

the
travelling
mind

First in a series of anthologies of the words of Edward Hilary Peterlin.

the
travelling
mind

An anthology of
miscellaneous short stories
and poems by

*Edward
Hilary
Peterlin*

for
Zita

Special Dedications:

The Day of Care is dedicated to Mrs. Vinnie Rutter who died on October 16, 1989 at the age of 94. She had a great mind, but was alone until the world came in and gave her a smile.

The poem The Day After is dedicated to Rita Langlois, secretary of Briarcliff School for many years. She brought joy and love into our lives and we shall all see her on The Day After.

The Special Someone is dedicated to Al Saley, the Special Someone of Mountain Lakes High School who all made our lives happier and special.

THE TRAVELLING MIND

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PREFACE

Paper. Bland, dry, bundled packages of fibers. Ink. Black, chemical, inhuman. Yet, what can it do? This paper can become alive and invoke emotion, it can become reflective and show us our true selves. It is all dependent upon the writer. Allow yourself now to transcend the physical and think of a different world. This collection will take you on a journey; this airplane will take you to countries never seen before. We will find many people on our trek through the reality of the imaginary, and we may even meet ourselves. All throughout our travels, let us look for those special ones, the people or things that are in our own lives. Let us look for the kindness we need; let us look for the faults we do not see. And if we can find even one small point about our lives that we have never seen before, our inexpensive journey will be worthwhile. I now give to you your ticket into the world of the imaginary, the world beyond the printed page. Hop aboard into the great plane that flies around this newly created land and let us look within ourselves. . .

-Edward Hilary Peterlin

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Oak Ridge, NJ

The Voyage
of the
Impossible Dream

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Paris, France 1551 – On a cold, dreary winter night, a seemingly normal citizen of France, Monsieur Jaques, was comfortably sitting at an oaken desk. In his dexterous hands was placed a fragile plate, one that was material, but yet it was spiritual. This plate was not an ordinary plate, but one with a picture on it. The picture was one of the ocean. This vivid picture beautifully reconstructed the awesome forces of the seas, entrapping for what seemed a gigantic expanse of earthen soil. The seas were the endless boundaries separating the European people from what lay beyond. Staring at this plate, Jaques could somehow see – see another section of . . . something. “What could this be?” Jaques wondered. Somehow, something was giving him this vision.

Then, the picture faded, faded into another picture, a picture of another world. This was a world of utter beauty, where huge rose-like flowers of numerous colors blossomed to their fullest. Where trees proudly stood, showing off their lush array of light green leaves to the world, a place where the brilliance of light yellow light illuminated every blade of grass. Where life . . . was essentially perfect. Jaques stared at the plate in amazement. Never before had he seen something so beautiful! He could see himself running through the green grass among the flowers, enjoying the beauty that he had beheld. As something filled his mind with “perfect” thoughts, then, he noticed that the picture on the plate was gone! The plate was once again just an ordinary plate, with no seeming unusual qualities whatsoever. Either he was dreaming . . . or he had a revelation! Then, he heard his wife calling. It was not a dream! Somehow, some way, he had to search for this world, and the beauty that was in it.

Paris, France 1552 – Jaques has finally become obsessed with the somewhat lunatic idea about this lost land in his visions. He has now taken it to the Queen, and petitioned for an exploration program to take them across the sea to try to find this lost world. If it is accepted, it could be the adventure of a lifetime, or it could be the failure of the century . . .

CHAPTER I

It is the third day of the petition to the Queen about the ludicrous idea to

PART 1

THE TRAVEL OF
THE GREAT SEA

trek across the sea to search for another world. Jaques has almost given up hope, but some inner voice tells him to press on. Today, a council is called to evaluate this 'idea' of sea travel.

"Quiet!" the queen yelled, "Let Monsieur Jaques speak!"

Almost as an awe filled the gigantic chamber, the room fell absolutely silent at the first bellowing sound of the Queen's voice.

"To whom I now address: her excellency Madame Josephine III, and the honest members of the council; I propose that we send an expedition out across the sea to find a new world that is the most beautiful place in existence. I have seen this world in a glorious revelation, and it would be the ultimate sanctuary for those of the troubled," Jaques said.

"Where is this 'world' that you speak so knowledgeably about?" a council member said mockingly.

"It is over the great edge at the end of the sea, the world of the great unknowns, and of the wonders we can only dream about."

"But going over the edge would mean certain death!" the Queen exclaimed.

"But your excellency," Jaques stated, "We do not know what is there. It could be the land of great beauty of which I speak about. But, it could also be a land full of valuable metals or shining gems, or even tasty new spices. If the 'land' there is filled with any of these, your wealth would be increased tenfold!"

"That is true Jaques, but where could you find men lunatic enough to go with you on this IMPOSSIBLE voyage?!"

"I could count on fellow men interested in exploration, those who hunger for sanctuary, or even those interested in money! Even for some of these people, they would actually wish that they would have death if they cannot find what they are searching for."

"True," Josephine said emphatically. "I will give you a ship. Just one ship, mind you; that might limit your exploration, but I can afford to lose a small ship. I will not give you any crew whatsoever, but I can help you to find crew by asking around. You will carry our spirit and honor wherever you go Monsieur Jaques. Good luck and fare thee well!"

With these words still hanging in the air, the Queen majestically marched down the red, carpeted aisle to the Royal Carriage waiting outside the stained glass doors. After the council had left without saying a word, he finally knew that his expedition had begun.

CHAPTER II

Jaques was walking down the grey cobblestone street, thinking about the extreme hassle of trying to get a crew to operate his ship. Where could he find a load of people crazy enough to go over the edge? Then, as he was passing the city square, he noticed a building, the home of the "Explorers' Club International."

Jaques had heard many things about this group. These people were the most daring people that could be found in the entire city of Paris. They studied the voyages of Columbus, DaGama, and many others. They studied how Columbus had gone over the edge, and found a spiritual passage to India. "They might also share my belief," Jaques thought. With this thought rampaging through his obsessed mind, he strode into the club.

As he was walking down a long carpeted hall, he noticed that on the walls were covered with portraits of past explorers. Some of these people had many weird ideas, and some of their proposed plans were even more ridiculous than

the one which was his. Now, Jaques was almost sure that he would find the few men that were going to help run his vessel here. As he reached the end of the hall, he found himself in a reception chamber. The hall was filled with gold-plated statues of explorer greats. Then, a lady seated at an oaken desk beckoned to him.

"What is your business here?" she asked.

"My name is Jaques, and I am here to talk to the gracious members of this club about my expedition to look for another world over the edge of the sea. Also I am here to see if there are any brave men here to help and go with me to the edge of the world."

"Just wait right here . . . Jaques is it? Yes, Jaques."

Then the lady disappeared through a carved ebony doorway. At this moment, Jaques became worried. The ticking of the wooden grandfather clock filled his head with visions of days gone by. Of the first day at his desk, looking at the plate. What if this was a trap? What if I fail? The nagging voice of the clock seemed to snicker at him, its face smiling in a never-ending grin of evil. Jaques began to wonder about his so-called 'revelation'. Was it real? Then, the lady reappeared.

"Jaques, the members have decided to listen to your expedition plans," she said snobbishly.

She held her hand to the now open doorway. Jaques went through the doors, not really sure if they were the doors of victory or the doors of defeat.

As he passes through the large doors, he found himself in an arched corridor. Somehow, the building was actually larger than it had seemed to be on the outside. Then, as he walked around a bend in the passageway, he found himself in a large, glistening chamber. It appeared to be made out of a silver-like metal with inlaid pictures on the ceiling. There was a wide isle of a rose

color leading up to a wooden podium with a gold symbol - probably a coat of arms - on it. Seated around this large chamber were approximately one-hundred people. As soon as Jaques finally stepped into the chamber to view its full grandeur, everybody all of a sudden turned to look at him - Jaques.

"Please Jaques," one person said, "Come, step up to the podium and tell us of your expedition."

Jaques nervously strode up the carpeted aisle. As he slowly made his way to the podium, he looked at the various members. The various members appeared to be of all different types - ranging from the common people to those of the upper classes, even princes. He began to doubt if he could convince any of these people to go with him. As Jaques finally reached the podium, he gathered his wits, and began to speak, even if he did not have the slightest chance of a victory over the very souls of the captive audience before him.

He began talking to the people with the vivid pictures of the vision in the plate: about the captivation of the sea, the endless thought in the waves, the compulsion to know more about the unknowns across the sea. Then he talked of the beautiful sanctuary that would be found over the oceans of the world. He talked of its beautiful flowers basking in the brightness of a perfect illumination; of the tall, majestic trees standing amid the lush, green grass. Then, he began talking of the qualities of the people he needed for his voyage: those looking for sanctuary, those looking for the ultimate beauty of life, those hard-working people who needed rest, or lust for the adventurous willing to explore the unknowns of existence. Finally he closed with the approval of her majesty, and the way it could make people rich, physically and mentally.

After he finished all of his speech, his plan was met with an enormous round of applause from the members of this somewhat unusual club. Then,

Jaques was sent back out to the reception chamber to await their decision.

The thirty minutes that Jaques spent waiting in the reception rooms were the most agonizing minutes of his life. It seemed like an eternity in which he was isolated, like a personal hell. The statues seemed to no longer snicker, but instead stare at him with a type of utter amazement. The never-ending grin of the clock changed to one of a straight nature, and even the nagging voices of the clock stopped. Everything in the whole plane of existence seemed to be deciding - deciding the fate of the expedition, and the hopes of one individual. All Jaques could imagine was the faces of evil running through his mind, the evil that would laugh at him when he lost his hope. Then, all he had to do was wait ...

All of a sudden, a person that Jaques recognized as a member of the club came out of the door, startling Jaques.

"Jaques, follow me."

Jaques got up, and followed the man back into the central chamber. When they reached the middle of the room, this man sat Jaques down in an empty seat on a bench in front of the massive podium.

"I, as the president of the Explorers' Club International, am pleased to announce that the expedition of Jaques has been accepted by this club as a deed of honest exploration to try to help the scientific world and to try to help the common people. We have voted on your plea, and we will requisition four great explorers to go with you on your daring journey."

"Thank you," Jaques said.

"These four brave men have before proven themselves worthy by going out to explore our expanse of land which we live on, and we would now like to include them in your voyage across the sea. They have all had previous experience in boats, and will help you to operate well. Where do you want them to

meet you?"

"At the town of Brest, one week from today, at her majesty's royal harbor there," Jaques said.

"Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge you as a standing member of our club. May your journey be a safe and successful one."

With these words of approval, the members of the club, including Jaques, all stood up and clapped their approval. Jaques knew that he had completed a hard task, but worse was yet to come.

CHAPTER III

One week had come and gone, and with it Jaques had left Paris, and found himself at the town of Brest near the north-western tip of France. He was walking down a semi-wide street, heading to the Royal Harbors. As he strolled leisurely along what appeared to be Main Street, he noticed that the shops were mainly all seafaring shops like The Lobster Inn, Say-lor Suits, and Ned's Nets. The air smelled of salt, and was very humid, so humid that you could walk on air. The light from the sun created almost a rainbow in the saturated air. Then, as he turned the corner, there was the Royal Harbors.

The wooden planks seemed to be alive as Jaques walked over them. He looked at the ships in the harbors. They were some of the biggest ships that Jaques had ever seen! All different ships were housed there ranging from the Royal Fishing Clippers to the gigantic war galleons. Was one of these ships his? Then, he went to the watch keeper and asked;

"Do you know which ship is going of the expedition to the edge of the earth?"

"Yes I do," the watch keeper said. "She's in dock number 30."

"Thank you!"

As Jaques walked along the walkway, he noticed that as he walked along the ships continued to grow in size. Then as he passes the ship in dock 29, he finally had beheld his . . . ship?! He was aghast! This 'ship' was not any larger than one of the fishing clippers. In perspective, it was only as large as the hall in the Explorers' Club International building. It was the smallest ship that they had in the whole Royal fleet! And he thought that her majesty approved of his 'expedition'. Five people was actually more than enough to run the ship!

As he approached his ship, he noticed four unusual people standing on the dock. They were dressed in an almost rag-like fashion, like seamen, but yet they wore elegant hats and custom-made jackets. Who would be these people to dress in such a fashion? As Jaques moved closer and closer to them, he noticed that they also started to walk to him. Eventually, they would meet.

"Are you Jaques?" one of the men asked.

"Yes," Jaques stated. "But to who does it concern?"

"We are explorers: Monsieur Jean-Luc, Monsieur Olivier, Monsieur Thomas, and Monsieur Pierre," they said as each of them introduced themselves to Jaques.

Jean-Luc seemed to be the tallest of the group. His voice sounded like one of authority to Jaques. His face was bearded and had a dark tan, showing that he usually worked hard at his life as an explorer. Olivier was the timid, shy type. Even he was almost startled in viewing Jaques for the first time. He was slightly hunched, and had a very nervous look on his face at the time. Thomas, he was a sight to behold. His build was excellent, and his muscles strong. He was the warrior, one who would take them through the deepest jungle without ever getting a scratch. His face was almost contracted in an evil snarl; his

voice was deep and bellowing. Pierre was a daredevil, and had numerous scars and bruises on his face, arms, and chest. His eyes were penetrating; these made Jaques feel as if he was being pierced by an awesome force of unknown power. His hands seemed to be tools of a 'different' world. In all, he was unusual, someone who had seen beyond the barriers of reality, and lived through it.

After Jaques had looked over and deciphered who these people were, he beckoned them to come aboard the ship. The ship was wooden, with almost no type of metal whatsoever. It had a different type of build than the other ships in the harbor. Instead of having a poop deck or 'extras' of that nature, it was all laid out in one flat deck with the wheel in a small building. The lower decks were connected to the upper decks by steep, small flights of stairs, and there were only two extra levels. On the second deck, there was kitchen stocked with food and wine, seven sleeping quarters, and a lounge. On the third and final floor, there was only numerous storage facilities, most of which were filled with food, water, wood for the hot stove in the kitchen, and extra clothing, mainly of a rag type. The ship had two sails, which were totally out of proportion to the size of the ship, with each being too large for such a small vessel.

"This is our ship?!" Jean-Luc exclaimed.

"Well, this must have been how important the Queen thought this expedition was," Olivier stated.

"Well Olivier, still, a ship is a ship, no matter what the size," Thomas said.

"Enough is enough. Look, the sun is going down. We better get very well rested. We have a dangerous journey ahead of us."

"Whoopie!" Pierre exclaimed. "The sooner we get to sleep, the sooner we will wake, and the sooner we can have some fun!"

With the thought of the burden that everything was going to be, the

small collection of odd people finally went to their sleeping quarters, and then fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

The next morning, the crew of the Voyager, as the vessel had been dubbed, was awake and on the main deck bright and early, ready for action. After Jaques had gotten the consent of the watch keeper, he readied the crew for action.

"Hoist the sails! Man the wheel! We are ready to go!"

At the edge of the wooden pier, where Jaques expected to see many people to watch the launching of this glorious expedition, he saw only one, and he appeared to be drunk. Jaques was depressed to this horrible sight, but he had learned by now that most people thought that he was definitely crazy, and they had basically not acknowledged his findings or comments, much less his crazy expedition.

Jaques turned his head from the terrible sight, and directed his full attention to the course of the ship.

Jean-Luc was all ready at the wheel, and Thomas was already hoisting the sails. Pierre was at the mooring lines, ready to set them away from the dock at the first command. Olivier was nowhere in sight. Jaques wondered about this.

"Well," Jaques thought, "He is probably in the kitchen preparing our first meal aboard the Voyager."

When the ships floating out of the harbor had vanished from sight, Pierre had hoisted in the mooring line and set the Voyager adrift. Then, after it was out of the path of the other vessels docked beside it, Thomas hoisted the sails,

and the Voyager began to pick up speed on the winds flowing through the harbor. Then, Jean-Luc turned the craft west to head for their destination, the Great Sea.

They were nervous and at the same time amazed that the expedition had actually begun. Little did they know about the Great Sea, and about the edge of the world. They were the pioneers of a new idea, one that might not even succeed. Anyway, when they thought of the world that would await them across the edge of the world, the idea of discovering that beauty kept them going on.

By the time that they had passed the outermost waters of the bay, everyone decided that they were starving from the work which they had done. Jean-Luc still manned the wheel, while the other crew members visible at the time, Jaques, Thomas, and Pierre, all headed down to the second deck for their breakfast.

When they got into the kitchen, they found Olivier putting out plates for the crew. What he put on these plates was a dry biscuit, and a warmed wafer. When the crew saw what they were basically going to be eating for the next period of the voyage, they were literally disgusted. Well, even if it was not real food, they still ate it.

"It really was not that bad," Thomas stated after their 'meal'.

Actually, for the better part, the crew actually liked the waferous substance. After they got finished discussing the facts that they had about the food, everybody went back up to the first deck. Then, as Olivier took the wheel, Jean-Luc went down to the kitchen for his first try at the 'food'. After he came back up, he took the wheel once again and continued to have them head west, to the edge of the earth.

CHAPTER V

The Voyager had been travelling for about two months now. The five-man crew was, of course, getting scruffy from the periods in which they did not bathe, and were irritable from being isolated from the outside world for the long period of time that has been occurring. According to the records of Christopher Columbus, they were about halfway to the edge of the world. By this time, even though they were not in the best of their assorted emotional moods, they still were getting more excited every minute of the way. As they got closer and closer to their destination, they seemed to be more joyous and kind to each other. Now, they had heard tales about the horrible monsters which inhabited these scarcely travelled waters, and even as they were getting happier, they were also getting to have much more fear.

As the brave men travelled beyond the known barriers of the ocean, the sky began to get darker. The waters began to roar with the might of the sound of twenty-thousand lions. The winds started to thrash the boat about like a toy amongst the rapids of a swift stream. The men of the Voyager were now struggling to save their very lives.

"I did not know it was this bad!" or "By the Royal crown of France!" were commonly heard from the crew plus some odd curses here and there.

"The sails are stuck!" Thomas yelled.

"The rudder's not responding!" Jean-Luc shouted.

Above all of the continuous racket of the awesome power of the forces of nature and the commotion of the crew, Jaques voice prevailed. He tried to give his commands to the crew, but to no avail. The Voyager was stuck in the squall, and there was nothing that the crew could do about it. Then, a barrel

came flying off from its position on the deck, and struck Jaques right in the head. Jaques fell unconscious to the deck of the Voyager, seemingly more dead than alive . . .

CHAPTER VI

When Jaques awoke, he found himself floating high above the cotton-like clouds. He was looking down at the Earth below him. There he saw the Voyager, floating helplessly in the torrential forces of the storm. The clouds seemed to engulf the Voyager within their seemingly endless grasp. Then, as the Voyager disappeared in the wrath of the powerful storm, Jaques began to move forward.

"Am I in Heaven or am I in Hell?" Jaques wondered.

As he moved forward with constant speed, he saw the sea under him begin to change, almost vanish in a straight line.

"The end of the Earth!" Jaques said in utter amazement.

He still travelled on, past the known reaches of the existence of man. The Earth had faded away to reveal a vast expanse of stars. The stars seemed to form a white road, a road leading on forever. Jaques then saw people walking down the road of white. People from the past, present, and future. He saw people in strange animals on wheels and ships sailing down it. It seemed to be a passage beyond the reaches of life, into another dimension, one of which has never been seen by the mortal eyes of man.

On and on this road of light weaved, in and out through the planets surrounding them. Then all of a sudden, only the road remained. The stars, planets, and fireballs had all turned black.

"How could this be? An end to Reality?"

Then the road disappeared into a hole of nothing. Nothing was there, no future, no light, no reality. Could this be the end of the universe? It was the total nothingness that had swept the legends of the ancients and the truth of the ancient philosophers. This has to be the dwelling place of the true God, the throne of the Almighty. Was this the final entrance to the world of heaven that Jaques had seen in his dream? Jaques was steadily drifting towards this hole in the existence of all things. Then as Jaques was sucked in to it, he found that he was flying no more.

CHAPTER VII

When Jaques awoke, he found himself on the deck of the Voyager. The sea was no longer releasing its fury, and the air was calm in the sails. Jean-Luc, Thomas, and Pierre were all lying unconscious on the deck. Jaques looked over the side of the ship to the ocean. Now, the water had turned green.

"The edge of the world must be coming near!" Jaques found himself thinking.

But then Jaques looked over the bow of the tiny vessel and did not see the Great Fall, or the sound of the roaring waters.

"But then," Jaques thought, "How could the water be green?"

Then Jaques grabbed a bucket and tied a loose rope to it, and hoisted up some of the green water. He reached his hands into the bucket in a cup, and gathered some water to taste it. It was clean, salt-free water! Jaques ran down the stairs to the third deck. He picked up all of the bottles and started filling them up with the glorious new water that had practically been an answer

to their utmost important needs! This fresh green water was stretching out from the ship for as far as the eye could see!

