enough to walk into.

I walked into the temple that night, right through the door, into a room bright, glaringly bright. At first I just stumbled around. Nothing.

“Help me! I need more than paintings that freak people out! I need something grander! Give me something I can spend my life on! Please! I know you are going away from me. Help me first!”

I walked through that room, crying like that, until I noticed there was a door on the other side, & I staggered toward it, & pushed through it, & fell to the floor.

Quiet a moment.

Looked up. A kind of office. Walls lined with books. A fireplace. An armchair. Something in that chair.

A film camera.

But my boyhood? I still have that black-&-white TV set, I keep it at a restaurant I sometimes run for amusement. It's a good way to show humble to an occasional inquirer I have to deal with.

So that's why I'm here & following Abe, because once I watched this program on TV & was a boy. I was a boy somewhere, I had a paper route, a room, a TV, an antenna. *It's true.*

I hurry.

xlvi.

He arrives to the shore of the Island, sees noone. Looks up. The Sea Dragon is already far up in the sky. I simply filmed it as it flew farther & farther away.

Thwup! Thwup! Thwup!

Sitting in my editing hut tonight, sipping my mushroom tea, I am sad again & anew. I don't suppose this is a film I would do much with. Just a movie stub souvenir for me alone.

Will they film the new season without me? I don't think so. I think they will summon me when I'm needed. It's how it's always worked.

You see, I had to find *Clarendon Island* in the first place. I mean, I was a watcher & it wasn't until I began my work, had *long* begun my work, that I could get near to it.

It was why I helped to conceive *TripTown*. [*Yes! Connection!*] Helped because I had a secret purpose that my partners didn't.

It was the cross-over episode between *TripTown* & *Clarendon Island*. The moment when I skipped from one to the other.

I was simply the hotshot director of **RemoteLand**. Why would I do a TV show?

They were younger than me, I guess, newer to the work than me. Came to me thinking maybe I would remember their names for some future need. No chance I'd hire them right now.

Came to my diner. Long hair, tie-dye rags. But serious. OK.



Didn't like coffee. Juice. OK.

Had an idea for a TV show. A network maybe interested in it. My name involved in *any* way would sell it.

"What's it called?"

They were silent.

"It's called *Trip Town*," I suggest.

They smile, pleased, scared by my bluntness.

"I'll write the two-hour premiere episode. Then I'll hand it over to you two. You'll write every episode save a few for guest writers. Good ones. Not TV writers. You'll coach their crazy literary ideas into workable scripts."

They nodded, wordless.

"I'll return once a season to write the season premiere. Bank on it."

They were trembling. Close to crying.

"Now go sell it. My script will be in that mailbox out there in two weeks. The red handle will be up. Fetch it but don't come in."

OK, I was being a little mean. But I wrote it. And the next season. And the next. And when it was cancelled they came to me desperate & I told them who to see to finance syndication.

And along the way I wrote the crossover episode that got me into *Clarendon Island*.

Of course I was made to agree to take one of them with me. The one sailing away on that Sea Dragon with the whole cast & crew. Abe.

I'm done. This hasn't calmed me down.

Maybe I'll let Cordelia finally come on set. Maybe she's ready to be my new lead actress.

The boys can come for now, I guess. They're sweet. Her flavor is . . . something else.

xlvi.

Well, "new lead actress" again. She was the first on *Trip Town*. She was the reason it got on the air, & I'd guess part of the reason it was cancelled.

Those hippy writer kids sold the network on the show, & it was mostly by my name & guarantee to write the season premieres.

But I didn't have a script. I didn't even have an idea to go on. I *wanted* to write on *Clarendon*

Island & my challenge was to create a show singular of itself, but eventually ready for my cross-over idea.

Eventually it came together but at first it didn't.

I don't have an actual home anymore. I stay instead, when I do, & it's not often, in a strange hotel in a mid-sized Northeastern US city.

Maybe it's sentiment. There was a period of time, after that strange moment in the White Woods, its clearing, Temple, film camera, when I doubted.

How to tell. I walked out of the White Woods with my spooky magic camera but I didn't know what to do next.

I didn't have a home, just a rucksack. Some jeans, underwear, thick button-down shirts. A very few books. A radio, pink, shaped like a white-faced cat. AM-FM. Cassette player too.