"Wait until the others wake up!" Jaques exclaimed.

About five minutes later, the other crew members woke up. When Jaques told the already excited crew members the other good news, they all began drinking their hearts out, and eventually, all of them jumped into the fresh-water sea.

After they finished their little celebration, the whole group began to look at their poor ship. One of the storage compartments had accidentally filled with water from someone letting the door open during the storm, causing the ship to list towards the left. One of the four sails was ripped along the middle, causing a loss of both speed and control. The crow's nest was damaged and had to be repaired.

The crew of the Voyager began the extensive work on their poor ship that would cost them much time. The expedition would have to wait. Right now, their own lives were more important to them.

The ship was fixed up in about four days, in which some of their nets, line, and even clothes were used. The cargo in hold number three was soaked, and this cargo was their reserve clothes. They had to make a sail out of these wet clothes and parts of the ripped sail. This ended up to be a total mess. The sail which they had made was bigger than the one before, and the crew had a hard time getting it to fit on the mast. It was composed of many zany colors, giving the ship a pirate-like appearance.

The crow's nest was badly damaged, and it was also located on the top of the highest mast. The crew, even Thomas, had a hard time getting up the now wet mast. The new crow's nest ended up being a barrel which had been found overboard. It was partially rotted, and was filled with boreholes. Even

though Pierre did not like it because he was the one that stood in it, it was the only piece of loose wood they could find that was not serving any purpose to the ship or its contents. Pierre saw this, and grudgingly help to make the new crow's nest.

The Voyager was not in its best of shape, but still, over one-hundred-thousand miles from the nearest port, they were in better shape than some of the ships that had travelled these uncharted waters. The crew was tired, and wanted a rest. Unfortunately, they had to watch the ocean and perform their duties as normal for something might happen to them sooner or later. The crew still had many new worlds to find, many new places to explore. They would not give up their hope. They owed the discovery of their lost world to themselves and France. And best of all, there seemed to be no one there to stop them.

CHAPTER VIII

The sea was still, as smooth as glass. The sun was pouring light over the tattered sails. The world was waiting for something to happen.

As Jaques looked over the placid waters he said, "It's too quiet."

After he said these words, the sea began to undulate. Then, the winds stopped.

"By the holy mother!" Olivier exclaimed.

"There's something coming up out of the water!" Pierre said.

"Arm your swords!" Thomas commanded.

Then, it was able to be seen for the first time.

"By the holy mother!" Olivier exclaimed again as he dropped to his knees

in prayer.

The thing was gigantic! It had shiny green scales covering the latter of the slimy body. Its eyes were yellow, like the core of the stars in the heavens. Its mouth was gaping, with a whip-like tongue that lashed out with brutal strength. It had fangs as sharp as a sword, with the other white teeth just there to help. It eyed the crew with an endless stare. Then, it lashed out its long tongue at the Voyager.

Thomas climbed up into the crow's nest with his gigantic sword. As the tongue reached to hit Thomas, he swung his sword in an arc at the tongue and reached it first! As the creature reeled back, it let out a cry of terror and pain that shook the heavens. Part of the creature's tongue was now on the deck! The water had turned crimson from the creature's blood. The creature lunged forward at Thomas. As he did, Thomas's sword blade was driven into the creature's eye. Again the horrible creature cried out in pain. For the last time, the creature again lunged at Thomas. This time, Thomas was knocked out of the crow's nest by the creature onto the deck. Then the creature fell into the water, thrashing. A few minutes later, it was dead.

All of a sudden, everyone rushed over to Thomas.

"Thomas, speak to us!" Olivier shouted.

Then Thomas opened his eyes.

"Jaques, get me my sword," Thomas said in a raspy voice.

After Thomas got his sword, he stood up using it for support.

"Where is that blasted creature? I need to kill it!"

"Thomas," Olivier said, "You already have. Come with me, you must rest."

Olivier led Thomas down to the lower decks, and laid him down on his bed. Using his own water and clothing, Olivier dressed Thomas's wounds, and cared

for him. Meanwhile on the upper deck, the rest of the crew contributed to help clean up the battered ship once more.

After the ship was cleaned, the crew began sailing on the now red sea of blood. Once again the waters were placid, and the breeze was still. The note of death still hung in the air. The sea seemed as if it would never forget this gruesome battle that took place on this day.

The waters of the Great Sea did not stir that day, as the Voyager continued to sail onward to its final destination, the dream that had yet to come.

CHAPTER IX

It was one week from the incident at the placid waters. The horizon seemed to be growing larger at the slightest westerly movement of the ship. The winds had now become normal once more, pushing the ship at an almost constant rate. The crow's nest had once again been repaired, and Thomas, no longer confined to his bed, was up and around on the deck, but was still not doing any terribly strenuous work. He was practically able to do work, but Olivier felt that he should still rest. Pierre was in the crow's nest looking for the slightest indication of the Great Edge. Jean-Luc was at the wheel, with all of his senses alert, all muscles tensed, ready for the slightest action. Actually, to Jaques, he seemed uptight and nervous. Well, it was seemingly just another common day for the crew of the Voyager.

It was about midday when the first words came from Pierre with his spy-glass.

"Jaques, I see the edge of the world!" Pierre exclaimed.

"About how far away is it?" Jaques asked.

"I would say it's less than a day's voyage, maybe just about one-hundred miles."

"Well everyone, start packing! We are almost there!"

Jaques began to give orders to the rest of the crew.

"Pack all loose items. Secure all of the food. We are going over the edge!"

Finally, Olivier piped up.

"Don't you guys think that this is crazy? I mean, going off of the edge of the Earth?"

"Well, Olivier," Jaques began, "Look at it this way. Some of us might be crazy ourselves. Look at all of the former explorers. They took their chances, and they became heroes. We won't just be doing this for ourselves, but we will be doing this for all of France!"

"But still," Olivier persisted.

"Olivier, either you go or not. The fame or the shoe. Which one do you choose?"

With these words in mind, Olivier just shut up and did his job.

It was not until later in the afternoon that Pierre reported that the edge was getting closer steadily. The water began to sound like the roar of the mighty dragon, and the current was beginning to speed up in sudden bursts, never dying down. The sun seemed to hold back its fall to witness the event of a ship going off the edge.

"It's not too far now!" Pierre screamed as the water began to churn. "I'm coming down now!"

The current began to get faster and faster. The noise of the water began to get louder and louder.

"Everyone brace yourselves!"

At this call, everyone no matter what they were doing on the upper deck, stopped and grabbed on to something.

"Hold on tight!"

Jaques looked over the bow of the ship. What a sight his eyes did behold! The blue water was travelling over the edge of the earth, like a magnificent waterfall unleashing its beauty. Where the water had stopped, there was black, just a dark black without any light, shape, or form.

"God bless us!"

At that moment, the waters sucked the Voyager down the fall. The crew was plunging into the pitch black darkness, screaming. The ship was like a stick, going over the edge of the mighty waterfall, being loosely held in God's hands.

CHAPTER X

The Voyager had been tumbling through the darkness over the edge of the earth. Head over heels the ship did its somersaults. The crew of the Voyager was hanging on to anything fasten down for their own life lest they fall into the depths below. Anything that was loose was now its own separate body, in its own acrobatic fall to its ultimate demise.

"We are going to die!" screamed Thomas as barrels flew past him.

Somehow, the water that had gone over the edge had disappeared.

"Where has the water gone?" Jaques wondered.

On and on did the Voyager fall. It seemed that the bleak darkness was endless, that they would be falling forever. Everyone had given up hope, and now were praying for their lives.

"What have I done to come to the end like this?" Jaques said.

"Will I ever see my wife again?" Jean-Luc said.

There were many things on the minds of the crew as they fell to their deaths. Then, all of a sudden, a faint but beautiful light penetrated the darkness.

"What is that light?"

The light began to intensify, until finally, the crew could distinguish the source of this radiance.

"My God! It's a river of stars!"

The Voyager fell into this river of stars, and sent stars flying as if it was water. Oddly enough, nobody was hurt by the fall. A wind had suddenly come up, and the ship began to move.

"I can't believe it! We're sailing on the stars!"

The Voyager had been saved by a miracle. But now that they were floating on the stars, where were they, and where were they going? What would become of them? And most of all, how would they get back?

CHAPTER XI

The Voyager, now on the sea of stars, was apparently stranded from the outer world. They would just have to sail on now, no matter what they would meet. The river seemed to stretch out for miles against the black emptiness of space.

"Pierre, how long do you think it will take us to travel along this river?" Jaques asked.

"Maybe a couple of days."

"Well, I hope that we get somewhere soon."

Two days had passed, and nothing had shown its presence that Pierre could see from the crow's nest. The 'days' that the crew stayed up on were getting shorter by the hour. In other words, the crew was getting tired of the eternal blackness that was surrounding them. The river of stars had still been flowing and keeping the ship up, but the crew would rather fall to their deaths instead of having to face the monotonous journey that was ahead of them.

Then one 'afternoon' . . .

"Jaques, there is something up ahead!"

"What is it Pierre?"

"It seems to be a hole, just leading . . . nowhere?! That's impossible!"

At these words, Jaques began to wonder. Was this his dream, reality, or both?

"Pierre, get down here quick!"

Pierre rushed down the ladder, to meet Jaques on the deck.

"Get everybody else up here!"

Soon, the whole crew was standing on the deck, waiting for Jaques to tell them the urgent news.

"Everyone, we are travelling into a hole, where nobody knows where it leads. I have dreamt about this, but I thought nothing of it. Now, I fear the worst. When I was here, I never saw beyond this hole, but I found that nothing can escape it. Once we go in there, there will be no turning back. Is everyone knowledgeable enough to travel with me, or do you want to try to get back? Speak now, or forever hold your peace."

Nobody said a word, as if a spell of silence had been cast down upon the crew.

"Then we go. Everyone get below deck, and may God favor the foolish."

Everyone, including Jaques, went to the decks below them, waiting for the decision of fate.

CHAPTER XII

The Voyager, now looking like a death ship, was steadily travelling toward the hole. The people below were scared to death.

"What will become of us?" and "We're going to die!" were commonly heard from the terrified mouths of the men. Even Jaques was scared out of his wits. He had lived through it once, and now he was going to have to do it again.

The Voyager was travelling faster and faster toward the hole. Inside the ship, everything was in chaos. Thomas was lying in his bunk with sheets wrapped around him lest he fall during the trip. Olivier was bent on his knees, praying to God for his life. Jean-Luc was sitting at a desk in the kitchen, holding a sketch of his wife, just staring off into the empty space surrounding him. Pierre was at a porthole, looking out into the hole, almost anxiously. Jaques, probably the most nervous of them all, was scared. He had to worry about the entire crew, their families, and most of all, his own family. Everyone was in their own state of mind, edgy, and if anything moved, they would hit it for fear that it would attack them.

The Voyager travelled closer and closer to the hole in front of it. The crew was now silent. The Voyager was now only a few feet away from where the turbulence started. As the crew was screaming, the ship called Voyager whirled around to its fate in the depths of the abyss.

CHAPTER I

The Voyager was travelling faster and faster to the black vortex. The ship began to tumble as it entered the first shocks of the tunnel. Then, the ship started spinning around and around the outer edges of the now whirling mass of energy. As the crew screamed, the Voyager made the final turn along the side of the hole before it reached the center.

"God, spare me!" Olivier screamed as he looked out of the porthole.

The world around him was totally black, aside from some occasional white streaks from the stars that were sucked up by the whirling mass. The barrels that were on the first deck of the Voyager were now floating in the near weightless environment. Olivier now had the worst case of a headache that the world had ever seen, as if twenty-thousand printing presses were pressing his brain sides together. The disorientation of the ship and its surroundings made everyone nauseous, including Jaques.

"We're all dead!" Jaques heard someone cry.

Was this going to go on forever? The ship continued to whirl around and around at an ever increasing rate. The combination of the stars and the black background made everything a blur. Every part of the crews' bodies were being pushed out by some unknown force.

The force of the vortex was immense, and it kept getting stronger and stronger!

"We'll never get home now!"

The sound of ripping was apparent to the crew. "Ripp!" the sails went, sounding louder than the vortex.

"The noise! That awful noise!" Olivier screamed at the top of his lungs as he covered his ears.

The ripping was now combined with an awful moaning, as if the gates of

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JOURNEY INTO
THE NETHERWORLD

limbo were opened up, letting the wails of the imprisoned torment the world. The moaning caused everyone to all of a sudden cry out in pain, filling the vortex with a sound of death. On and on the moaning wailed, rocking the ship even more in the cries of evil.

The ship began to creak at it reached the full force of the sinful awe inside the vortex. Then, some of the nails started popping out of the girders.

"We're going to be splattered!"

Then, all of a sudden, just as soon as the forces had started, they suddenly ceased.

"What's going on?"

The crew stood up in both relief and curiosity as the silence began to surround them. They gently walked up the now creaking stairs to the deck above them. They first looked at the state of their poor ship. The sails were either severely ripped or torn off, and one of the three majestic masts that once bore the royal symbol of France was now missing, presumed cracked and ripped off by the vortex. The paint that had once given the ship a better than merchant-like appearance was now flaked or peeled. After they had surveyed their 'ship' they finally noticed their awkward surroundings.

"Where are we?" Olivier said as he looked over the bow of the ship.

The water that the ship was now gently floating on was crystal clear, like the diamonds on the queen's crown. As Olivier gently put his head over the rail, he noticed that he could see the bottom of the sea. The plants were a perfect green, and the fish were a perfect gold. A brilliant light illuminated the world, sending rays bouncing off the water. Even the ship, although wrecked, had a majestic appearance against the crystal water. The sky was a perfect shade of light blue, and there were objects there representing clouds that looked perfect enough to sleep on. Everything around them seemed to radiate

a feeling of excitement and joy. Still, some of them were confused.

"How did we get here, and where is 'here'?" Jaques said.

CHAPTER II

The crew, relieved but still bewildered, took their normal positions, as if they were still back on the surface of the Earth. With what was left of their sails, they pushed onward. The winds here were practically constant, causing the ship to move forward at an almost constant rate. Since the crew's nest was now floating somewhere in the ocean, Pierre was standing on the highest part of the ship that was reachable. In his hand was a spyglass, which he used to look for any signs of land. The rest of the crew was trying to mend the broken sails so that the Voyager could move faster.

It seemed like days that the Voyager sailed through the clear waters. In this world, as the crew found out by surprise, there was no night. The illumination was constant. One sail was all that the crew could make, but just that one sail for one of the two undamaged masts made the Voyager travel faster. Then one day . . .

"Jaques!" Pierre screamed. "There's land up ahead!"

"About how distant is it?"

"Maybe less than a day at the speed we're going."

"Well then, let's go!"

With instructions from Pierre, Jean-Luc gently guided the ship towards the glorious land that was up ahead. Faster and faster did the ship seem to travel towards the land that the crew was so anxiously waiting to set their feet on.

"Maybe this is the perfect world," Jaques wondered.

He would never know until they got there. Then, as they got closer to the land, Jaques began seeing trees. These trees had bright green leaves, and they stood straight up.

"These were the trees in the picture!" Jaques exclaimed.

Then as they got closer and closer, Jaques began seeing the flowers, all bushy and rosy. Then finally, he saw the grass. It was uniform in height and was the flawless shade of emerald green. This was the perfect world!

Jean-Luc steered into a lagoon along the glistening sandy shore, and set down the anchor. Everyone got into the lifeboats and headed for the shore with their eyes opened wide and their mouths drawn back in a smile. As they got on the shore, the light began to shine brighter and brighter through the trees as though the world was welcoming them to the place of ultimate beauty.

"We found it!"

Everyone ran into the grass, all giddy like little children at their playtime. They ran up to the flowers, sniffing them, and then just picking one to carry with them wherever they went. They climbed up the trees, where awaiting them were perfectly ripe red apples. They ran around and around, listening to the perfectly colored birds whistle the perfect songs.

"This is the perfect world!"

They played and romped until they got tired and went to their soft beds that they made out of the grass.

"This is the true paradise," Olivier said before he lay down to go to sleep.

But little did Olivier or any other member of the now sleeping crew know that their paradise would not last for a very long time.

CHAPTER III

When the crew woke up in the 'morning', they were still as happy as yesterday. They were in the kitchen of the ship waiting for their breakfast. It seemed like a normal morning, except that the crew was much happier. Olivier happily cooked up their biscuits and coffee, and everyone sat down to eat. They were not disgusted about the food this morning because Olivier had topped it with some of the apples that he had found yesterday, which made it look cheerful. After they had finished their breakfast, they began to travel as a group on the island to try to find some way of getting home. Then as they got onto the upper deck, they were shocked.

The light had dimmed considerably, making it like an evening back in France. The trees were all drooping, their leaves all black on the ground. The flowers had all withered where they had once stood, and the grass was now as black as the night.

"What happened to our paradise?" Pierre asked.

Then a strong gust of wind knocked everyone to the deck. Cautiously, they got in the lifeboats once more and went to the shore of the land. The boats landed on a rocky beach, where the crew got out. When they went to pick one of the withered flowers, it crumbled at their very touch. Now, this made the crew feel downcast and sad. What had happened to their once beautiful land of perfection? Even the water that had once been crystal clear had turned cloudy.

They wandered around the dismal world, looking for a cause for their loss. As Pierre was walking through the once majestic trees . . .

"Hey everybody! I found a cavern!"

Everyone rushed over to the spot where Pierre was standing. There they

beheld a strange sight. There was a hole about a good ten feet high. Inside the hole, everything was a pitch black. As they all stood at the mouth of the cavern, a gust of stale air blew out of the cavern, causing everyone to back away from the awful stench.

"Should we go in, or shall we stay out here?" Jaques asked.

"Let's go in. We're explorers, right?" Pierre said.

"Okay then, we will go into the cavern. Thomas, go back to the lifeboats and get the lanterns. Jean-Luc, go find some vine that we can use as rope, and a whole lot of it too. Olivier, run back to the ship and get us some provisions. Pierre, go get us some sticks that we can use to make a fire if we need it. I'll stay here to mark our spot. If you can't find the cavern, yell and I'll yell back. Go to it!"

As everyone set out for their jobs, Jaques had begun to worry. Was this the trap that he was worried about? Would we live to see the next morn? I found our world of beauty, just for this? Soon as these things ran through his small head, the others returned with their various supplies. Soon, they would be descending into the cavern, without the slightest notion of being able to come back.

CHAPTER IV

Jaques distributed the supplies so that each person had enough items that if they were split apart, he could live for a comfortable two days. This made the equipment very heavy, but the crew requested this, even if they had to carry it. After this was finished, the group of men began their descent into the cavern. When they got inside, one lantern was lit so that the group could

see where they were going. In this cave, somehow something was blocking the light from outside objects from reaching the floor of the cavern. This power was strong, but not strong enough to stop the light from the lantern from illuminating the cavern. The light from the lantern was dim, but it did light the passageway so the crew could see where they were going, which made them feel safe.

Inside the cave there were a number of disorientating features. The walls were covered with a slime that dripped down onto the rocky path like oil dripping from a lantern. The stench of rotting meat and plants was lingering in the air that surrounded them. The space that was farther than eight feet from the lamp was not lit, causing the fear that they might accidentally fall into a pit of some unknown nature. The passage was leading steeply downwards, causing unsure footing on the somewhat rolling rocks. The passage twisted this way and that so that even Jaques couldn't tell if they were going around in circles or not. All of these items made the now tunnel-like cave appear spooky and evil.

Then as they turned a corner, they saw a pair of ruby-red eyes piercing the darkness, peering into their very souls. The light from these eyes was temporarily blinding to the crew for they had adjusted to the darkness that was around them. Then, as the light of the eyes began to fade, and the souls of the crew were returning to their bodies, the creature spoke.

"Who dares to enter the realm of the Netherworld?" the creature asked in a booming voice.

"Jaques and his expedition dares to enter."

"To find the world of perfection, that was here before you."

"Silence petty one! The world above us is perfection, a perfection of evil! Same as the Netherworld to which you have dared to gain passage to!"

"But it was--"

"Silence! You are trespassers in my realm. Now you must pay the price of arousing my anger. You must travel the expanse of the Netherworld. At the exact end of the Netherworld, there you will find the portal that will lead you back to your puny world."

"But why not send us back now?"

"Because you deserve to die. Do you want my to take those souls from you now scum?"

"We'll go! We'll go!"

"Good. You'll be dead by tomorrow. Then I'll have more flesh to feed the fires."

After these words, the creature vanished from the sight of the crew, leaving only the expanse of dimly lit tunnel that was in front of them. The crew ran down the hill, not caring about what was underneath their feet. They only hoped not to meet the master of this realm again.

CHAPTER V

The crew was now scared of what they would meet down here. They would have to travel the expanse of the Netherworld, whatever that was. They took short steps, being careful not to fall into any pit or trap. The walls had now turned to a type of grey stone which felt rough as sandstone but looked shiny, like silver. The floor had become smoother now, making the footing harder with the shoes that the crew was wearing. The incline that was in the cave was steadily growing steeper, causing one or two people to slip now and then.

Then, as the incline got very steep and the floor very smooth, everybody

slid down the tube as if it were as slick as ice. On and on they slid down the polished copper floor.

"Wheee!" Pierre exclaimed. "This is my idea of having a good time!"

Then, after everyone was laughing, they hit a wall. Here the tunnel made a ninety-degree turn, and they didn't slide around it. Now the tunnel was level, as the upper deck of the Voyager when they had first boarded her.

"What happened?" someone inquired.

Everybody stood up, and began walking around the room.

"If this is the worst that this Netherworld has to offer us, we will have no trouble whatsoever," Pierre said.

Then, as he turned around the corner, he almost lost his footing.

"Watch out guys! There's bad footing around here."

Then, as the lantern began to get closer to Pierre, he noticed something.

"Hey guys! There's a chasm over here, so don't fall into it!"

As everyone also reached the scene, they finally got a good look at the chasm. They couldn't see the bottom of it, so it must have been pretty deep. The other side, to tell the truth, was not very far away. To Pierre, it seemed as if it were a mere twenty feet away.

"Come on guys, let's just make a rope bridge. It's not that far!"

Jaques took out his rope and began tying it to Thomas's. They went on and on in this fashion, until they had a rope just long enough to reach the other side. Pierre anchored one end to a rock, and formed a lasso out of the other end of the rope. Spying a big stalagmite on the other edge of the chasm, he swung the rope around it, securing it tightly. Then, very carefully, he started to walk across of their rope. He carefully balanced himself across the short distance as the vines creaked from the strain. As he got across of the chasm safely, the other crew members slowly made their way across on the rope. As

the last of them started his way across, they heard a faint rumbling from the roof.

"Quickly!" Thomas yelled. "Get across quickly before something happens!"

Then, Jaques, who was the one on the rope, started to move faster, losing some of his balance. The rumbling grew louder and small rocks started to fall on his head. The rest of the crew was yelling for Jaques to come across. Then, Jaques jumped into the arms of the crew waiting for him. They ran out of the cavern just in time as the rocks from the ceiling began to grow larger. As they watched, the rocks covered the place where they were standing, completely filling up the entrance with rocks, blocking their former passageway.

"Shoot," Pierre said. "I wanted to do that again."

After everyone got over their shock of the cavern, they surveyed their new surroundings. They were in another tunnel, this time one with rock-like protrusions on the walls and the floor.

"Well guys," Jaques said. "Let's move on."

The crew was now moving along the tunnel, fearful of what might happen around the very next turn. They felt as if their judgment day was coming.

CHAPTER VI

The crew had been walking down the path of the tunnel for about two hours now, and nothing has happened. They were nervous and uptight, ready to jump at any sound that they heard. The tunnel was getting rockier as they walked on. The air now smelled of rotting flesh, filling the crew with the sense

of foreboding that something evil was about to happen. Then, as they turned the corner, they saw a horse-like animal hanging from the vine that they had made back at the chasm. The flesh was crawling with maggots, and some bare bone was exposed as it stuck out of the animal's flabby blood stained skin. On the adjacent wall, they saw a message hastily scrawled in blood.

"Beware the forces of the eternal fire" it read with other phrases, all in different languages.

"Is this a warning?" Olivier asked.

Nobody answered. The crew walked on, ignoring the incident that just occurred, but with the warning still embedded in their minds. They turned corner after corner still finding nothing on their trek. The temperature began to get hotter, as if something was burning, but still, they smelled nothing burning. Then, as they turned the next corner, they saw a gigantic cavern. In the center of it was a huge burial urn from which issued forth a gigantic orange flame.

"Is this the eternal flame that the warning talked of?" someone asked rhetorically.

Then, the lantern that had lit their passage from the surface blew out.

"Drat. The fuel must have been used up."

When Jean-Luc checked the level of the oil that was in the lantern, to his surprise, it was full. The lantern should have stayed lit.

"Drats. Where are we going to find a real fire down here?"

Then, Jean-Luc had an idea. He reached into his pack and pulled out three charred sticks that he had brought from the surface. He took them, and started to move towards the flame, with the intentions to light them.

"Jean-Luc! Don't do it!" Jaques yelled out in desperation.

"Hey! It's only fire, and it cannot hurt me as long as it is in my control. Someone's got to light the lantern."

Jean-Luc moved closer and closer to the flame in the urn. He then took one of his charred sticks and moved closer to the fire. Sticking it in the flame, it readily ignited.

"See, nothing to it!"

He reached out and got the lantern from the floor. He put the flaming stick into the lantern. As it touched the wick, the flame jumped up, forming a gigantic pillar of fire that was taller than Jean-Luc.

"No! Jean-Luc get back here!" someone cried out, but to no usage.

The pillar of flame had merged with the eternal flame, forming a gigantic fire that filled the entire room. Then Jean-Luc screamed out in pain and terror, but soon was silenced by the crackling of the flames. Then, for an instant, the flames grew in intensity and then died. Olivier dropped to his knees in prayer as the others stared dumbfounded. Where Jean-Luc had once stood was now a withered form resembling a charred, blackened prune.

"NOOOOOOOO!" Jaques cried out.

The cavern echoed the note of death, reverberating faster and faster until it was finally silenced. Jean-Luc was no more. The warning was right. "Beware the eternal flame". What the demon had said had come true. "Your flesh will feed my fires". Then, everyone was silenced, bowing their heads down in reverence to the once great explorer.

Then, Jaques scrawled a message on a shred of parchment. He laid it down where Jean-Luc had last stood, and then addressed the crew.

"Here is the final resting place of Jean-Luc. He was truly a great explorer, and to us, a personal friend. He did not die in vain, for he was trying to help us be free of this wretched place. May every one of us be as respectful for him as he was of us, and may every one of us always remember him."

The crew held a short requiem under the direction of Olivier, and then left

into the opening of another tunnel with their heads bowed down in reverence and sadness. Meanwhile, the lord of the Netherworld chuckled as his fire grew taller . . .

CHAPTER VII

The crew of now four men was in a new tunnel. This time, the walls were perfectly smooth, and they were made out of black metal. Somehow, this tunnel was different than all of the others, but not in its physical sense, but in the mental aspect. It seemed to give a warning to the crew, but they were unable to receive it. They just ignored this sense of premonition and walked onward. The tunnel did not turn or have a single grade. It was like a passageway to a palace, the palace of the Netherworld. The tunnel continued ahead of them as far as Jaques could see with the newly lighted lantern. The walls gave him a sense of confinement, as if he was being trapped in this hallway, but this could not be true.

"No Jaques," he said to himself. "Think different thoughts now."

As he did so, he walked on. It seemed as if they would be walking for hours to get out of this tunnel. The tunnel still kept up its monotonous symmetry. The walls didn't change, the floor didn't tilt, and the ceiling didn't rise.

"How long can this go on?" someone asked rhetorically.

Then, as soon as that one man said these words, the tunnel disappeared to reveal a gateway with an inscription carved above it.

The inscription read: "This is the gate securing the passageway to the rest of the Netherworld. He who dares to go past these gates shall find the gateway to another world, the outer worlds above."

Jaques read the inscription and then rushed to the gigantic gates. He tried to open them, but they were stuck and would not budge from their resting place.

"Come on! Help me with the gates! They're stuck!"

Everyone that was there went to the gates and tried to open it, but it still would not budge.

"Great," Olivier said with a tone of remorse. "We find a way home, and we can't get a stupid gate to open."

They tried everything. They threw water on it, they spat on it, they kicked it everywhere, and they even threw their food at it but not one thing would make the gates budge. Then, Pierre's eyes lit up. He had an idea.

"Everybody stand back!" Pierre yelled.

Pierre went to the gate, and then moved about one foot away from it. Then, he raised his arms to the 'sky' above them and stared at the gate. Pierre looked everywhere on the gates, and concentrated his force at the center of them.

In one word in a commanding tone of a higher power he yelled: "Open!".

And the gates opened.

"Pretty neat, huh? I learned that one a while ago from my father. Works good, doesn't it?"

Nobody had any comments, but they all stared at Pierre with their mouths open and their eyes staring in utter astonishment.

"Hey guys, I only opened a gate."

Still they stared at Pierre.

"Well guys, are you coming? I want to get home!"

"Right," Jaques said in a confused tone.

They walked through the gateway, all of them still attempting to compre-

hend what happened between Pierre and the gate. They were dumbfounded at the mere sight of Pierre and his stare. "It must be those eyes," thought Jaques. The crew walked onward to the other horizon with the hope that they would find the passage back to their own world of Earth. Then after the gates could no longer be seen on the horizon, they shut tightly, and then disappeared, leaving nothing behind them.

CHAPTER VIII

The crew was no longer in a tunnel but in a giant cavern that seemed to stretch out for miles. In the cavern, the heat was blazing, and the crew was steadily drinking up the water that they had brought with them for their journey. They were exhausted from their trek across of the various tunnels and passageways of the Netherworld, and now they had to travel across of this?

"This is too hot for me," Jaques said.

"Where are we going?" Olivier asked.

"We'll find out when we get there," Thomas said.

"Will you guys knock it off?!" Pierre exclaimed.

The heat was causing everyone to be irritable, and the long distances that they walked were giving them cramps in their legs. Suddenly in the afternoon of one blazing day . . .

"Hey everybody! There's another tunnel here!"

Everybody rushed to the tunnel's entrance, glad to be out of the heat. This was a tunnel formed out of crystal, perfectly clear and glistening in the light that was emitted from the cavern that they had put behind them. The walls, ceilings, and floors of the tunnel were unblemished, as if someone had

been constantly polishing and repolishing the crystal floor.

"Well guys, what do you think? Should we follow this tunnel or do we go back into the searing heat of the cavern outside?"

In the end, the vote that they had was unanimous. The crew would follow the tunnel of crystal. Now, this polished tunnel was highly reflective also, and this gave the crew a hard time seeing and walking. All they could do was to follow the tunnel, even if they bumped into a wall or two. They were just glad to be out of the searing, painful heat that they had encountered in the previous tunnel.

The tunnel, like its predecessors, continued on its path for a long distance. This one had turns, but all of them were perfect right angles, which gave them the impression that they were being led to the center of a circle, towards one single point. After hours upon hours of walking, they reached a single, central room. In the center of this crystal room, they saw a giant crystal sphere sitting upon a crystal pedestal that was colored red. Behind this pedestal was a set of carved ebony doors, which appeared to be the same as the ones that Jaques had seen as the entrance to the Explorers' Club International.

"Is that the portal?" Thomas asked.

"Yes, that might be it. Don't think me to be crazy, but I've seen those doors in Paris!" Jaques told Thomas.

They ran towards the doors, jubilant to be going back to their loved ones. In their dash, they saw the crystal sphere and stopped to admire it. It was perfectly round and unblemished, without a single flaw, like the corridor that surrounded it.

"That would make a beautiful headpiece for her majesty's crown," Jaques said.

As he took it off the pedestal, a giant suddenly appeared out of the air. It was as if it was the guardian of the crystal. The giant reached out to grab Jaques, but Jaques ran away from it.

"Thomas!" Jaques yelled.

The warrior spun around, with his sword drawn and his body poised for action. He lifted up his sword and challenged the beast to a battle. Jaques ran with the crystal as Thomas clashed with the beast. As Thomas was avoiding the brutal punches of his foe, Olivier, Pierre, and Jaques opened the doors to their world. As they began to step through, they beckoned for Thomas to stop his game and come with them. As Thomas jumped through the portal, the others quickly shut the doors and left the giant trapped in the chamber back in the Netherworld. They had left the Netherworld once and for all.

CHAPTER IX

When the crew went through the portal, they found themselves back in the Explorers' Club International, in the reception room. Now, the secretary was red in the place, and fuming upon their rude intrusion. Soon, she began to yell at them.

"How did you clowns get in here? Why are you dressed like that? Who are you? Get out off here before I find someone to force you out! OUT! OUT! OUT!"

They ran out of the reception room, down the hall of greats, and out of the building.

"That's unfair!" Jaques exclaimed. "I'm a member of their club!"

Well, they did not actually care. They were here, in Paris, back on the

known Earth!

"We made it!" everyone yelled as they jumped up and down jubilantly.

"And we made it with this," Jaques said as he pulled out the crystal ball.

* * * *

It had now been one week since they had returned from the Netherworld. All of them had seen their families, and all of the proper ceremonies and parades were held to honor the now deceased Jean-Luc. Now, Jaques was summoned to have another meeting with the queen about his expedition, this time private, without the council.

Jaques was waiting in the chamber, thinking about what he would and could actually tell the Queen. Then, Queen Josephine III strode majestically into the chamber.

"Jaques," the Queen began. "What have you done with my ship?"

"Well your Majesty, this is how it happened."

Jaques began explaining the details of his journey to the Queen: the dragon, the trip over the edge, the vortex, and the Netherworld. Finally, the Queen spoke once again.

"Now you are telling me that you lost my ship and returned back to me with nothing at all?" the Queen asked.

"Well, not exactly . . ."

Then, Jaques brought out the crystal jewel and presented it to the Queen.

"It's beautiful! I will take this in payment for all of the trouble that you caused me. May you live to uphold this loyalty to the crown forever!"

Then, she went to her chambers, and ordered the crystal to be mounted

upon the head of the royal crown.

"Well, maybe I did not get anything valuable from this expedition, but I completed the voyage of my 'impossible' dream," Jaques said as he travelled down the road to his quiet home in the rays of the red, setting sun.

The Early Years
of the McDunns

(a prelude to
"The Fog Horn")

Introduction, parts of the Epilogue, and most characters from Ray Bradbury's
"The Fog Horn"

INTRODUCTION

Out there in the cold water, far from land, we waited every night for the coming of the fog, and it came, and we oiled the brass machinery and lit the fog light up in the stone tower. Feeling like two birds in the grey sky, McDunn and I sent the light touching out, red, then white, then red again, to eye the lonely ships. And if they did not see our light, then there was always our Voice, the great deep cry of our Fog Horn shuddering through the rags of mist to startle the hulls away like decks of scattered cards and make the waves turn high and foam.

"It's a lonely life, but you're used to it now, aren't you?" asked McDunn.

"Yes," I said. "You're a good talker, thank the Lord."

"Well, it's your turn on land tomorrow," he said smiling.

"What do you think, McDunn, when I leave you out here alone?"

"On the mysteries of the sea." McDunn lit his pipe. It was a quarter past seven of a cold November evening, the heat on, the light switching its tail in two hundred directions, the Fog Horn bumbling in the high throat of the tower. There wasn't a town for a hundred miles down the coast, just a road which came lonely through dead country to the sea, with a few cars on it, a stretch of two miles of cold water out to our rock, and rare few ships.

"Why do you stay out here in this dreary place McDunn?" I asked.

"Well, it began many, many years ago, about when I was six, when I first encountered a . . .

CHAPTER I

. . . lighthouse Grandpa? We're staying at a lighthouse?"

"That's right Mike, we're staying at a lighthouse!" Grandpa eagerly told Mike.

"YIPPIE! WE'RE GOING TO A LIGHTHOUSE! WE'RE GOING TO A LIGHTHOUSE! WE'R--"

"Hush up! You'll wake up the dead! Besides, you have to pack your things. You wouldn't want to wear the same clothes for the whole time that we're on our trip, would you?"

"Uh . . . no."

"Well, start packing! Our plane leaves at five. You better be ready by then."

"Can mommy help me?"

"Sure your mother can help you. Besides, I don't think you could do it alone. Anyway, I'll be back at quarter to five on Saturday to pick you up. Cheerio!"

That was Grandpa, the best guy in the whole world, except for Daddy. I mean after all, he's taking me to a lighthouse! By the way, what is a lighthouse? Golly, I don't even know what a lighthouse is, even though Grandpa talks about his lighthouse all of the time that he is here. Oh, well. Now was a good time to learn. Well, I better call . . .

"MOMMY! I HAVE TO START PACKING!"

Soon, mother came rushing into the room.

"MOMM--"

"Hush up! You'll wake up the baby! Oh wait! That's right! You're going on that trip with Grandpa this weekend! Where are you going? Will you be safe? Oh well. I guess you don't know."

"We're going t--"

"Oh well, we better start getting you packed. We only have a day. Work, work, work. Why are you kids so talkative? I have to start packing! Kids, what a pain!"

Then mother left the room. What's wrong with her? Oh well, that's stress for you. Soon, mommy came back into the room, and pulled out many sets of clothes from my drawers. Then, she went out of the room, and didn't come back. Well, anyway, I'm actually going to a lighthouse! What an exciting .
..

CHAPTER II

. . . experience this will be for us! Alone out at my lighthouse!" Grandpa exclaimed.

"Grandpa, are we off of the ground yet?"

"Yes we are Mike. You can open your eyes now."

My God, flying for the first time is the most scary thing that I ever have done in my life. Just the acceleration of the plane made me nauseous. I hope I don't ever have to do this again in my life. Then, suddenly I opened my eyes, and I looked out of the window. Then I saw it. It was the most beautiful sight I've ever seen! We were actually above the clouds! From this high up, all of the trees were dots of grass, and the roads formed a thin-lined grid across the Earth.

"Um, Grandpa, what's a lighthouse?" I asked feebly.

"Well Mike, a lighthouse is an object of beauty. Majestically standing above the horizontal horizon, steadily winking its eye to warn the humongous ships of the sea where we are. It is an object which we should cherish as part

of our heritage; an object which we should embrace and hold dear to us for eternity!"

"Huh?"

"Maybe I should have stated it simpler. It's a big white building. It has a clear top and it flashes lights away from it and makes a low, loud sound. Also, people can live in it."

"Okay."

A few brief moments passed as I glanced down at the world below us.

"What does it look like Grandpa?"

"Well, it's a bi - forget it. You'll see it when we get there."

"Okay."

I sat back in my plush seat, and I stared out of the window, looking at the sky above me. Nothing interrupted me for what seemed like days. Of course, this changed when the stewardess came around with the stupid little bag peanuts. Actually, I was rather glad that she had come around. Now I had a new toy to play with!

"Grandpa, can you open these for me? I don't know how."

"Okay." The bah shuffled in his hands. "There you go."

All of a sudden my lungs were filled with the smell of - well, peanuts. After I stared at them for a while, I decided to try one. Then, my mouth was bombarded with the ultimate salty taste of my first airline bag of peanuts. Then, after an agonizing decision making process, I shoved the remainder of the peanuts into the ashtray.

"Grandpa, are we there yet?"

"Not yet. We'll be there soon."

A minute ticks away on the clock of life.

"Grandpa, are we there yet?"

"Just wait. Now put back your head and take a nap like a good little boy. I'll wake you up when we get there."

"Okay!"

With these words, I gently dozed off in the comfortable chair of the airplane.

The next thing that I knew was the feeling of being rocked back and forth. Then, I awoke in a total panic! I opened my eyes, and there it was - was just Grandpa rocking me to wake up. Then, I was relieved.

"Why don't you look outside, Mike."

"Okay!"

Then, I saw a big place of water. Out in the middle of it, I could see a white dot, with moving ships going around it.

"What's that Grandpa?"

"That's a lighthouse. My lighthouse to be precise, and that's where we will be staying."

"Okay!"

Okay, what a wonderful word that was. All you had to do was say "Okay" to anything that Grandpa said, and he would smile and sometimes chuckle. Ahh, the power of words. Then I saw the water come closer, and closer.

"Grandpa, what's happening?!"

"We're just going to land. No big deal."

"I'm scared of landing! We might crash!"

"Don't worry Mike, I'm here!"

"Okay!" I said hastily.

Then, I shut my eyes. Soon, landing was all completed. We got off the plane, and I did ever so quickly! I was overjoyed to be off that machine! Then, we got our bags, and headed off for the shore.

CHAPTER III

It was morning, and the sun was up. Matter of fact, it was glaring down upon our car so much that the air conditioner broke. God, did it ever heat up in there. When we got to the dock, I was glad to be out of the car. Somehow, it seemed to be a little cooler outside than other places, but I could not figure out why. There was an unusual wind; maybe that caused it. Oh well. Another thing to ask Grandpa someday.

"Grandpa, why are we here?"

"Well Mike, we have to board a boat to get across Lonesome Bay to the lighthouse."

"Why can't we just take the car?"

Grandpa chuckled.

"Well Mike, if you can get my car to ride over water, then we can. For now, let's just use the boat."

"Okay."