I walked. I walked & walked. I had a canteen, blue, shaped like the old Kool-Aid containers. Souvenir of my childhood. Saved up for it. Drank a lot of Kool-Aid then. Now only water. I walked for miles & miles, slept maybe two hours a night, wherever I was—

Eventually I ended up in that mid-sized Northeastern US city & it was no more interesting than the highways, villages, towers, schools, factories—

I filmed it all, & especially the forests, rivers, swamps, & so on between those other places—but it wasn't a story, a narrative—

But the hotel. It was tall, very tall for this not-so-big city, & I couldn't see its top, there were always clouds up there, *always*—

It occurred to me that I should walk into that hotel & get a room & sleep a whole night. Maybe it would help.

Called the Hotel Noah. I stood there in that dusky evening, it was late April, a cool night, stood there trying to figure out how old this hotel was, & I couldn't figure it out, anymore than how tall it was—

So I walked through the front door, first time of many over the years, & always have found it disorienting entering, the indoor glare of the chandeliers that felt like summer sunshine, the low *hmmmmmm* that was ever present, that comforted, the lobby sometimes longer, sometimes wider than other times, & the shifting mirrors embedded in the walls, each one different, more than a funhouse, much more, these were more than image distorters, much more. One would show you hundreds of years old, another as a kind of embryonic starchild, a third as a sort of Creature, or sometimes Beast, shifting, shifting; that first time I fell to my knees as I took it all in, I felt paralyzed & wanted to leave—all I'd wanted was a room!

Then someone was helping me up. Gently, firmly. Smaller than me, but I felt strength in his hand, his arm. Even as I stood, he still kept his hand on my arm.

"It's OK," he said softly, gruffly.

"What is . . . this place?" I panted.

"My name," he replied slowly, "is Cosmic Early."

He led me to a room he said was not being used, next to his. I was still weak, not knowing why. Like a nurse or servant, he led me to this room & undressed me from my travel-smudged clothes. Led me to the bathroom & gave me a discrete washing down. Pulled the curtains closed, turned on the bedside lamp, & got me tucked into bed. Pulled up a chair next to me.

"Shouldn't I check in?" I asked weakly.

He held up the room's key. "It's taken care of." Smiling.

I wanted to know who he was, what this place was. I wondered why I didn't want simply to leave. But I didn't. It's like I had been walking for days & miles to arrive here.

The truth of the matter is this: I told Cosmic Early my dilemma, & he offered to help me. I didn't know then he was some kind of legendary underground reclusive author. That *nobody* knew he lived in this hotel. Here he was known as someone else. Liked. More than liked. Here he was part of things, & that other writing life was totally partitioned.

"Why did you tell me?" I asked much later.

He laughed. "It wasn't anything complex. I needed a friend, a confidante. Another man, like me. Mortal, vulnerable, full of questions. I could tell you were smart, maybe a little lost too." Gate-Keeper laughs. "That all sounds nice. And it's true, we're friends now. But that's not why in the first place."

Silence. "I had to tell that story, get it out, & it couldn't be in one of my books, under my name."

"Why?"

"Because they wouldn't read it. It would never get to her."

"Who?"

"The girl in the story."

"You mean Cordelia?"

"Yes."

"She's real?"

"She was."

"And your friend?"

"Yes."

"The whole thing?"

Gate-Keeper grimaces. They are sitting in his room, seated opposite each other across a small table with a chess-style board between them. But no chess pieces. Each one looks nearly identical to the others: inch-high panda bears, guised in flouncy skirt, big laughing eyes & mouth. Paused between games at the moment.

“I guess I never thought it was true. You told it so dispassionately, like a fiction you were proud of. But a good fiction, no more.”

Early touches one of his pieces & it cackles softly. “It was a long time ago,” he says softly.

He read it, his rough pages, over the course of three long nights in the very earliest days of their friendship, & it formed the basis for what Gate-Keeper wrote as *Trip Town*’s series premiere.

xlix.

But when I told it on *Trip Town*, I shifted things a little. It’s like I listened to that long tale told those late nights in my hotel room over our strange game, one move each per night, & it shifted a little in my mind, a word for another word, a phrase, a bit of the narrative—

All for *Clarendon Island*—

“It was years ago yet I wonder if they do it even now. Dosing the fountain waters of Iconic Square with LSD. Lightly, like brushing the drums of many minds, not pounding them awake.”