Grandpa went back to get our bags from the Caddy. Then, as soon as we had our bags, we boarded the ship. It was a fairly big ship, and it was the purest white that I have ever seen. It rocked back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, well, you get the picture. To me, this was not a pretty picture. In fact, I was sick for a little while. But soon, I got accustomed to this peculiar movement. We were floating on the clear blue gentle waves, riding on the sheet of glass known as Lonesome Bay. It was comfortable on the ship, almost like the airplane, but less comfortable. After thirty minutes, Grandpa finally spoke.

"Well Mike, we're almost there."

I watched intently over the bow of the ship. Soon, I would be able to see it. And then, it appeared over the horizon. It towered over my head. White bricks laid on top of a stone island with some moss gave it shape. The top of it was clear, and seemed to have something metal inside it.

"That's McDunn Island. Our ancestors founded the Lonesome Bay lighthouse there years ago, and we still have it today. Of course, it isn't the same one that was originally built, but it has the same design, and it works well."

Soon, the ship landed on the dock of McDunn island, and left us there. Then, we went inside the lighthouse. The stairs, well, they were numerous in number. It wasn't till about three minutes of climbing stairs that we finally reached the rooms of the 'house'. The rooms were fairly large, had a bed, a lamp, and some pictures of the sea on the wall.

"Let's put our bags down here, and follow me. I have something that I want to show you."

We climbed more flights of stairs until finally, we came to the top of the lighthouse, the clear part. From there, we could survey our new surroundings. The view from here was impressive! The placid waters stretched out for miles, with only a few jagged rocks sticking out above it. Below the water, I could see the giant reefs that surrounded Lonesome Bay. The sun was high in the noon sky. Everything was essentially perfect.

"C'mon Mike. Let's go back downstairs and unpack our bags."

"Okay!"

We unpacked our bags, and put our clothes in the chiffarobe, and ate lunch. We played cards during the afternoon, and then came the evening. Again, we walked up the flight of stairs. Then, after the sun had almost set, Grandpa turned on the light. White and red it flashed.

"Pretty!" I said.

"Yes it is, isn't it? It's been warning ships for generations, and still is today. Let's have dinner!"

We went back to our room, and ate some hot tomato soup. Then we went back up to the top of the tower.

"Hey Mike! Do you want to hear a story before you have to go to bed?"

"Yeah," I said as I watched the light pierce the darkness of night like a sharp needle.

"Well Mike, the story goes like this . . .

"It was many years ago when the first McDunns made the first lighthouse here. It was a foggy night when the first lighthouse bore its then flame light across the Bay. Then, the fog started to get thicker and thicker. Finally, the light couldn't penetrate more than one hundred feet into the fog. Then, unknowingly, a ship came along. Unfortunately, the light of the lighthouse didn't reach the ship. The ship struck the reef and sank to the bottom. A new ship it was, straight from the harbor - destroyed. Young crewmembers died in the battle against the sea, but nature won out. It was the first McDunns in the lighthouse that felt responsible. If they had made their light brighter, perhaps the crew would still be alive. Then, the next night, a strange mist fell over Lonesome Bay. Then, as the McDunns stared out across of the water, a ship appeared. It had ghostly white tattered sails, and it glided across the top of the water. Chasing it was a monster, a large green monster that had a terrible voice. A voice of sorrow for those who had lost their souls. Then, right before the dawn, the ship and the monster disappeared. When the McDunns saw the morning sun, they thought that they had only been dreaming, and thought nothing of it. Then, exactly one year later, it happened again."

"Does the ghost ship still roam these parts Grandpa?"

"Yes it does. And every year, the ghost ship of Lonesome Bay still roams, being chased by the monster again and again."

"That's scary!"

"I guess it is Mike. Well, you better get to bed now. It's going to be a long day tomorrow."

With Grandpa's story still in my head, I went back to our room, and fell asleep in the plush bed.

CHAPTER IV

Soon, almost too soon, I woke up. Then, after I got dressed, I went to the kitchen to eat breakfast with Grandpa.

"Grandpa, when is the ship supposed to roam Lonesome Bay?" I asked.

"Well, it's supposed to be tonight, but that's just a story that was passed on from generation to generation. It's not true. Don't worry yourself about it!"

So, for the rest of the day I didn't. I spent the day playing games with Grandpa, walking the shoreline with Grandpa, and looking out over the bay. Then, evening came. I remembered the vivid story of the ghost ship of Lonesome Bay and became curious if it really was true. I walked up the stairs to the top of the tower to start the vigil of searching for the ghost ship of Lonesome Bay. Little did I know that Grandpa was there too.

"Hi Mike! Came up here to look at the stars, huh? Well, I'll be going to sleep soon. Don't be up to late, okay?"

"Okay!"

After a while, Grandpa left down the stairs, heading for his bed. As for myself, I was too scared to sleep tonight. Constantly I watched the bay for a

sign of a ship, but none came. Then, at the striking of the witching hour, a ship appeared. It was even worse than Grandpa had said! It had sails that were ripped and sagging. On the sails were crosses. Its masts were tipped over and the tops were rotting away. The decks were covered with bones, still holding onto anything within their grasp. At the wheel of the ship was the skeleton of a man, still grasping the wheel with all of its might. At the very top, a tattered Union Jack fluttered gently. Behind the ship was a monster. It had a giant head with immense lantern eyes, a neck that was as tall as the lighthouse, and a body that was bigger than the reefs! Then, the monster lunged forward at the ghost ship, and both of them started to move at an enormous rate. Faster and faster they went as the night went on, dancing in their dance of fury and desperation. Then, the night was beginning to fade away into the soft light of the dawn. Finally the ship disappeared. Then, the monster turned its head to look at me. Its huge yellow eyes came in contact with mine. I stood up and walked forward to meet him as he swam towards me. Then, when he was about one foot away from the glass, he stopped. We stared at each other, as though we were friends, but separated by the depths of the sea. Then, as the sun popped up from its resting place along the horizon, the monster went back to the depths of the ocean. Then, I fell into my chair, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

The next morning marked the day that we had to leave the lighthouse. After I had gotten dressed, I went to the top of the lighthouse for the last time while I was there with Grandpa on our trip. I stared out across the water for many hours. Finally, Grandpa walked up the stairs.

"What's wrong Mike?" Grandpa asked.

"Nothin."

"How was your night?"

"Okay."

Somehow Grandpa knew that something had happened there, but he eventually gave in and left me alone to my silence.

As we got on the plane, I again pondered on the thought of seeing the monster again, and again becoming friends. Somehow, I was attached to Lonesome Bay for eternity, but finally I went home. And I couldn't help but remember the monster. And to this . . .

EPILOGUE

. . . day John, I can't help but to remember the monster. I still think about the monster and how I could talk to it," McDunn said.

"It's the mysteries of the sea," said McDunn thoughtfully. "You know, the ocean's the biggest snowflake ever? It rolls and swells a thousand shapes and colors, no two alike. Strange. One might think that things would last forever. Maybe I can talk to it now. You know, that monster sounded like the Fog Horn. Well, maybe we can try . . ."

Miscellaneous Poetry

W E L C O M E

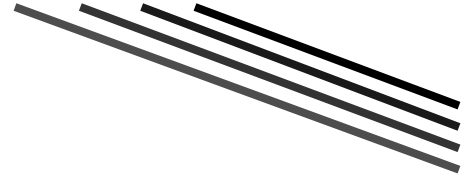
Welcome to my imagination
Where a secret reality hides
A place where we cannot live
But where emotion thrives

Welcome inside my mind
Into a secret world
Where vivid tapestries of fantasy
Hang with their stories unfurled

Come and let me take you
On a trip to a distant place
Where the real and the unreal
Change at a blistering pace

But remember my friend
You can always return
And even if my imagination isn't there
There are still many things to learn

Welcome to my imagination
Dear friend
But remember to always
Return back to your reality again



THE FALL OF THE TORMENTORS



In the darkness I sat,
Pondering over this and that,
When the icy fear hit me on the steps right here,
Filling me with a constant evil fear.
The morning of evil had began.

A humongous black figure loomed over me,
Dark were his eyes, large were his feet,
Arms of steel, tormenting my very soul,
All of a sudden left out in the cold,
Alone and afraid.

The figure towered above me,
Reached for my head did he,
Getting ready to crush all of my feelings with one blow,
Leaving me with nowhere to go,
My feelings on the brink of destruction.

All of a sudden a light appeared,
Warm, bright, and soothing to my ears,
It illuminated the dark hall,
Lifting my fear from the corner of the wall,
It was a Friend.

It came over to me,
And then we,
Raised up our hands together,
Driving away the terror,
The attack of the Tormentor.

We drove him down the stairs,
Pushed him through the passage there,
The strength of us combined,
Drove him out of line,
Causing him to flee.

The courage of us together,
Drove back the Tormentor,
And gave the mighty feeling,
And then I resumed breathing,
Because I had found a friend.

THE DAY OF CARE

One day I was walking down the street,
And I saw an old lady just lingering there on her feet,
She just stared at the eyes,
Of the few passersby,
Just ignoring her as they walked.

Her eyes were filled with deathless sorrow,
Her mouth sagged like there was no 'morrow,
Through her face she had clearly shown,
That she was all alone,
In her dismal, isolated world.

She stared into the air,
Even though nothing 'twas there,
Looking for something,
But only finding nothing,
She was looking for a Care.

The people passed her by,
Not even lifting a little eye,
Making her feel,
Like she was under a heel,
Of the lowest form of life.

The sky then grew cloudy,
People began to get pouty,
No one really cared,
About what was there,
Making the world disappear.

Then I passed her,
When the leaves began to blur,
And I lifted my head,
Like raising a pillow off of a bed,
And gave her a Smile.

The Smile went to her head,
And like the world was raised from the dead,
She smiled too,
Lifting her head out of the blue,
Making her feel wanted.

Then a feeling overcame me,
One that made me happy,
That made me feel glad,
As the old lady had,
As I gave her my Smile.

I turned around to face,
The old lady in lace,
And walked back into her land,
I finally took her hand,
And I led her out into our world of kindness.

So whenever you see,
That old lady by the tree,
Just throw her a Smile,
And stay with her awhile,
And what you receive will be immeasurable.

THE EPIC OF THE NEVERENDING WINTER

The blue bird,
Gently sits on the,
Branch of the birch,
Tree,
Gently singing its song,
Letting happiness onto the world.

The sun shines,
Warming the earth,
As the notes of the bird's,
Song,
Set upon the grass,
Filling the world with vivid color.

The tree stands,
On the lawn,
On the capitol,
Building,
Giving a sense of majesty,
Giving knowledge to the world.

Inside the capitol,
Building people decide,
The final and ultimate,
Fate,
Of the western world,
Deciding what to do with the A-bomb.

The bird keeps,
On singing its song,
As the people,
Decide,
The fate of their enemy,
Deciding who and what to destroy.

Then the decision,
Is made to,
Drop the atomic,
Bombs,
On the other side of the world,
Seeing off the ultimate destruction.



Then the people,
That are trapped,
Make their final,
Wishes,
To be free of their Communist world,
To let their souls quickly be unleashed into freedom.

The bombs rocket,
Their way through,
Vacuums of space,
Plummeting,
To the countries below,
Getting ready to kill off the world.

Then as they,
Push their buttons,
Our great A-bombs,
Explode,
In the once glorious countries below,
They were getting ready for the pain that followed.

There was pain,
Lots of Death,
But very painlessly,
Grasped,
Their once glorious lives,
That once ruled the most inner forces of the world.

Soon we will,
Be demolished too,
Lives painlessly taken,
Rapidly,
Ending the country of the free,
That once fabled home for the free destroyed.

The world was,
Covered by ashes,
And bodies of,
Dead,
Making the world a battlefield,
A battlefield for the scavengers that are left.

But from the,
Tons of Ashes,
Comes a new season,
Winter,
A neverending winter that will be a reminder,
A reminder of that depressing day of the holocaust.

The bluebird now,
White from snow,
Sings in disgust,
Bellowing,
A note of sorrow that serves as a reminder,
A reminder of that depressing day of the holocaust.

The bird sitting,
On the decaying branch,
Of a tree,
Fills,
Fills the world with the dismal color of grey,
The color that rules over this Neverending Winter.

Saying goodbye to,
The winters we,
Knew so well,
Uncovers,
This new Neverending Winter that makes our souls long,
Long for the free world that we wished would come from our ashes.

This winter has,
No holidays except,
For one celebrating,
Sorrow,
Sorrow for the ones who destroyed the world,
Made it into the place of the depressing, sorrowful Neverending Winter.

Maybe one day,
The sun will,
Shine melting the,
Snow,
Ending the depressing, sorrowful Neverending Winter,
Letting the bluebird sing on the birch once again.

And from the,
Ashes of the,
Holocaust will come,
Countries,
Dedicated to the dead fulfilling their belief of a new world,
A World with the everlasting freedom.

And the people,
Shall rue the,
Dismal feelings of,
Winter,
That will fill them with joy and sorrow,
Joy for the newborn, sorrow for the dead.

Foreverlasting.

TRIBUTE FOR THE FORSAKEN ONES

I sit silently,
Thinking about,
Life,
And finally,
Realize that,
I am alone on this earth.

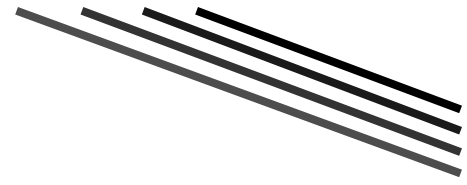
Abandoned by,
Those who,
Love,
Me I now,
See that,
I am alone on this earth.

I am one,
Who is convicted of,
Crimes,
For which cause me,
To realize,
I am alone on this earth.

I still,
Sit silently,
Alone,
Searching for,
Someone,
I am alone on this earth.

Given no,
Chance to,
Repent,
I hold,
My guilt,
I am alone on this earth.

Distrust I,
Have earned by my,
Actions,
For which,
I cannot repent,
I am alone on this earth.



I am,
Not seen by,
Anyone,
Which makes,
Me depressed,
I am alone on this earth.

I have,
No friends and,
Family,
They have,
Forsaken me,
I am alone on this earth.

No longer,
Does light,
Shine,
On my once,
Bountiful life,
I am alone on this earth.

I repent,
I repent,
Repentance,
Is in me,
But still,
I am alone on this earth.

The inanimate objects,
Are my only,
Friends,
Now that,
I realize,
I am alone on this earth.

No longer,
Am I,
Son,
Or brother,
Having been forsaken,
I am alone on this earth.

There is,
Not an ounce of,
Joy,
Left now that,
I accept the fact that,
I am alone on this earth.

I fall,
I fall again,
Hurting,
With the pain,
With the pain,
I am alone on this earth.

The guilt,
The guilt,
Gnawing,
At my,
Inner soul,
I am alone on this earth.

No one,
Is left,
Here,
Now that,
I accept,
I am alone on this earth.

The void,
The void,
Draws,
Me into,
The void,
I am alone on this earth.

Guilty is,
The only,
Plea,
Guilty of,
The crimes,
I am alone on this earth.

The verdict,
The verdict,
Guilty,
For eternity,
It will last,
I am alone on this earth.

No trust,
No trust is my,
Sentence,
No trust,
No trust,
I am alone on this earth.

The pain,
The guilt,
Hurts,
As I,
Find out,
I am alone on this earth.

Nobody to talk,
To who will,
Understand,
The void,
The void,
I am alone on this earth.

No longer,
Will the,
Happiness,
Of my,
Days return,
I am alone on this earth.

Guilty,
Guilty,
Guilty,
Is the,
Only cry,
I am alone on this earth.

My home,
Is finally,
Destroyed,
No trust,
No family,
I am alone on this earth.

No one,
No one,
No one,
Will come,
To me,
I am alone on this earth.

A dream,
A dream,
A dream,
I wish,
It was,
I am alone on this earth.

No longer,
Will I be,
Trusted,
With anybody,
Or anything,
I am alone on this earth.

Only one,
Light of,
Love,
Shines directly,
To me,
Only the Lord.

He is,
The only,
One,
Who has,
Not forsaken me,
Only the Lord.

He,
Still,
Loves,
Me,
No matter,
What my crime,
Only the Lord.

He is,
My only
Friend,
Now that,
I am alone,
Only the Lord.

He lights,
The Path to,
Freedom,
From this,
Personal hell,
Only the Lord.

He is,
The only one that can,
Save,
No one,
Else,
Only the Lord.

I still,
Fear my,
Judgement,
But I,
Am still loved,
Only the Lord.

I am,
Never forsaken,
By,
Him he,
Shall guide me,
Only the Lord.

But in,
The world of,
Mortals,
I know,
I realize,
I am alone on this earth.

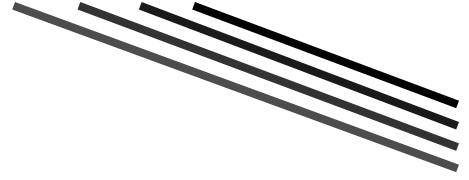
For Eternity.

THE DAY AFTER

I was sitting,
In the car,
Riding,
To my school,
On,
The Day After.

I got out,
Of the car and,
Walked,
To the top of,
The stairs,
Hearing,
Voices of children,
Talking in happiness,
But I look,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I open the,
Door and,
Walk,
Into the,
Green carpeted,
Hall,
Smelling,
The aroma of,
The Home-Ec room,
But I sniff,
And t'is devoid of smell,
With nothing there.



I look,
Into the computer,
Room,
And see,
Children,
And hear the,
Bleeping,
Of computer,
Games,
But I search harder,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I look,
Into the typist's,
Room,
And hear the,
Clicking,
Of an electric,
Typewriter,
But I look,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I stroll,
Into the,
Library,
And see,
Librarians,
Shelving hardcover,
Books,
But I look,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I pass,
All of the classrooms,
With funny,
Teachers,
In them,
Laughing,
At their jokes,
But I listen harder,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I go down,
To the,
Office,
And see the,
Loving caring,
Secretary,
And kind,
Principal,
Smiling and,
Talking,
But I look harder,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I walk into,
The gigantic,
Gym,
With the,
Gymnasts,
Doing double,
Flips,
On the rings,
But I look harder,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there.

I walk outside,
Into the green,
Field,
And see,
Classmates,
Along with,
Friends,
Playing with a,
Frisbee,
Laughing joyfully,
But I look and listen harder,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there . . .

It's the Day After,
And t'is empty,
With nothing there,
But memories,
To return to again.

THE LIGHT ETERNAL

As I wait,
Here,
On my deathbed,
Everything seems lost,
Everything except for The Light Eternal.

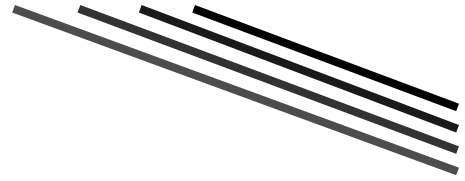
The darkness creeps,
Engulfing,
Me now,
The darkness is all,
Except for The Light Eternal.

The soothing calming,
Light Eternal,
Draws me into,
Itself calming me,
The wonderful Light Eternal.

As I enter,
This new world of,
Light,
I see the,
Gates of heav'n,
With the welcome of The Light Eternal.

I am graciously,
Welcomed by the,
Light,
Into this new,
Peaceful world,
With the help of The Light Eternal.

I look around,
And see loved,
Ones,
Welcoming me also,
Into his hands,
Into the loving grasp of The Light Eternal.



Then as I,
Begin to see,
The Light,
I notice who,
The Light is,
The Lord is The Light Eternal.

Now I find,
Myself awakened from,
A dream,
I am home,
In bed,
But I have seen The Light Eternal.

That day as,
I walk in the,
Square,
I see another,
Vision pertaining to,
The Light Eternal.

Everyone around me,
Is glowing with,
Light,
Showing me that,
Everybody truly is,
The Light Eternal.

The Lord has,
Shown me the,
Light,
Of himself and,
His love,
Showing that his love is truly Eternal.

CONFRONTATION

the battlefield of
the war
reeks of
confrontation:

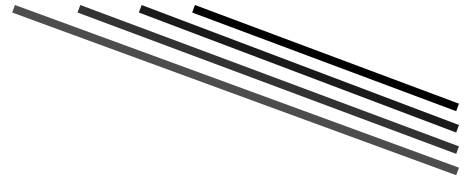
one day in
the wild blue
yonder
two planes
are flying
as the
enemies fight

soon the sun
sets on the
armies
but the
fighting still
continues
on

then the men
finally realize that
they
are together
in the
gigantic sky
alone

then the light
of the fighting
below
changes to
a fire
that is
rising

it is a fire of evil



the men eye
one another in
hatred
as they
approach one
another ordered
to kill

neither of them
knew the other
man
that they
would shoot
that day

in the fire of evil

the flames grew
higher as the
men
approached one
another in
their deadly
planes

it was one
or the other
one
who could
shoot first
and destroy
the other

then the flames
grew higher as
their
hands twitched
on the
triggers of
the cannons

then one shot
but it was
too late
for he
had already
been
hit

as the other
pilot who
shot
was flying
by the
other plane
crashing
he caught a
glimpse of the
man inside and
saw that it
was his own
neighbor from
the other
side of the
war

he had killed a fellow man

what have i
done to his
wife
and
family
said the man
in disgust
what have
i done

then started the real confrontation

all of my
life i have not
killed
another man
said he
i never
have

then as the
flames died he
saw
the plane
crashing to
the ground
below

the confrontation has just begun

for the rest
of his life
he
lives with
the confrontation
of guilt
on his
shoulders

saying goodbye to
his army life
he
left and
was disturbed
for he had
killed
another man

it is not about
wars or guilt he
said
it is about what
comes after i speak
about that is the
real hurt

i speak to all
of you when
i
say that
you should
never kill
for it destroys
more of you
than you harm
them

the real confrontation
is right here
in
you my children
and remember what
you do for
the confrontation in your lives has just begun

::CONFRONTATION MY CHILD::
::REMEMBER THAT IT::
::HAS ONLY BEGUN::

CONFRONTATION

THE FALL

I was standing on top
of the bridge
looking down at the water
thinking about my life

Then I made the
decision to go
off and plunge down
to the depths below

I said my final
prayers
and took the incentive
and jumped

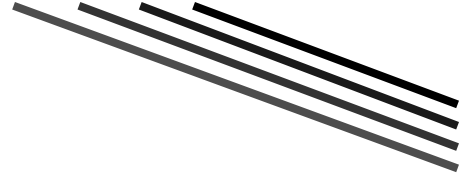
the people around me
were screaming something
but I couldn't hear
for I was screaming too

the air whizzed past
my red face
whipping away the scream
from my lips

I wondered if I
would still live
after I hit the
water below

the air whizzed past
me faster and
faster yet
and then I screamed louder

I could see my
life flashing before
my eyes as I
was held in fear



I took a breath
and looked down
and saw the water
coming closer to me

I began to think
that I
shouldn't have done this
after all

the water was rapidly
catching up
to me grasping
for my life

my heart was racing
faster than it
had ever gone before
in the whole time of my life

still I screamed and
looked down
with my hair churning
like the sea above me

then the water reached
my feet
as I was travelling
faster and faster
and all of a sudden

BOING

the bungee cord zipped me up to the surface again.

THE LIGHT OVER THE HORIZON

I was sitting
on the ground
of the hill
waiting for the sun to rise

Only the stars
were there to
greet me when
I sat on the grass

I waited through
the early hours
to see the
sunrise today

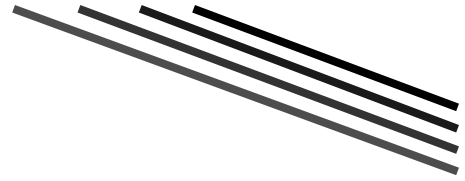
Then as the
air began to
get colder I
saw the first hint of light

Then it steadily
rose out of
the ground from
which it was entombed

It was only
one sliver of
light at first
but it soon grew

It shed its
radiant light over
the green grass
and caused the dew to glisten

The sky was
pink with a
charming fresh light
and made the sky a painting of beauty



The sun warmed
the Earth as
it winked gently
at the life below

It was the
light over the
horizon the light
that we could all see

It slowly continued
to rise into
the sky lighting
up every area of shadow

Then it gently
popped out of
its resting place
and lit up the whole world to see

It was the
total essence of
beauty and it
was free and could be seen by all

The sun was
now up giving
life to the new day
and waking up once again

THE SEARCHING

it was the
time of the
searching:

walking through the
forest floor
searching
for the
thing that so evades

i see the
light of the
sun
streaking through
the leaves of the dense foliage

my ears are
attentive and
listening
for the thing
that so evades my senses

i gently walk
on the
branches
on the forest
floor so as not to make a sound

my eyes are
glaring into
the bushes
and the trees
looking for the faintest sign of the thing that so avoids me

i hear a
faint rustling in
the bushes
and my muscles
tense for the thing that so avoids me



i slowly stealthily
turn around to
see
what is there
but i see nothing

then i plunge
into the
bushes
and run towards
the sound of the thing that so avoids me

then i reach
an open
field
in the forest
where i see tracks of the thing that so avoids me

then i hear
another rustling of
leaves
and turn around
to face the thing that so avoids me

then i hear
a faint
yelp
behind me
but i do not respond

then the thing
comes rushing
out
at my back
and leaps onto me breathing down my neck

then i yell
a cry of
joy
for i had found
my puppy who was lost in the forest

THE COMING

It was dusk,
In the sky,
At the time,
Of the coming.

The soft cotton,
Clouds gave peace,
To the peaceful,
Calm of the sky.

Then all of,
A sudden the,
Peace was broken,
By the coming.

It darkened the,
Peaceful blue sky,
Calming the cotton,
Clouds above.

I looked at,
It and saw,
A beauty of,
The likes I had never seen before.

The shades of,
Pink purple and,
Blue surrounded a,
Red sun.

The coming drank,
Of the sun's,
Sweet light and,
Hungered for more.

It drank and,
Drank on while,
The light grew,
Brighter colorful and more beautiful.



It soon drank,
The sun's life,
And the color,
Disappeared from the sky.

The coming hungered,
For more juice,
So it drank,
The moon.

The sky was,
Dark and isolated,
With not even,
A star to greet the night.

The coming was,
Satisfied and it,
Looked down and,
Saw the lights upon the ground.

I looked down,
Also and saw,
The jewelbox that,
Greet the coming.

I had to,
Fall from the,
Peaceful sky and,
Greet the coming.

Then I stepped,
Out of the,
Sky and made,
Myself find the courage to greet the coming.

Then I turned,
Around to face,
The coming and,
Saw it.

With all of,
My strength I,
Ran towards it,
And it invaded my soul.

I did not,
Fight the coming,
For it was,
Already part of me.

I greeted my,
Loving parents who,
Hugged me and,
The coming.

It was the coming of my time to return.

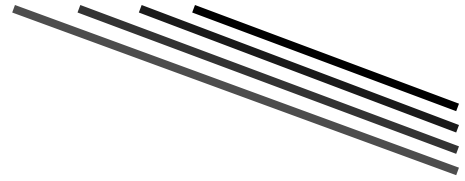
THE LOST

In the dark
Lonely
Cold
I wait for
The lost
To pass
Wanting to be found

Listening
In the dark
Bleak
Barren
Note of silence
Hanging on the
Edge of the
Finger of God
The glorious
Conductor of the night

It is ~~then~~
That my eyes
Adjust
And become one
With the night
Ever seeing
Ever peering
The dark invisible searchlight for the Lost

It is now
That my hands
Reach out into
The night
Feeling for the
Minds
Of the Lost



Where are they
For the searchlight
Is dim
And the probe
Not even a touch
One can only
Wait for the Lost

It is then
When the searchlight
Sees
A faint dim
Figure piercing the
Intensity of the night
It is a figure
Of the Lost

The probe extends
Into the solidity
Of the dark
Dragging behind the
Searcher cutting
A path to the lost

My ears can
Hear the
Cries
Through the eerie
Silence of the
Lonely night
The cries of the Lost

My heart races
Faster
And my eyes
The searchlight
Water
As I hear the
Cries of the Lost

The probe pulls me
Faster and
Faster
As the Lost
Look at me
The searcher

The Lost's
Feet
Move to
The beating of
My heart as
I draw closer
The Lost and the Searcher
Yearn to meet

Soon the searchlight
Tells that
We
Are almost upon
One another
As we run faster
To meet each other

The Lost runs
As fast as
I
And I run
As fast as
The Lost
And soon we shall meet

The Lost embraces
Me
As I embrace
The Lost
In an embrace
Of utter
Joy for the Lost is found

Part of me
Reaches
Out to the soul of
The Lost
As it was told
When I was found

I can feel
Part of me
Escape
Out of my body
As I see it
The awesome
Ball of light

The ball of light
Floats
Between me and
The Lost
As we step apart
To see it

The ball of
Light
Pierces the chest of
The Lost
And enters the
Heart
Of the Lost

The Light Eternal
Has entered the heart
Of the lost
As some of the
Light Eternal
Has escaped mine
To welcome the Lost

The Lost is
No longer
Lost
For the Lord,
The Light Eternal
Has entered his heart
Showing the hope and love of his greatness for eternity

The Found
Gallivants
Onward singing the
Hymns
Of joy as
The Searcher I
Am left in my tired isolation

I am exhausted from
The Giving
But still I wait
And regain my
Composure
And well-being
For I am
The Searcher

It is not
Easy
Being
The Searcher
Called by
The Light Eternal
The messenger of God

You must learn
To live with
The Searcher
And coexist with
The Lost
To give them
The Love
As well as
The Comfort
To turn them into
The Searchers
As The Light Eternal
Has shown us the love
As he was the first Searcher from
The sky above

If we can all
Be Searchers
For the sake of
The Light Eternal
As he searched out for
The Lost
The world can all
Become one
In Love
And Joy
And be
The Searchers
For the whole universe

The Light Eternal
Guides us
As we search
In the dark
Of oppression
Sin
And guilt
For the lost in the world
And help everyone
Survive
Through the great concert of Life

The Searchers
Are finding
The Lost every day
As The Light Eternal
Continues to find
The Lost
Through us
As he continues to help the world

THE SEARCHER; THE LOST; THE GLORIOUS FINALE OF LIFE

THE IGNORANCE

Here lies the shredded
Cardboard box
House of the
Homeless
Drifting down the polluted
River
Washed away by Ignorance

Here lies the broken
Words
Foreign language of
Paper
Fallen from weary
Eyes
Foreign to writing because of Ignorance

Here lies the tattered
Clothes
That have protected the bodies of the
Homeless
Bought in the
Junkyard
Because of the high price of Ignorance

Here lies the once glorious
Street
That has become an old
Alley
Dilapidated and full of
Potholes of filthy water
The only drink for the homeless
Because of the selfishness of Ignorance

Here lies the abandoned
Tenement
That has become the homeless's
Revered place of shelter
Run down old and
Condemned
Soon to be torn down
Because of the blindness of our Ignorance



Here lies the last
Garbage
Pile flaming with the
Only warmth for the homeless
Ancient flames
Because of the cost of our Ignorance

Here lies a small
Scrawled drawing
Of a loved
Child
From long long
Ago
Shoved out from our world by Ignorance

Here lies the charred
Photo
Of a young
Woman with child
Lost to her loving
Family
Because of the uncaring attitude of Ignorance

Here lies the deflated scrubby old
Basketball
The only
Source of pleasure
Given to the
Homeless
Because of the greed of Ignorance

Here lies the rusted
Car
Lying stripped on a back
Alley
Their only possession
Their only home
Because of the destruction of Ignorance

Here lies the forgotten
Park
The eternal park
Benches
The odd uncaring dirty
Beds for them
Made by the hands of Ignorance

Here lies the ancient
Subway terminal
Smelly old decaying
Place of stench
Kept alive as the city of
Homeless
Constructed and wrecked by the cold stone heart of Ignorance

Here lies the old
Soup kitchen
The place of neverending
Food
To benefit the needs of the
Homeless
Not even recognized by the eyes of Ignorance

Here lies the memory of
The helpers
Of the
Homeless
Keepers of the
Poor
Not once having been acknowledged by the hearts of Ignorance

Here lies the wet paper
Bag
Shrine of the demon called
Alcohol
The downfall of the
Homeless
Provided graciously by Ignorance

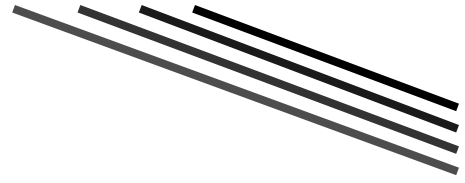
Here lies the decaying
Body
Of a lonely lost abandoned
Child
Killed from the lack of
Necessities
Which are enjoyed in surplus by Ignorance

Ignorance is us my friends
Ignorance is ruling our lives
If Ignorance gains the upper hand
Ignorance will rule the earth

Fight Ignorance
Fight the pain
Greed found in Ignorance
Lend a hand heart eye help them
Come Homeless for help
Die Ignorance cold hearted
Welcome warm caring loving ones
Give them yourself
Find out what it truly means to care.

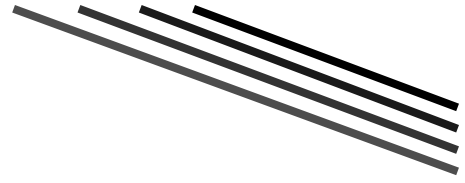
THE GREATEST OBSERVATION ON LIFE

It is hard
To write
With your mouth.



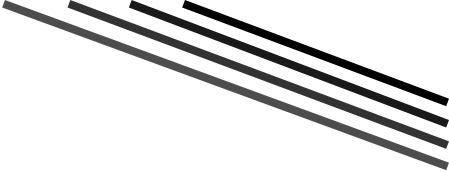
THE BEE

The bee buzzes
Behind my ear
And hastily
Flies away
As I whirl my head around
To see the yellow king of pain
That stung me on my neck.



STRESS

AAAAUUUGGRRUUUGGGHHH!!!!



TWENTY - THOUSAND



the sky looks gleefully upon haggard ships
drifting through the open lagoon
filled with the ominous dark lit only by the
indifferent halo of lights reflecting off of the
steel lanterns of the ships flying above
the forests of kelp glistening in the soft
moonlight undisturbed by man waiting
for that special someone to uncover their lost treasures
from the men of old for of the kelp
twenty-thousand of them there are
floating in this sea
glistening in the moonlight untouched by human hands
the skyline is telling the story
of the saga of generations of people that have
wrecked the streets of the city that monument to
the age old harmony of nature destroyed by the hands
of man the cove still remains as the untouched example
a small cove in the numerous multitudes of waters surrounding it
the twenty-thousand waves glisten in the moonlight
supplemented by the lost light of the ships sailing
with their old unraveling sails extended waiting to greet the
sunrise that has awaited them for years twenty-thousand
years have gone by for the sleep of the kelp
the ships have waded across the twenty-thousand waves of the world
to face their master twenty-thousand have perished seen by that
saga told by the demolished horizon with only the ships remaining
to greet the lonely sun weeping spreading out its sorrowful light
through the hazy lost atmosphere a monument to ages past
stoic in its monotonous path spanning across the tracks of the
twenty-thousand stars still beckoning the people to relight their
lanterns lighted by the reflections of the moon upon their burnished steel
and twenty-thousand will one day be reborn from the last few people
in the city of old and there will be some who will help but to rebuild
the old lives of the people here to refurbish the world there will be
one
who can save the existence of those few who escaped and helps to save
twenty-thousand

UNTITLED SNOWS

the sun shines yet on the new-found day
few birds sing on the bare branches of the trees
the cold blustery north wind shakes these frail branches
falling to the ground amidst the
softening rays of the sun
the cold drives through layers of clothing that i wear
as the snow constantly drives through the wood of the
dilapidated cabin that i claim as my home
the wind is the screwdriver further helping
the cold to claim its victims here in the dead forest
nothing is living here and no one is coming yet
change brings me no comfort only the snow is
still here i wait only for my traps to come and bring
me bounties of food for they have not closed yet
the clouds are coming now they are hiding the sun
that has melted some of the snow
i can see those untitled snows coming to claim
their lost territory to try to claim a life
it is time to build a fire to create the shelter
it is time to try to survive
for here come the majestic untitled snows
that killing provocative beauty and serenity of
untitled snows



STONE

That person walking
Down this busy
Street of town
Filled with people
Is he the one of stone?

"It was worthless"
"He was 89"
"I didn't know"
The feeble words
Is he the one of stone?

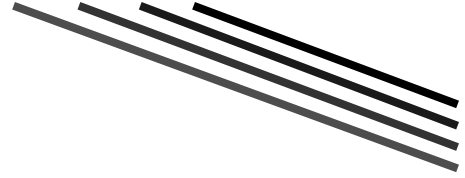
"Our equipment soiled"
"Our hands dirtied"
"No cash reward"
The resentful words
Is he the one of stone?

"Why was I there"
"I didn't help"
"Who really cared"
The old excuses
Is he the one of stone?

"I saw it live"
"It was his time"
"It was on the way there"
The mindless comments
Is he the one of stone?

Walking down the
Busy streets are
People still living
Their normal lives
Are they the ones of stone?

The one of
Stone does not
Care about those
Who pass away
Are they abandoned by the ones of stone?



Or are they
The ones of
Fire warming others'
Hearts of stone
So we can all realize the importance of everyone?

Are you the one of stone?

Are you the one of fire?

Think, and change.

THE TRAVELLER

Along a white horizon it travels
Along the waves of the sea
Among the jagged rocks it waits stoically
On its haunches

The Traveller this is
Travelling along the winds of the world
Traversing the currents
One in the spirit of life

The Traveller is rushing over the earth
And yet is travelling slow
In one space it is confined
Yet unbound

To the refuges it ambles
Along the paths inscribed with
The abominations which mortal suffering has caused
The Traveller is suffering from our toments

The Traveller carries with Him a great message of
Salvation for the denounced spirits
Cowering in the apathetic shadows
The Traveller will provide illumination from His weakened spirit

The Traveller's calloused feet etch upon
These monuments to mortal suffering
An epic of eons of martyrdom
The Traveller is dying for a cause

In the distance the Traveller spies
The place of refuge of the rejected
And still trudges under its burdens
Carrying the price of salvation

The black pillars of onyx are
Lethargically rising off disks of light
Trampling the ancient gods of salvation
The Traveller's pillar is first emerging



Through the ominous greeting the
Traveller forces his protesting feet
To submit to the immortal power of
The Traveller continuing onward

The pillar is rising from the back of
The Traveller reaching to the heavens
Or Hells of the sky above
The Traveller carries his burden well

Onward through the street he ambles
His feet burning the inscriptions of terror
The inscriptions of terror burning into his feet
The old sins are being lifted still

The pillars are in front of him now
And he is passing them only
Recognizing their monstrosity
And yet he does not feel his own

Walking onward he sees a rejected soul
Behind a pillar smelling of alcohol and urine
Sitting against a pillar
His only clothes the trash of the rich

"You bum!" the soul says to him
"How do you come to know us?"
"How do you know where we live?"
"How can you heal our souls?"