I nod. He continues.

“I watched. Many many days I watched as people dipped dry hands or dusty feet into those waters. Pretty girls splashing their faces & laughing. Old folks tossing in coins & smiling in the spray.

“I watched the years of watching turn toward wanting again. Old gleams. Old furies. Return of violence, return of tenderness. A medicine come not from the stars, nor from dreams, but within, where there is no higher & there is no ground.

“But more. Iconic Square’s in a major city, little known, surrounded by government offices & corporate headquarters. That spray touched important cheeks, drip dropped from the hands of diplomats, into treaties & disputes, what abiding fears bleeding tomorrow’s canvas.

“And I wondered. Sitting on a bench, shadowed by an oak tree, watching, dosed high on the sunshine & the smiles & the sweating musicians who played better & weirder through the afternoon, music the rags a poor man will wear proudly, music is heartache at rest, playing less & less for coins & bills, more & more for sky-smacking bliss. *Fuck*, I wondered. A light dose if it touched your skin casually. Enough to change a mind, soothe a heart, jar a sure hate? Breaches in the web, if you believe in webs & who does—

“No, it wasn’t me. I wasn’t so brave, or connected to the powers over the pipes. I found out by accident on the day would have been my last. I drank there while going. A bridge in my mind, a note in a plastic bag in my pocket. Drank there on whim, twice because a tug in my heart still saw a chance the rest didn’t. Wavering thing.”

Trip Town begins with this scene, more or less, even when I found out these were later notes. He told me the story out of sequence. But this is what I heard first & I could see the scene so clearly.

I called him Preacher in the show, never another name for him. Before the show's title card, he is in a place that is shadowy, high-ceiling'd, tall windows but they are smashed & boarded up. The only time *Trip Town* appears on the screen is next, white letters, black background.

His dark clothes of the opening are gone. A white t-shirt whose tie-dye splotch spells Beatles, LSD, Noisy Children, Phish, Clarendon Island, shows a girl's smiling face, one after the next, sometimes several. Torn blue jeans shorts. A red baseball cap on his head.

Coming out of one of the tall buildings is a woman, arguing heatedly on her phone, carrying a scruffy clutch of papers. Her face is not shown clearly, close-up on her cracked lips, far away so her figure just glints—

Many faces drinking, touching the water, hands cupping, smiling, I let faces dry show in black & white, wetten, begin to color in, deeper & deeper, like skin sponges absorbing & changing—

I let the scene film on, show Iconic Square deepening in color, & the mild opening music deepening, piano, drums, heavier drums, fiddles, electric guitars, the scene sops itself up, begins to repeat itself, people blink in & out & in & out—

Someone told me this scene was considered one of the most legendary of any TV show premieres.

It only mattered to me how it played into my long plan. The next scene worked it more.

Early read on, his voice tremoring a little, sweat on his cheeks. But he read. I listened.

"I'd known the place I'd be going for a long time, good to be able to arc over this hour to where you will end & some other beginning, a bridge not too big or trafficked but it was high, so high, oh so high, look at the sky *high oh so high*—

"The river below forgotten I looked straight up & kept looking, crawled off the bridge into a hidden grassy area, tugged there by my heart, & kept looking up, twisted around to see better, this is what I'd wanted so long, to look up from this place. Become a mind as common where all are welcome. Heartache at rest.

"When had I stopped looking up? What day? Which hour? Whose word had made me look down & never quite so up again, was it hers, yours, my cum still on your lips, saying you loved me, & goodbye, still nude with me on the floor, still taut for fucking?

"I'm not fucking *her*! You fucking *dreamed* her!"

“Was it him, you, that letter you wrote far from me, *coward*, about your disease & your decision? Your talking cassette labeled *Last Songs* that I listened to the night you passed from me, & the last of our hungry hours arguing if Godd’s best final proof is music, oak trees, or fine young ass?

“There were other reasons, & many excuses, & every last one fell unnoticed from me as I watched the sky into its inexplicable dusk, into its crying passion told each night as stars, I passed through seeing up & up, become up, finally up, *swinging high, oh so high, from the strands above the stars that dangle them down so low*———

“Dirty, broken, remade, smiling, I swung until the dawn, finding myself where I’d ended & begun in a new way, unexpected, fine, & I knew enough to trace a path back to that fountain, those few splashes of sweet drink, & I returned to marvel.”