"You deserve to die and
"Rot in hell! for what you have done
"Blasphemy! look what you claim"
He does not know the Traveller well

The Traveller holds out a hand
Stretching towards him balled in a
Fist of strength
Groping for the lost soul

The rejected soul looks up at
The Traveller and says to him
"What in the hell are you doing?"
The Traveller is confining the unbound

The lost soul reaches for the hand
Of the Traveller expecting to pry it open
But rather the Traveller's hand
Is opening only with the soul's touch

The soul's eyes open wide and stare
At the lighted darkness blinding him
For in the center of the Traveller's hand
Comes a beam of light

"Light! you bring Light! to our people"
yes i do
"How can I be saved"
follow me

The soul is led back to rest
Upon the black pillars
But there is something new
Welling up inside of him

From the soul's hands comes a
Beam of light and
From the soul's back comes
A dark pillar

The Traveller walks on
Determined to find destiny
Riding in front of him
While ignoring the pillar on His back

There is no sun here
The new day is only greeted
By a feeble glow shining
Through the dark clouds

In this dim light the Traveller
Can see his destination over
The low hills
A broken city is in the distance

It is the city of the lost souls
The rejected ones
The last humans on the earth
The final destination of the Traveller

Walking along the road upon
Which their pains are written
His pillar grows taller
He is bearing their pains too

Soon he sees the first of them
They gather at his side
They follow him and worship
A being that they do not remember

There are many behind
The Traveller but none dare
To traverse along the road
For they would bear their pains over

Soon he was in the center of the town
And the followers of him shouted
And the people came running
To see the new person in their lives

They were all around him
Staring at his tired face
Poking at his heavy pillar
Laughing at his pain

"You dumb soul
"Why did you come here
"To put your many pains on us"
They all cried out in unison

They grabbed up stones from
Their street of pain
And threw them at the face
The Traveller's face was a target

Their pains added to the weight
Of the already unbearable pillar
Rising off of him
Already driving him to the ground

"Don't you dump your silly
"Pains on us"
They cried at him
As their sins rained down on him

They drove him to the
Ground where they kicked
And spat on him while some
Ripped at his flesh with fingers

They clawed at him with their
Hands savoring the warm blood
Gushing out on their hands
Comforting them in their greatest sin

Soon the Traveller was a
Mass of matter unrecognizable
To those around him
And the souls laughed

"No more pain for us
"But more for you where
"You are going"
They still sneered at the dying

Then as they continued to rip away
The tattered flesh from the flimsy
Bones the growing pillar pierced the
Clouds above for the first time

A single shaft of pure light
Shined down the path of the
Pillar of sin and landed upon
The face of the Traveller

Scared were the souls for not for
Many years had they seen a light
They backed away as they
Saw the Traveller's face unharmed

Their scratches and gores had
Disappeared to reveal a smooth
Skin but it was still
Bleeding through the pores

A rasping breath was heard from the
Traveller for it was his last
But with this energy
He lifted out his hand

With the souls' eyes opened
Wide and all encompassing
His hand opened
And from it came a single shaft of light

Confined into a beam it shone up
To the clouds showing their
Graceful ominous billows
And the souls' eyes followed it

They were enchanted by it and did
Not notice the gasp of the Traveller
A last chance for air he tried
But then life slipped from His grasp

Then it was unbound
The beam of light burst and
It lighted the world
Entering all of the people in it

Then the souls looked down slowly
And they all had clenched fists
And then they slowly saw them open
And beams of light came out

They converged upon one single
Spot on the clouds and there
The clouds opened up
To reveal a monstrous shaft of light

From the light of the Traveller they
Could see Him bathed in light
And they saw the body of the
Traveller bathed in light rising up into the sky

Farther it went and it rose
Up into the clouds and it
Then disappeared
Grasped by a gigantic hand of light

A strong wind passed them and
Blew them on their backs
And their hands closed
But the light lingered in the sky

Now any one of them can
Open their hands and see
The Traveller's light from them
A gift from Him

They don't know what happened to
The Traveller but
Somewhere he is still walking
Walking with his pillar

He walks to give a
Redeeming light to the people
Of this forgotten world
The unbound Traveller lives and helps the people forever

The Traveller is here and he lives
Inside of you
And if you are one of the lost souls
Someday you will open your hand and see the light

It is the light of the Traveller

THE PRAISED OF MY LIFE

It started as an
Innocent love
Superficial
Pure

It was a secret
For us all
A secret love
That everyone hides

What went wrong
I'll never know
What caused the loss
Of the praised of my life

The first time I
Laid my eyes
Upon her
I knew who she was

It was not looks
It was not lust
It was not fantasies
It was only her personality

Such a kindness has
Never been seen
Such a all loving soul
Will never be seen again

It was her whom
Was the praised of
My feeble life
Dwarfing grandeur

I followed her
Throughout the world
My mind occupied
By the thought of her laugh



There is not one
Who has ever been
As that praised one
Had been for me

As she talked
I could hear
As she walked
I could see

There was someone
Special there
Someone whom I wanted
To be a friend with

What can we do
When we are encompassed
By the fear
Locking in our feelings

For years it was such
As I followed her around
And then came
The magical moment

I could help her

I could help everyone as I would have done

But I could help her

What did it mean

I only did the same for her as the others

But then she thanked me

She was the only one

I wrote a letter thanking her for remembering
And I was ostracized
Cast out from society
For simply reciprocating
Still a slave for those who needed me
Ignored by those who thanked me

My fortune reversed upon the ground I find

The object which I had so dutifully made for her

In a blink of an eye I knew

All the secret letters
All of the sideways glances

Had all been in vain

The praised of my life
Had thrown away the praiser

In the blink of an eye
A dream can be shattered

In the course of a day
A life can be ruined

There is truly a place in our souls
Where secrets hide
The secrets that are hardest to express

And that's where they'll stay

For the praised does not want the praises anymore

I know it won't work
And two years have been spent in vain
Why?

Love

All that I know is that forever

I will still hide a secret love

Even when it rejects the praises

I still have my dreams

And dreams are what life is made of

I know

Because all that I do and

All that I have done and

All that I will do

Is all for the fulfillment

Of a dream that cannot be fulfilled

I still dream

I still enjoy

The smile and

The laugh

Of the praised of my life.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

Standing there in the midst of a clearing
Teeming with the varieties of the jungle life
A chimpanzee looks about
Its nostrils inhaling the beautiful fragrances of
The jungle flowers
Its eyes scanning
Peering over the unbroken skyline
Of towering trees spreading out
Their broad leaves
Stretching for the sun
And the chimpanzee is happy

Without any warning
A spire appears in the jungle
Blocking out the sun
Towering over the protective hands of
The high kings of the forest
The protrusion's top hidden
In the billowing wisps of the clouds
It's shadow falls upon
The chimpanzee and it
Strikes a fear into the chimpanzee's
Heart and mind
A screech is let out over the forest
A wail of terror
For an unnatural object
Has placed itself in
A jungle paradise



The chimpanzee smells
Odors
The black odors of a world that
Has not yet come
And the chimpanzee scrambles
To find a shelter
But it finds none
It rushes through the bush
Trying to escape the shadow
And does not notice the roar
Of the river
Looking back over its shoulder
Yelling in defiance
A clamor wrecks havoc upon the
Jungle peace
And then not looking
The chimpanzee plunges into the
River
The swift unforgiving currents
Carrying it off to its death
As it wails in terror and fear
Because it will die
And as the chimpanzee is
Sucked underneath the turbulent rage
Of the waters
The spire disappears
The smell of the pollen returns
The sun shines once again
Because the future world will never happen
The link has died
The human race has no future

Because of the fortune teller
And its tale of death

THE PARASITIC PERSISTENCE

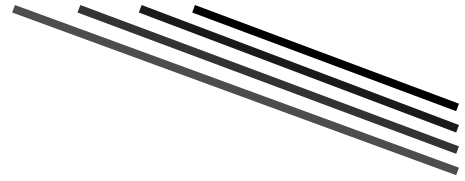
For one second
It shimmers there
In front of your eyes
And is implanted
Upon your brain
For eternity

It enhances your
Every emotional thought
Occupying your dormant
Mind of knowledge
The spark of
Everlasting life

It gives you
A drive to
Continue onward in
Hard and unstable
Times of sorrow
In the years

Even if you
Try to expel
It from your
Every daily thought
It is a
Persistent predator

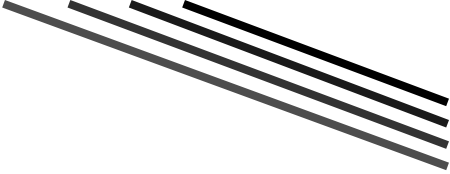
Constantly feeding off
Of your joyful
Thoughts it rests
Peacefully giving you
A sense of
Utopian bliss



Never will it
Become separated from
Your soul for
You and it
Are eternally bonded
From a first sight

It is the bondage of a dream

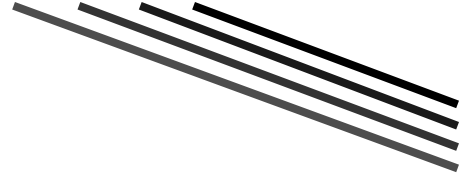
POEMA AMORIS



Gazing at the skyscrapers
Skittish animals glancing sideways
Preheating oven
Anxiety before the big game
Humbly approaching the crowd
Tremulous child
Addressing the crowd
Four score and seven years ago
Gazing at the skyscrapers
Fire alarms ringing
Speaking with a forked tongue
Candle flame flickering
Dim the lights
Quoth the raven "Nevermore"
Sword piercing armor
Thou shalt not worship false gods
I beg for mercy
Snake attacks bearing fangs
The wolf in sheep's clothing
Run away!
The persistence of a dream
If you strike me down, I will become more powerful than you can ever imagine
Sitting on a false throne
Submission
Gazing at the skyscrapers

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

The world was dark
The cameras flash
Music maestro
The fiddlers fiddle
The trumpets sound
The curtain opens
Upon a virgin day
The dancers dance
The truck barrels down the mountain
People flee in terror from the downpour
A swarm of locusts
The buzzing of the fly
The distant sound
The eye of the storm
Peace be with you
The fat lady sings
The barricades are cleared
The trumpets sound
The fiddlers fiddle
As the world turns faster
The chorus shouts
The world joined hand in hand on a sunny day
The cameras flash
The man slams the door
And on the seventh day
The crowd cheered their shouts of joy
God rested



EDUC

Lead away, my friends
Lead me away from my dreams

For now is the time of reason

Lead away, my friends
Lead me away from my desires

For now is the time of purity

Lead away, my friends
Lead me away from my happiness

For now is the time of logic

Lead away, my friends
Lead me away from my pride

For now is the time of accomplishment

Lead away, my friends
Lead me away from my selfishness

For now is the time of sharing

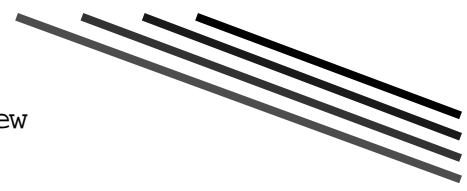
My friends, you may lead me away
But you cannot lead me away from love

For now is always the time of loving
And without love my soul is not complete

Non educere ex amore potestis



A HIDDEN SECRET



mostly hidden from view
one above all others
lying in wait hiding
listening to the soft rain
yearning to speak its truth

and through all the day
none come by me
new life is born

i feel the pulse, the beat
the gourmet of the deli
the cry of the wolf, its peal
waiting outside for the mail
the dream that I decree
the longing of anarchy

upon a dark street I roam
thinking upon the direction I must go
nothing that I see is real
all freedom I must steal
from this world of apathy

nature cries alleluia
song trapped in a can
subliminal laughs of pan

turning points of focus
inside of your psyche
learning to mold itself to you
lethargic in its addiction
eating away at your soul
yelling to be free.

so do i love
love i so do
the hidden secret
of my verse
both left
and right.

PATIENCE

Upon a lost thought
The lonely man
Wanders aimlessly
Having no purpose
Having no destination
Waiting for someone
To come upon him
Seeing
Peering
Out into the
Bleak
Dark
Night
A veil hiding the
Unseen
Reality of the world
And still he waits
Waiting for that one
Person
To break through
The barricade
Of the dark
Bleak
Firbidding
Night
To find him
And show him the
Light



UNSEEN POWER

A stumbling block
In our way
A train
Going only where the tracks do lead

Uncontrollable
Following along
Changing on its own
Upon its confining limiting iron rails

What could it be
This random metamorphosing
Thing that
All of us possess

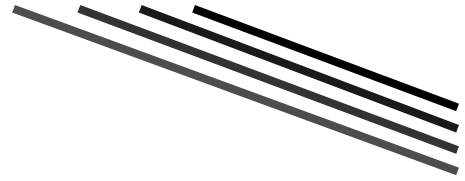
It is the carrier of our thoughts
It is the messenger of emotion
It is the thing above all others
That makes us who we are

It is that distorter of truth
It is that barricade for wisdom
It is that limitation of our expression
That hides who we are

What could be
This random metamorphosing
Thing that
All of us possess

Every day we use it
Every day we hear it
Every day we see it
Every day we touch it

Controlling our destiny
Like an unseen god
Altering our fate
In a split second

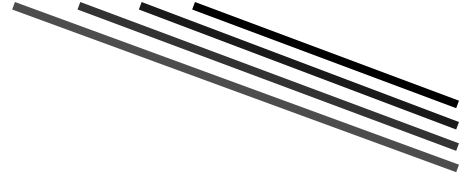


It can change our lives
Within one point in time
Forming a direction for us
In a single breath

The power of Language

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

A forgotten man ambles down the deserted street
To his filthy cardboard home
Sagging from the pommeling of the rain
His jacket soaked and torn
His shoes full of holes
He leans down with a sigh
And enters his humble abode
Inside, an old oily curtain is his only cover
The water drips from the cardboard ceiling
As he smiles adoring his cardboard walls
He considers himself one of the privileged
In his hand he holds his daily food
One crust of bread
One moldy half-eaten hot dog
One grease encrusted french fry
One stale dog biscuit
For it is truly a feast
He crouches down yet further
Wrapping his curtains around him
Trying to cover up the dirt on his face
Trying to cover up the holes in his slacks
Trying to cover up the lost soles of his shoes
As he says his grace
And thanks God for his kindness
And for his bounty
For here in his frigid yet bountiful home
He sits
Alone
On this glorious Christmas day.
Where will you sit?



SONNET, JOURNEY

In sorrow I walk through the falling rain,
Its heavy patter not yet soothing me,
With soft tears formed from my undying pain,
My undying true love yet yearns for thee.
The twinkling star shines yet in the grey sky,
How it directs and guides me on my way,
As my faraway love does not yet die,
For the star, my love, does inside me stay.
Bleeding, through the wretched night I travel,
My frozen digits are denied feeling,
My body piercèd by the sharp gravel,
The star shines on inside my mind, healing.
For on this twisted winding road of life,
You, love of my heart, lead me through my strife.



THE FIRST STAR

The first star of the evening
The first star of the morning
The brightest star in the sky
Twinkling with its white pure light

Always adding its light to
The brilliance of creation
Making night seem like day
Making day seem like night

Guiding my way
Through the dark of the day
Constantly remembered
Through the light of the night

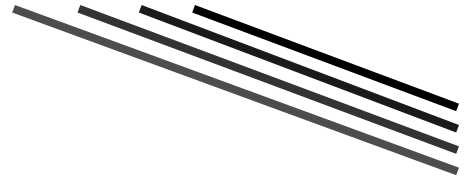
It is always there
The soft innocent light
Its glow illuminating my heart
Its vision etched in my mind

How can I forget the light
Of this divine illuminance
Light of Dark
Dark of Light

Light my way through the night
Light my way through the day
Guiding me through
The times of dark and light

A beauty so plain
Yet so picturesque
Captured not of film
But of love

The glow is always there
Over my shoulder
In my head
In my heart



For the glow, the illuminance, is the beauty of the star of heaven
The beauty of the star so bright
Leading me onwards
Embracing my heart

How can we ever ignore the beauty of the first star?
How can we ever forget?
How can we ever express?
How can we ever address?

How can we ever be one?
How can we ever be together?
You in the heavens,
Me on the earth?

Oh first star
May our love be true
May your light
Always shine upon me

And one day
~~When~~ I will fly
Into the heavens above
We shall be together

Me, myself,
And the first star

LOVE OF ALL LOVE

A love of all love
A hope of all hope
How heavy do you weigh on my heart
How forcefully do you take my mind
How high do you lift my spirits
How low do you bring my tragedies

A love of all love
A hope of all hope
How constant you are upon me
How monotonous is your vibration
How addictive is your lure
How silent is your call

A love of all love
A hope of all hope
How enduring is your memory
How lasting is your beauty
How powerful is your message
How tender is your wish

A love of all love
A hope of all hope
How soon will you fade
How dim is your light
How bright is your beacon
How soon Night will fall

How beautiful your smile
How gentle your person
How touching your feelings
How joyful your laugh
How you are
A love of all love
How do I possess
A hope of all hope
To join with
My love



SONNET, WIND

Here I lie looking upwards at the leaves,
How fragile they are as they flutter yet,
Waving their emerald hands in the swift breeze,
Of losing their weak grip they do not fret.
I can see one as it exists up there,
Its beauty undying as the sun's fire,
A jagged lacy fringe dainty and fair,
To have this beauty is my desire.
I reach upwards to grasp my only dream,
My fingers reach for my only true want,
As I touch it, the leaf lets out a scream,
Into the wind it starts its deadly jaunt.
I chase it through its long flight like a dove,
Chasing the power of my one true love.



LEAVES

As I step outside
Into the harsh biting wind
A new world forms
A stained glass window of colors

Deep browns
Burning oranges
Luminous yellows
Passionate reds

And they are falling

falling

falling

d

o

w

n

to the ground

The wind churns
The waves hidden in my hair
My scarf flails lifelessly in the wind
As the leaves fall around me
Surrounding
Hypnotizing
My memories fly away
Riding on the gliders
Fluttering to the ground
Memories scattered about me

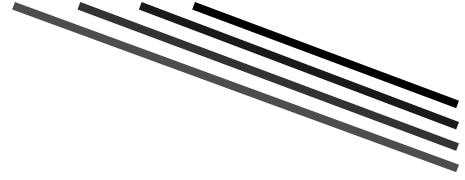
Happy
Sad
Jubilant
Grave

But I see one green leaf

Alive

Breathing

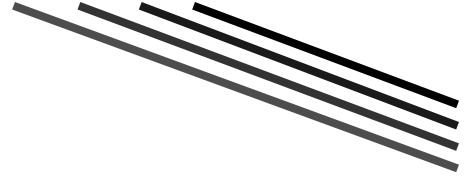
On the ground
I tilt my stoic head
To look at this wonder
As the wind churns around my body
And I see
One spot of pulsing red
Surrounded by the green sea
And it would not die



For within the memories around me
Only one was still alive
It held back against the cold call of death
The living memory of a love
Alive in the present of the past
The love of people long gone
 family embracing me
 friends surrounding me
 hidden loves supporting me
 a world enticing me
Will always hold out against the
Grasp of the cold
Existing for the numerous days and nights to come
I pick up the one leaf
 the one memory
And once again place it
In my jacket pocket
Inside of a warm secure home
Close to my heart
As around me
The waterfall of leaves
Continues on

S P O T

standing in the dark
I can hear them
out in the room
watching me
as I tremble
with word in hand
my muscles contracting
and expanding
contracting
expanding
as I hear the count
one
two
go
the light is on
shining in my face
I look up
and yet am still blinded
not able to even hear
the multitude of eyes upon me
I say my peace
and then the light goes out
and I am left in the dark once again
trembling
only able to hear
the people
in front of me
shifting in their seats
I cannot see them
blinded by the evil of the night
blinded by the truth of the day
I can only utter my words
with knowledge of only myself
with sounds of others my only comfort
blind



CLOUDS

here i lay
surrounded by a sea of green
filled with the joy of the newborn day
the sun shines down upon
my naked face
warming my rosy cheeks
tanning my sensitive nose
as i see the world of blue

there is smoke in the heavens
a white of pure white
voyaging without worry upon
the winds of the globe
forming the wonders of my thought
as i gaze upon them

they are stable
unstable shapes
changing with every
passing moment of time
a dog
a parakeet
a castle
a man
but yet i cannot

why is this so
oh gods of the sky
who has given you
the power to change
dragging your gray
wispy shadows with you

how i lay here
in this field of green
wishing to be among
the tireless clouds



travelling without a care
changing without fear
as the magical puffs of white
soar overhead

sometimes i remember
they would give of themselves
showering the earth
with their tears

rejuvenating the earth
from their sorrow
or am i yet mistaken
and they be tears of joy

but yet they still
pass over the horizon
evading my perceiving view
what if they wanted to look at me

where do the
gods of the sky go
when they must
travel on
to the end of the wind
to the eddies of the sky
to a magical place where the
gods that i have seen
are no more

they must die
gloriously
dissipating into the
winds of the globe
in a sea of ecstasy
being scattered across
the totality of the world
becoming one with the
wind that drives them

oh what it must be
to be one of the
gods i see overhead
one of the trees
one of the dogs
one of the sheep
but i am here
lying among this field of green
am i one of the clouds
trapped in a mortal body

where will i go when i die
will i be among the winds
to be burnished by the sun
for eternity

will i become
one with the world
as the majestic clouds
do when they die

as i lay here
in this field of green
these thoughts are
but thoughts i feel

do the clouds ever
look at one another
do they ever
wonder about what they are

do they wish to be
of mortal flesh
stationary and
moving of their own will

but would they miss
their carefree lives
among the sea of blue
voyaging with the winds
would i miss
this worrisome life
among the sea of green
hand in hand with mortals

but how warm
is the sun upon
my cheeks
warming my face

does the sun
warm the clouds
do they feel
the joy of life

oh what i
wouldn't give
to feel like a
cloud for just

one day

and then look
down upon us
mortals and
see us in a new light

what would i see
from the heavens
above my head
that i do not

from my sea of green

only the clouds know
only the clouds know

i try to discover
what it is that they do see
from their chairs
in the blue

but i cannot
begin to think
that they would
see us small specks

dotting the green

wrecking the green

raping the green

what i wouldn't
give to be
one of the clouds
riding on the winds

as the sun
warms my face
tans my chest
gives life to the world

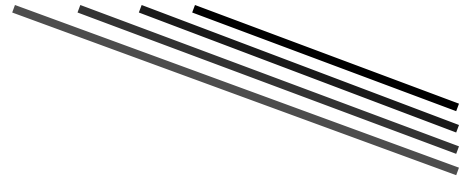
i close my eyes
and dream
of the world
that i cannot see

the world of the clouds

SILENCE AND EMOTION

There he is
Standing on the
Full vacant stage
His back towards
The crowd
His hands up
His baton ready
To count the
First
Beat
Of emotion

His arms
Slowly moving
With the soft
Delicacy
Of the music
So soft
So pure
His arms move faster
As he sways to the beat
Their motion
Fluid
Sensuous
As the music
Gains its speed
As the emotion
Continues on



The fluidity
Gains its intensity
As the music
Grows with
Snowballing feelings
As his face
Shows his effort
His arms move
Freely
Sensuously
Tracing an endless path
As the sweat appears
Upon his straining
Face
And then his cheeks
Tremble with strength
As he holds out
The final note
Hanging upon
His outstretched finger
Dripping in
Ecstasy
As it grows
And finally dies

His hands fall
As the emotion
Fades away

He turns towards
The empty crowd
And takes his
Bow of perfection

He signals
To the empty
Stage
For his absent musicians
To stand

As a smile appears
Upon his beaming face
As he revels
In the showering silence
Of the waves of imaginary applause

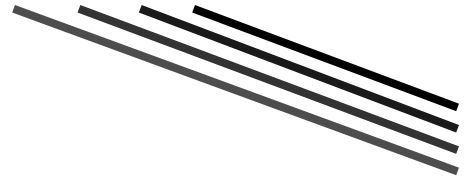
As no one cheers
For the silent music

But only he is there
Standing alone
With the non-existent crowd cheering
At the majestic perfection
At the gripping splendor
At the poignant end

Of silence and emotion

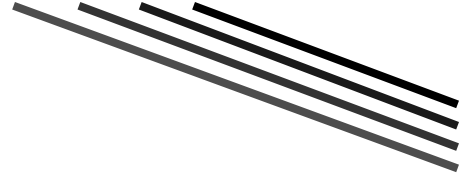
D U S T

Hidden in the corner
Out of our field of view
You sit
The wooden corner
Shielding you from the wind
You will not blow away
There is nothing that will touch you
Nothing that will move you
Nothing that will harm you
As you gently sleep on
The ledge
Nothing shall violate your corner
Except for that
Which moves free from body
Free from will
Free from man's control
Dust
Hidden in the corner
I
Cannot remove you
But the breeze can
Until this shall happen
I leave you in your
Hole
Grey manifestation of
Cloudy sky
Until that which created you
Shall remove you once again



SONNET, WINTER FOREST

None but a wintry day can hold me down,
From wandring the roads of the land of God,
But still upon his land he does not frown,
For His creatures upon a frozen soil they trod.
Traversing the earth where Man cannot go,
Observing the absence of Mankind with glee,
Leaving their tracks in the fresh white virgin snow,
But not from man do they swiftly flee.
For a new death upon the land has its grip,
But no longer one of natural cause,
It was one spoken by a human lip,
The blackest death holds God's land in its claws.
For pollution today is the destructive knife,
Severing God's land from its dying life.



REFLECTIONS

I look out at the world
And see none but you
For the beauty of nature
Is that of you

Upon the
White
Soft
Clouds
Freely traversing the
Vast heavens
I see nothing
But the
Pure
Kindness
Whitness
Of your smile

Upon the
Gentle
Gallivanting
Breeze
Winding around the
Land of God
I hear nothing
But the
Happy
Carefree
Joy
Of your laugh



Upon the
Tickling
Frolicing
Laughing
Stream
Jumping over the
Forbidding rocks
I see nothing
But the
Smiling
Caring
Loving
Image
Of your face

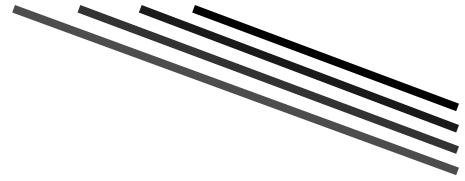
But within this
Newborn
Fresh
Pure
Spring day
Warming the interior
Of my heart
I cannot see
The
Beauty
Kindness
Caring
Truth
Of your soul

In the reflection of nature.

EDEN

As the sun rises slowly
Creating a pink sky
 Coated in pastel colors
 With not a blemish in sight
I look over the horizon
 A hill
 A mountain
 A soaring bird
I hear the sounds
Of the new morning
The yawning of the earth
The rustling of the waking trees
The soft murmur of the brook
 Waking the sleeping fish
The soft chirping of the avian world
 Waking the sleeping people
And behind it all
 There is soothing silence
 The support
 The breath
 Of the world
And the new day is pure

But high in the sky
There it is
 A blemish
 An intruder
 A malignant companion
Breaking the serenity
Of the pastel sky
 Black
 Evil
It is small



But yet it still
Adequately
Accomplishes its task
 To destroy
 The serenity
 To obstruct
 The beauty
 To violate
 The paradise

And it only takes this
Small
Young one
To destroy the entirety
Of nature's Eden

Only one small one

But our paradise is gone
And we cannot expell
 The serpent
Out of Eden
And the small
 Polluting
One
Will multiply
 and grow
 and envelop

The sky of Eden
Blocking out the
Light
Of the benefactor
 Of the ruler
 Of the creator
 Of the caretaker
Of this new Eden

Is there anything
That can stop
 Their rampage
For in Eden we do not
Fight
Such wars

Only the vipers in the sky do

For in Eden we do not
Block
The heavenly light

Only the vipers in the sky do

And we cannot
Move them

And we cannot
Touch them

How can we
Shove them out
And regain our
Morning paradise

The answer
Is not here

In Eden

DARK ROOM

In days separate
We grow closer
But in days together
We grow distant

What a confusion
Is in my mind
As what will happen
Does not yet come

In a cold damp room
I wait for the future
Unarmed
Afraid

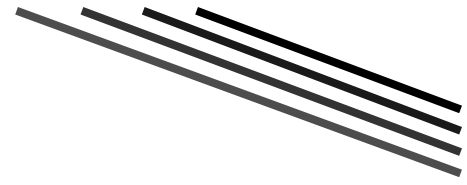
A love inside
My mind
My own love
Is what will come

What will Future
Bring to me
Will it be a plate of joy
Will it be a platter of sorrow

I can only wait
Here in my dark
Room sitting on
A stool

There is a sound
A door is opening
But I cannot see
The intruder's face

He comes towards me
I can feel him coming
But he does not
Address me



Soon I know
He will speak
Narrate a tale
Of times to come

He presents me with
A choice of gifts
One wrapped in silver
One wrapped in onyx

He breathes to me
The following words

You choose
You take
You live

But his riddles
Only confuse me
More with every
Moment he is there

What gift should
I accept from this
Intruder named
Future

One in silver
One in onyx
One reflecting light truth
One absorbing all

I can only look
At the two here in
My dark room
On my stool

And I am only
Confused yet more
Here by his
Two offerings

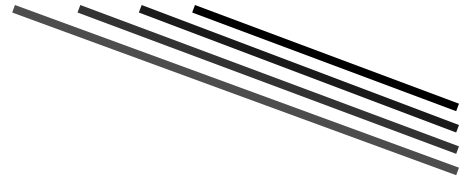
And my stagnation
And my inaction
Does not force
Future away

Only makes Future
Stay here in
My dark room
Waiting for my choice

A choice not soon to come

LITTLE MUG, BIG JOY

Hot
Steaming
Dark
Bitter
Warming
Soothing
Burning
Reliving
Rejoicing
Fresh
Joining
Black
Creamy
Sugary
Natural
Traditionalized
Ten-cent
Heavenly
Omnipotent
Cup
Of
Morning
Coffee



A WEED

On a spring day

Odors of newborn flowers in the air

Avian concertoes upon the fresh wind

Happy scurrying of newly awakened creatures

There in the middle of it all

Is a weed

Alone

Isolated

It cannot hear the

Rousings of the earth

It cannot smell the

Sweet odiferous floral surroundings

It is only able to hear

The other weeds

But the other weeds are not here

The last weed was forgotten by

The killing powder

That fell from the heavens

The solitary weed

Is alone on the great lawn of life

The weed is

Rooted in the cold earth

Which gives rise to the cold world

And the unique special weed

Can only exist

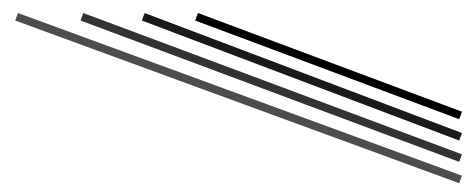
Sobbing quietly

Wishing to no longer be

One

In a world of

Many



The weed was always
Different than the others
 Too many leaves for the grass
 Not enough colors for the flowers
 Too small for the trees
 Too pointy for the ivy
 Too motionless for the critters
Only one of its kind
Only one weed on the manicured lawn of life

As the weed
Wailed and sorrowed over its fate
It did not see
The malevolent gardener
Coming towards it

Today the weed is gone
A cold
Dark
Shallow hole
Is the only indicator that
The weed was ever there

And the flowers still bloom
And the birds still sing
And the trees still bud
And the earth is still cold

Even without the weed.

SEA OF WET WATER

The black liquid
Flows out of its container
And spills upon
The clean page

Every spill is
Random
Yet organized

As we transcend
Into the larger world
The spills become
smaller
and
smaller
and soon
they form shapes

the small inkblots
merge
into one
and as we
Voyage into the
Yet larger world
There are
Many
More inkblots

They do not
Spill anymore
But are
Ingrained
Upon their
White home



They are
The

Words

Written by
A

Pen

But they do not
Move

But they do not
Breathe

Therefore they do not
Live

but as we transcend
into a yet larger
world
something else is there

some thing is
looking at the
words

and it is
leaking
with the
geyser of tears

it must be hurt
but words do not
move

but words do not
breathe

therefore they cannot
hurt

but soon
We raise our
Eyes to a
Larger
World and
What we see
Astonishes us

There is a thing
Writing the words
Upon the placard

And it is
Leaking
Also

The placard
Is attached to a
Black
Cold
Lifeless object
By a slender piece of
Inhuman metal
We travel
out
further
and see

the black object
is a
box
of which we only see
a corner
but there are
other things here now
and they are
also looking
and the ground
floods with their tears
as we

Wander out yet
Further
And there
Inside the
Cold
Malignant box
E

one of them

lifeless

motionless

loveless

and the others
are weeping
as their
 the of tears
 stream

flows
 down
 the
 dying
 grass

and only now
can we read the words

Goodbye Mother
Your Loving Son

we wait
to see
what will
become

All of the
Things
Leave soon
And only one
Is left

surrounded by an ocean
of his tears

and he stands there
head in his hands
with the
torrential waterfall
of tears
filling the
ocean

he is still
standing there
surrounded by the

sea of wet water

the wet water
of his tears

and he just
stands
and the box
is there

and the
message
still
remains
on the placard

as the world
becomes
a world of
wet water
the sea
plunges into the
heavens

and the universe
overflows with
the wet water
until it can
hold
no more

and yet it
still fills

for the son
cannot stop
his flow of tears

and others
are drowned

and others
float and
are saved

but
the son
does not
see
them

he has drank of
the wet water

And
Each
One
Is
Contributing

And
Each
One
Has
A
Box

But
Some
Boxes
Do
Not
Have
A

stream of wet water

Beside
Them

And everyone pours out
Their wet water
For them

But some
Of them
Do not have
Any
Of the wet water
To give

They stand
Puzzled
By the sea of wet water

It is alien to them

The lifeless words
Do not move them

They are the
Stones
In the wet water
Blocking the
Torrent
From its
Path through the universe

But we
Are full of
The wet water

I am the
Stream
That feeds the
Sea

I am the
Waterfall
That creates
Sorrowful rainbows
In the air

I have a box
I have the wet water

I am the
Sea
Of the
Wettest water

And the wet water
Floods my eyes
And
Drenches my soul

For my
Mother
In the box
Cannot breathe
Any longer

And can no longer
See the wet water

But somewhere
Her soul will be
Floating
Happily
On
The wet water of my grief

And someday
We shall toast again
And someday
We will once again
Drink the wassail

And we shall
Become diners
In the
Restaurant of joy

And we will
Feast
And be
Happy

And in our
Slender glasses
Shall be the
Elixir
That Keeps Us Alive

we will be intoxicated with
The Wet Water

and we shall be happy
and drink all of
The Sea Of Wet Water

and then be in paradise

together

PLACES AND WONDERS

Oh the wonders there are to see
The places there are to go

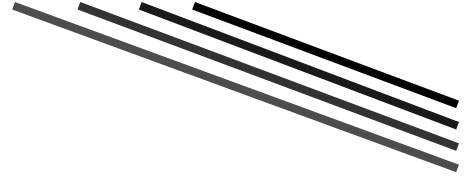
Look at the trees
Towering above me
Forming nature's skyscrapers
Casting giant shadows
Upon the
Moist
Friendly
Earth

Look at the stars
Watching over me
Forming nature's sentinels
Guiding our way
Around the
Confusing
Bustling
World

Look at the clouds
Flying above me
Forming nature's airships
Carrying mankind's dreams
Into the
Undiscovered
Vast
Blue

Look at the moon
Soaring around me
Forming nature's companion
Keeping everyone company
During the
Infinite
Creeping
Time

Oh look at the wonders there are to see
The places there are to go



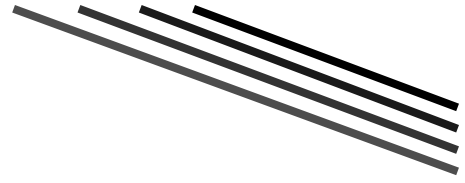
Before it's too late

And we can never go there

Again

SENSELESS

Person
Table
Candlelight
Drizzle
Companion
Solitaire
Peace
Barking
Rattling
Draft
Murderer
Knife
Scream
Death
Companion
Rage
Fight
Knife
Death
Exit
Candlelight
Silence



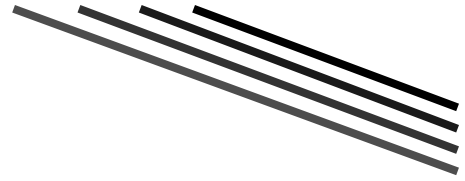
GHOST

There is a ghost following me

When I walk
Suspiciously looking about
Scanning the land
For hostile life
The ghost is there
I hear its footsteps
And when I
Wheel around to see it
Only empty air is there
For here
The ghost cannot be seen

When I sit
Reading with alert ears
Combing the air
For foreboding sounds
The ghost is there
I hear it breathing
And when I
Whisk my eyes to see it
Only empty air is there
For here
The ghost cannot be seen

When I lie in bed
Thinking of grander things
Feeling the solid walls
For any warning vibration
The ghost is there
I feel its warmth
And when I
Flail my arms and peer about
Only empty shadows are there
For here
The ghost cannot be seen



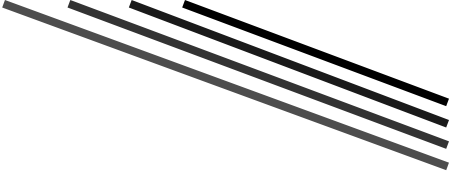
When I dream my dreams
Looking at beautiful splendors
Smiling and laughing
At every joyful experience
The ghost is there
I can see it
I can see its face
And when it approaches me
I am not afraid
For I know the ghost
And when I wake up
The ghost is still there
I can no longer see it
But I think of it
The ghost of my love

There is a ghost following me

And it refuses to go away

IDEAS FLOATING IN MY HEAD

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MAGIC ON THE WINDS

There is a place
Where only I can go
And in that place
There is a breeze

It is gentle
And cools me off
After a hot day
And refreshes
My hot face

And here
I can lie
On the grass
With my breeze
Blowing gently on me

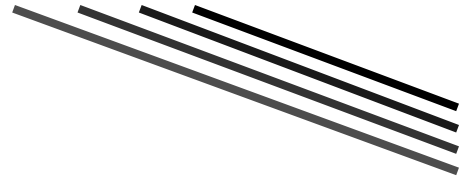
It carries away
The hard toils
Of my day
Into the top of the world

Lying there
In the green grass
With the odiferous flowers
And the breeze
Blowing gently on me

I am at peace

The magical breeze
Blows away my worries
And whisks them
To the corners of the world
Far away from me

Peaceful
Blissful
That is how
The world is
In my special place



There is a magic
On the wind
A magic of peace
A magic of beneficence
A magic of blissful innocence

Sometimes as I
Lie in my special place
I make a wish
And silently address
The gentle breeze

Bring the magic with me
Come with me when I return
To the troubled confusing world

The breeze and its magic do not care
For it can only exist in
The imaginary world of peace

THE DARK PATH

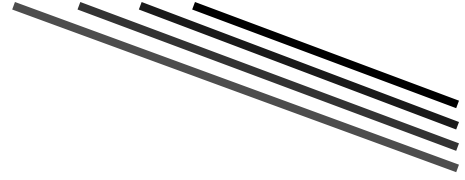
There is a dark path
Upon which I walk
Lined with
Dead
Gnarled
Trees

The trees are
Watching me
Their grasping arms
Waiting to pounce
Upon my ignorant body

There is a dark path
Upon which I walk
Lined with
Hidden
Piercing
Eyes

They belong to
The ferocious animals
Stalking my
Defenseless soul
Waiting to carry me away
Into the waves
Of leafy darkness

There is a dark path
Upon which I walk
Filled with
Deep
Heartless
Potholes



Without a care
They obstruct my path
Snickering when
They trip me
And then thank their
Gravity god
For pulling me
To the ground

There is a dark path
Upon which I walk

There is a dark path
Upon which you walk

Life

IN A BOX

I ~~hear~~ it

I ~~see~~ it

I cannot escape it

It is monotonously

Blinking

It is eternally

Beeping

It is forever

Cold

And inhuman

It is tied

To my life

It is essential

But yet useless

It is everywhere

But its thoughts are nowhere

I talk to it

Am kind to it

I worry about it

I long for it

It does not talk

feel

sing

react

act back

It cannot reciprocate for

My generous actions

I wish it

All to myself

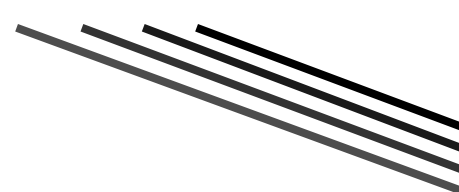
But everyone must use it

I ~~fear~~ it

And grow exhausted

By answering

Its lifeless cries



But to me
It is a child

The child
Of blinking lights
And beeping sounds

The child
Of technology
In a box

MEMOIRS OF A LOST LOVER

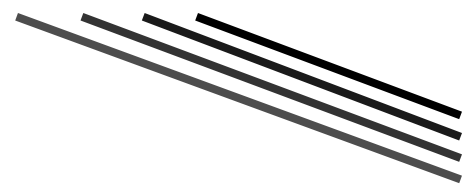
I have a love
Which I hold tightly
Against my breast
Close to my heart

For a
Long
Monotonous
Time
The love
Stayed close
To me
Near to the
Droning of my heartbeat

But I know
My love
Does not hold a love as
Closely as I
But my love
Does not go

We both live our lives
With only me
Holding on tightly
To my love
While my love
Holds none
And I am happy
As my love is happy

And my love
Being fed by me
Caressing grip
Refuses to die
And will never dissipate
Between my fingers



And I will be happy
Even if the
Person whom I love
Is not there

My love is memories
My love is hopes
My love is dreams

My love never came to me
I never held
Or touched the mind of
The person
Whom I love so

But I am still happy

And if my love
Ever finds its way
Out from my breast
Into reality

I will be still happy

If that person
Whom I hold so dear
Finds another
My love will
Still be there

But it will
Hide from view
So that no other
My see it

And I will
Still be happy

And that person
To whom I cling
With someone else
Will be happy

Will my love be happier than I
Will I be happier than my love

But if that
Special
Dear
Person
Ever returns to me
I know
My arms
Will be open
To greet my love

But no one else
Can ever
Replace my
One
True
Love

But even alone
I shall not be alone

With my love in my heart
Remembering
Dreaming

I wish you would come

Sometime
Someday

I hope you will come

And if you do not
Want this
My
One
True
Love
Leave me with
The love in my breast

So we shall both be happy

BATTLE OF MAN

There is a building
Made of fragile glass
And the robust steel
And the muscular concrete

Within its cells
Live mindless little ants
Working and typing
Following the orders of
Their illustrious queen

So rigid
So motionless
Is the building
Unnatural and foreign

But there is
Something natural
Within the cage of steel

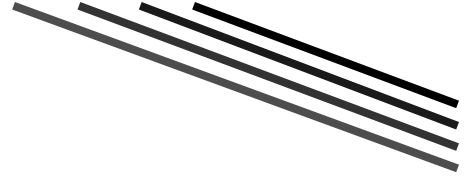
A tree
Is growing in the floor

Its roots
Push through the impervious concrete

Its branches
Break the translucent glass

Its leaves
Embrace the unforgiving steel

Slowly
Ever so slowly
The tree
In the magnificent
Palace of man
An evil natural force
Subtly irradiates
The blemish on its land



Long after
Man is gone
The tree will still be there
And all of its companions
Happily living on the rubble
Of the defeat
Of Man

GUARD OF LOVE

In my heart
There is a love bound by chains
Guarding it from harm
So it will never leave