Another long scene, Preacher loses his clothing over the course of it, & the bridge is quite high, in fact, & there are many human remains on the rocks below. The sky moves from a nice ordinary blue to a fierce crimson, to something wildly blaringly colourous that falls into his skin, even as the evening comes, stars fall to him too, clutches in his hands, glowing burns on his skin, the music eerie, a piano, an electric guitar, some odd percussion, the night stretches & twists, the bridge changes & comes & goes, we ran far over the usual lengths of TV scenes, since, really, only two so far, & only one remained.

Early was exhausted with this telling, took the water I fetched him in a couple of deep gulps, a cough, a belch, a vague hand wave at me as though I would stop him, & he read what he’d brought to fini.

“I didn’t leave for a long time, though rarely drank again. When hunger got me & my cup was empty. When it got cold & I chose not to tent with the huddled rest. When my dreams obscurely advised & my heart lightly tugged, & then tugged a little more.

“When I left it felt tragic. A car wreck full of burning bodies large & small. The delighted king when barriers to his blood lust fall, when his word & fist sum to first & only beautiful truth.

“I left & am now far gone to that fountain in Iconic Square. I dream on it still, on weak nights, & wonder who opened the taps, how did they find the way to let the elixir in? *How?* Why the light dose? Did anyone figure it out like me? Does it go on? Are the grim men on TV, at podiums, doubting a little? Are tall buildings now governed by secretly grinning goofs?”

This scene was what I was arriving for. It shows Preacher, now dressed in what look like skins, singing, *humming* his way through a strange & pathless pale woods, sometimes entering a cave from which emerges not Preacher but a Beast, then later him again moving along, sometimes faster than what seems possible, speeding, speeding, become a Creature of some kind, a White Bunny, a little panda bear, like our game back in the hotel room, a tiny tiny thing—

Then a black screen & words:
There are only two tomes.

*One tells the sky.
One sings the earth.*

These words burn themselves blackly out & Preacher's gruff low voice is heard for the first time, saying: "Are there fewer fists in the world tonight? *Does it still try to save us all?*"

He passes out at my table, & this time I help him to my bed, & stay close to him, thinking toward how this will make *Trip Town's* opening episode, what clues I'll deeply embed in it, not even knowing he's told me hardly a third of the story.



To be continued in Cenacle | 94 | *October 2015*



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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News* (for 30 years as of this month!). Stories from his newspaper now feature regularly in these pages.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His writings regularly appear in these pages. Talk of Hawaiian pieces soon! More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His delightful poetry regularly appears in these pages. His recent RaiBook, *Kingdom of Clowns*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/kingdomofclowns.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her haiku has gifted these pages for many years. I was lucky enough back when to hear her read her poetry in person, & hope that occurs again one day. Her work can also be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Hella_Brad is the Twitter handle for Brad Kennedy. His piece in this issue is a delight, & the first justification I've ever seen for using Twitter.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. Chapters from his wonderful travel memoir *Nighttime Daydreams* regularly appear in this periodical. It is also a treat to have again some of his poetry in these pages. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His cryptical poetry first featured in *Cenacle* | 92 | April 2015. We have a date to walk around Boston one fine sunny day soon.

Rainer Maria Rilke was born in Prague in 1875, & died in Montreaux, Switzerland in 1926. He is the highly praised poet of *Sonnets to Orpheus* & *Duino Elegies*, & a personal hero of mine. More of his wonderful poetry was reprinted as part of the 1999 Burning Man Books series, & can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His wonderful poetry & prose feature regularly in these pages. Special thoughts for you & your son's health, Tom.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She divided today between tending the yard & tending *The Cenacle*. She is a Treasure.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. With no answers to how or why, I do find much happiness in pen, notebook, Polly iPod, & a half-noisy joint to write in.

Victor Vanek lives in The Dalles, Oregon. He has long contributed photography, & more recently contributed prose-poems, but this time we have both in a happy happy mix.

* * * * *





Keep the speed steady. Hold the wheel tight.

I swear I feel every little sway.

Our minds are the windows.

Our hearts are screens..

We scratch.

We scrape..

And we dream.

--The Hold Steady, "Oaks," 2014..