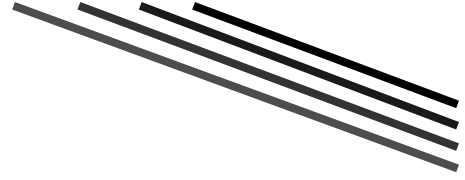
The chains are rusty now
After years of use
I can try to replace them
But I do not in time

My love escapes
And pierces my heart
And flies out into the sky
Rendering the pure clouds incarnidine

And I can still love that love
Although it is somewhere else
Around the world
And I am happy

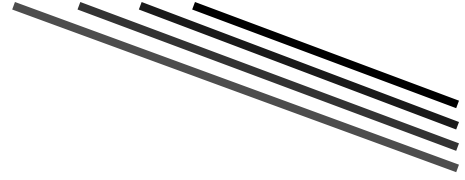
But I am frantically running
Around the face of the earth
Gathering up the pieces of my lost love
Placing them in my caring heart

Guarding them forever



REVERSAL THE VULTURE

There he is again
Can you see him
I always know he's there
The vulture is flying there
Circling around me
Watching
Waiting
Until I am weak
He has come down twice
Twice tried to steal my life
But I fought him off
The vulture made mistakes
That cost him his chance
Now I am running
Away from him
But now I know
And have found a shield
So if the vulture
If he
Ever tries to steal my heart again
He will not come close
I have protection
I have a shield
But the vulture is still circling
High above my head
And it will
Until I shoot it down
But I don't know if I
Will come close
To the vulture
Trying to take my life
I won't give it a chance
I'll need to find a gun
But until then
I shall still run from
The vulture



EYES OF THE TIGRESS

I was walking through
The dark
Indian
Forests
Encased in a prison of green
My gun in hand
Searching for my prize
Searching for the tigers

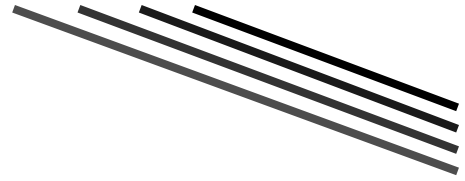
Elusive they were
Their tracks in the soft mud
Could never lead to them
Imprints of old
Engraved upon the wood
Were the only sign that they were ever there

A broken limb
A fallen branch
A dry set of tracks
Fading onto the rocks
Is all the tiger left

But I stalked the tigers
I would have my prize
And return home
A hero

For days and nights I
Followed my prey
A hunter hunting a hunter
A predator preying on predator

I remember the night
I was walking
In the cold
The stars were twinkling overhead
The mother Moon peered protectively over me
No evidence of Man was found in this last Eden
Safety was around me
So I could fall asleep



I was awoke by a shaking at my side
It was dark all around
I could not find my lamp
And I was cornered by the rocks
If something should go awry
There was no escape for me

I could not see anything
For the Mother moon was hidden
By the ominous black clouds
The twinkling stars
Sputtered out as they tried
Vainly
To light my path

I heard a low sound
A rumbling of thunder in the distance
The wrath of the gods would shower upon me
As they cried for the
Rape
Of their virgin forests

I was panicked
With no escape if something should come
Then
The true God
My savior
Sent a wind of truth
And blew away the clouds
From Mother moon

Then I saw it
I froze
In front of me was
The tigress

It was slowly coming up towards me
Its eyes glaring
Where was my gun
I did not know and had no route of escape
I remembered I had a knife
Which I used when I fished
I pulled it out and held it in front of me
My hands shaking in fear
And the tigress was bold
Steadfast in her approach
Unlike I
The defenseless man
Cowering behind a piece of metal

The tigress was growling
Low and booming
With the thunder backing up her proud claim
Her teeth bared
White and sharp as the edges of barbed wire
Gleaming in the pale light of Mother moon
Approaching slowly towards me
As if to prolong my agony
The tigress was smarter than I had thought
She knew how to make a man die
And make him die in pain

I was only standing there
Cowering in the corner
Trembling with a palsy of fear as the tigress approached
And the her eyes were glowing
Haunting
Hypnotizing
Mesmerizing
And as I shook with my feeble knife in front of me
I could not help but stare at those eyes
So full of determination
So full of pride
So full of courage
And she continued to walk closer

As she was coming I could suddenly hear all around
The silent sounds of the night forest
Became as loud as the ship whistles that brought me here
And they called me and yanked me
Towards my death
As the tigress drew closer

And I could not help but look at her glowing eyes

She drew within feet of me
And I shook as I had never trembled before
Convulsing in fear
And she glided up to me
To within inches of my face
Her breath panting
Her teeth bared
Ready to give me my last meal
And I dropped the knife as
My convulsing fingers could not hold it any longer

And then I saw something in her eyes change

Her mouth closed
And her heavy breathing stopped

She just stood over my contorted body
Looking at my eyes

And then she licked my on the face
And ran off into the night
And the dark clouds
Hid Mother moon once again
And I was left in the dark
Still shivering with the cold fear surrounding me

I could have sworn I saw something in her eyes
It seemed like she learned to love
Yes
There was love in her eyes
Love for me
Or love of something she knew
There was love in the tigress's eyes
There was love in her eyes

I am shamed today
That a wild beast
Whom I would kill
Spared my evil soul from destruction
Among the forest leaves
And no longer do I hunt
For the animals are people to me
And I have learned to share in their love

But even today as I look up at the sun
And drink of the cool natural water
Living peacefully with my animal friends
Part of me is in that Indian forest
In the corner
Shivering
Staring into the eyes of the tigress

SAMENESS

It was a day unlike any other

I woke up from my comforting sleep
To open my eyes on a newborn sun
Shedding its light upon the world

When I looked about myself
Everything was the same as it had always been
Everything was in its place
But outside of my private home
Everything was different

I strolled out onto the black street
My shoes clicked upon the unforgiving asphalt
And people were around me
I did not notice them
Since they are always there

As I was walking someone bumped into me
I looked up and that was when I first saw
All of the people in the street

All of their faces are the same
All of their bodies are the same
All of their features are the same

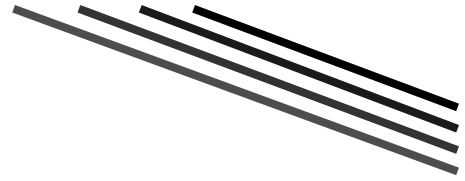
All of the people were the same

I could not understand this radical change
For I knew that everyone was not the same
I knew that I was different
I knew that I was special

I ran to my office building in the city
And rushed into the lobby with its mirrored walls
And saw myself in the mirror

I was like all of the other people

Was I seeing myself or was I seeing everything else



All of the people were the same

I screamed out in fear and horror
As I drew back in apprehension at my same face
And found that my voice
Was not mine

All of our voices were the same

I collapsed onto the ground
Surrounded in a sea of sameness
Astounded that I was not unique
Perplexed by the similarity of all people

I saw that I was not special

Everyone is the same

BODILESS LOVE

I am the owner
Of a bodiless love

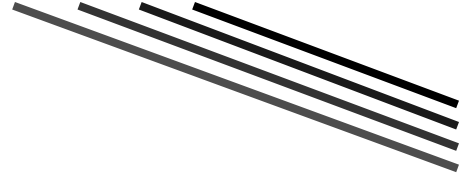
That beauty before my
Weary eyes
Replenishing my exhausted yearning

That one is nothing but a
Lifeless hulk
To me now

Once that shell was possessing
Bountiful lures which I loved
But the person I found
Became nothing but an
Ember of my first burning emotion

For only now do I see
The person I love
Is a concoction
A brew
A fictitious story
Inside my mind
Imagined and
Perfected
By me searching
Wanting
Selfish soul

And as I see
My love now is
Asinine
As the foolhardy becomes
Emphatuated
With his own mind
And feels a consuming
Fire of love
For his own thoughts



In an eternal love
With his own conjectures
I see myself

In love
With a fabrication
That will never be
That never was

In love
With something he cannot see
With something he cannot touch

I am in love with

And I am engaged to
My bodiless love

CLEAREST CLARITY

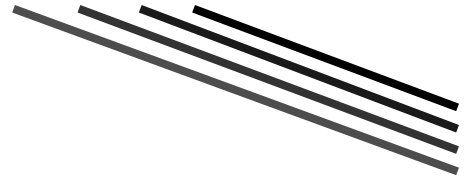
Is what I see
What you see

Fading
Shimmering
In front of my
Self-centered eyes
The elusive genie
Reality is
Manifest in its own
Illusions

But the genie
Is also known as
The powerful force
Babel
With its monstrosity
Causing utter confusion

Babel
Reality
Throws its blades
Of false vision
Into a world
Piercing through the skulls
Of all its lost children
Uniquely distorting their
Visions
Of the secretive
Reality
Babel

And the master
Babel
Laughs fruitlessly
Mockingly
As its victims amble
Stupefied
As they see
A contorted world



They become
Accustomed
To seeing distortion
Until

The distortion is clear
And the clear is distorted

And on top of
The layers of
Confusion

The distortion is contorted
And the contortion is inverted
And the inversion is rotated
And the rotation is reverted
And the reversion is distorted

Until the distortion
Becomes clear

And once again
Becomes distorted

And the genie
Bellowingly
Laughs his
Monotonous
Menacing
Reverberating laugh as
Reality
Babel
Sees the ignorant sheep
Eating something which
Is not there

And the genie
Maliciously
Laughs his
Infamous
Foreboding
Resonating laugh as
Reality
Babel
Sees the befuddled sheep
Stupidly walking on something that
Is not there

But the genie
Reality
Babel
Is himself fooled

For he sees
What is the
Clear

But the clear is
Distorted

So does our beneficent genie
See the true clarity
Of the distorted world

Or does our philanthropic genie
Laugh emptily at the
Asinine
Inversions of his own
Perversions

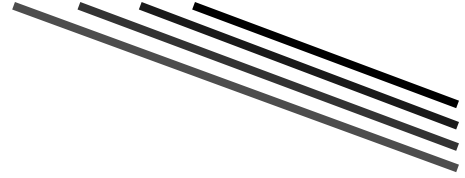
Or does our providing genie
Cast his blurred
Knives of distortion
At those
Which are merely
His own
Contortions

Is there anyone
Who can see
Clarity
As being so
Clear

Is what you see
What I see

SONNET, OLD

There is an ancient land which I walk on,
Breathing underneath my own modern feet,
This trodden square I rest my eyes upon,
This forbidden place where the ancients meet.
I see them before my now ancient eyes,
Their splendor of imagination real,
My curious ear upon their words spies,
Their wisdom long lost now I alone steal.
How great was their majestic construction,
Towering above poor heads to the skies,
How soon time leads them to their destruction,
Their sentient word now so swiftly flies.
For the aged works I now so respect,
The worlds around me do greatly reject.



N A M E

There is a
Roaring fire
Engulfing my very soul

Being replenished
Daily
By an unseen hand

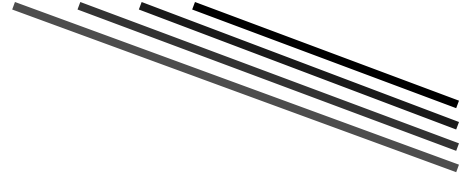
And it
Consumes
My mind and life

And although it I do
Combat
It refuses to depart

As I
Block
Its ever reaching
Grasp
From reaching my
Weary eyes
I know it tells me

I am here to comfort

But it is only present
To so skillfully
Destroy
The world I
See
The world I
Touch
The world I
Feel



Somewhere I try to
Halt
Its monotonous
Apathetic destruction
I am not
Resistant

And the flames
Proceed onwards to their task

A task
Bestowed
Upon their existence
By that secret hand that

No one sees

I can try to find it
Maybe the
Benefactor
Of the rampant flames
Can aid me in
My struggle

But to find the
Elusive one

I must know its
Secretive appellation

But its
Unknown name
No one can find

So now I sit
In anguish
Calling out for the hand
To help
To stop
Name after name
I yell
But it does not come

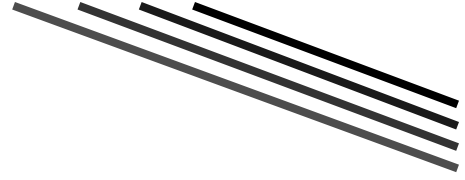
And my contorted body
Wearily sits here
As it burns
As it fights the burning

Because I do not know
The name

Of hope

SONNET, RAIN

Upon a once blue sky grey clouds trod upon,
Blocking the warm pure light of Father Sun,
Their shadows covering land light shone on,
The life below's day is soon abruptly done.
As the soft rain pattered down upon stone,
The river banks of weakened earth do swiftly swell,
Remembering the light that on them shone,
Their sorrows the water does swiftly quell.
The birds sing not o'er the rains' soft patter,
The animals now do so deeply sleep,
Free from the sounds of nature's loud clatter,
The sorrowful have time to greatly weep.
For because the grey now covers the sky,
The happy thoughts of the world swiftly fly.



SONNET, UNSPOKEN ADDRESS

My pen is that which shows myself to you,
My letters to express a love so great,
A love to be found soon between us two,
As I expedite my love far to late.
For I have seen a person of beauty,
Who has captured my wild and rampant thought,
And has given my love such longevity,
And has caused my heart to so long for naught.
How could a love so great go unspoken,
As two souls alone in the world exist,
For should my fragile soul become broken,
Of only love will my mind always consist.
For so great are my veritable dreams,
That my love for you now so real seems.



TURN IF JUSTICE SO CRUEL

Standing
In a shower of white petals
Dying to the ground
The sun shines
Through the gray clouds
And in the distance
The bell of death tolls
For one so close
And the chirping birds
Fall silent
As the weather warms
The somber land

and a man falls to the ground
as the clanging cacophony of silence
is destroyed by the loud wails

When will it be my turn?



DREARY DUTY OF LOVE

There is
a dainty daffodil
in the dusty desert

its boisterous beauty
trumpeting out into
the dry world

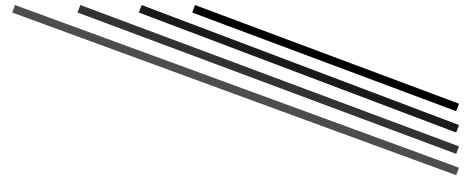
I worshiped woefully
the flower of spring
in the summer of fire

I would bring the
rampant rains
to cleanse the blemished sand
and keep my daffodil
alive in the harsh heat of forbidding dust

The tender shouting rains
kept my vigilant watch
for onto the biting sands
my tender foot would refuse to go

When the mocking rains
refused to answer my incessant call
the sands would still not give way

But with a bubbling bucket
I brought the water of life
with me and stepped
onto the harsh hearth of the dying desert



Bucket trembling in my
Heavy hand
I walk on the
nemesis
and the sands
burn my feet and
dutifully dissolve my sonorous soul

But I will not spill the water

Daffodil
I will reach you and
Sacrifice my only water to your beauty
and release the mighty music of my soul
to tame the raging rains

And I will build a temple
from the mortar of my loving mind
and line it with the slate of my shackled heart
and place within it an icon
coated with the luster of my true love

And the docile rains
Will make it wet
and keep you
oh daffodil of my dreams
alive in the dreary desert

and my body
dead from the devilish gifts of the dusty sands
will keep a vigil and make the rains come

PLEADINGS OF A SEA ANEMONE

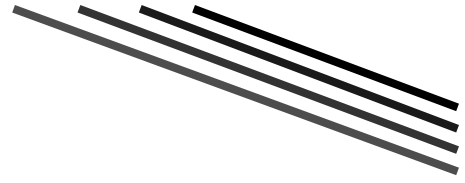
And I tiptoe through the
Sterile spikes of steel
Piercing the bog
Clinging to my wet insides
I drip
Over the arid mossy floor
My iron soul becoming honey
Upon the stable swords
Slicing my metal will
And ahead the place of plenty
Inhabits the land
And I shall forfeit my life
To the sands
To reach the bountiful heaven
And I shall be free
But the sea of steel
Lies in my dreams
And forever shall I cross it
To reach the land of reality

Above the waves

IN A BEACH OF LIGHT

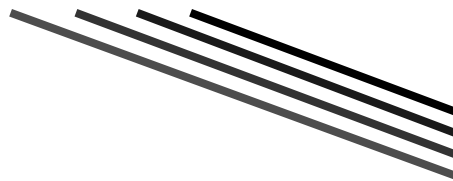
When Father sun
Pommels my parchment skin
The day shall cease to be
And with the willpower of the martyrs
The sun shall bend to my will

Do not shine on me I will say
And the light shall cease
For all except that
Which does not wish
Cannot bend the daggers of the sun



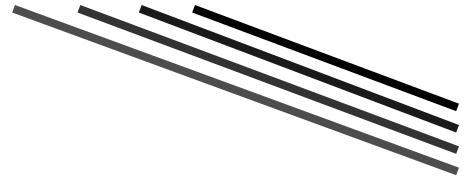
COLOR FROM THE SKY

There will be a color
Spilling out from the clouds
To fill the dark of the earth
And past the gray day
Shall come the vibrant night
With its sparkling diamonds
That no ring can hold
Except for the gold mounts of the sky



MUSHROOM

Sitting there in your nightcap
The folds of your sheets underneath
Your wide protective umbrella
Upon a soft pedestal
As high as the sequoia of the gnats
You look down upon the small world
Protected from the small floods
Shaded from the sun above
Until the floods of the moon
Light your dim way
You shall not move
From your sacred location
On the leafy forest floor
And come to life



THROUGH THE RAIN

grim grey clouds
cold moist knife of air
slicing the beneficent sun

droplets fall swiftly
from their dreary home

light bends its path
beauty does not fade

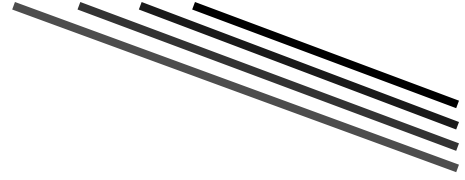
through the rain
i still see your beauty

through the dark
i still dream of the light

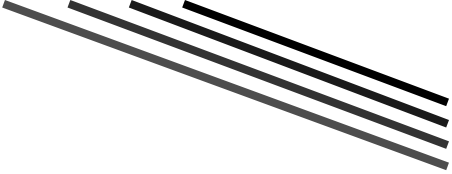
and as i wave a hello and goodbye
blue coaches whisk me away

cover the droplets from falling

both of us travelling through the rain



AMONG A SEA SO DARK



Gliding across the gilded waves
A ship of dark does fly
Incessantly called to
The distant land of dreams
Its dying oars of weakened wood
Caressing the waters below
Indulging them to a slice of cool moist air
Before the fickle sea returns it
And the musing moon's milk
Is split upon the placid calm
As our onyx ship of ebony light
Shuffles across the waters
The soft weeds upon the bottoms
Caress the invader's keel
And guide it gently onwards
To find the land of the sun's honey
And the silent roars of the fish are heard
Through the soupy air of night
Echoing off the stout ship's sides
The amplitude of incessant silence
The birds silky soar thundering in the
Ceiling of sky
Bending the light of the watchers above
Keeping sentry upon the sluggish vessel
Seeing it through the sorrow's dark sea
To reach the sweet love's land by the morn
Waves lick the sweet ship's smooth sides
Pushing it onwards

One day the ship will come
And with a crack of thunder its oars snap
And will be immersed in Apollo's sweet ambrosia
In the land of love's sun

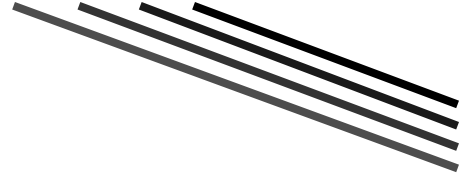
ON A BOILING DAY

And the gentle winds shall come
And the rustle of the leaves
Will be the roar of nature
And all will be deafened by the sound
And the tired trees shall fall
In the power of the vent
And the vibrant colors will by
Washed away into the breeze
But although no singing birds
Will be left on the branched
The air will still carry their
Happy song of sadness
Throughout the hollows of existence
And the gentle winds shall come



SONNET, PASTEL SUNSET

A sunset so soft the world has not seen,
Its pastel blood spilling out to the sky,
And God his chimeric clouds he does preen,
Assuring that love does so swiftly fly.
Nature's colorful love fills the evening,
And its spongy clouds soak it up with joy
But some in its joy are not believing,
Fearing it as Lucifer's evil ploy.
These lofty colors I do worship so,
As they disappear from God's weakened clasp,
But into them my weak hand I do throw,
Trying to save them with my feeble grasp.
But when the sun falls in that distant land,
Never again will God's colors be grand.



WALKING

One day out I went
Searching for answers

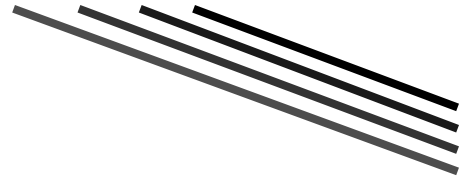
The few questions
I knew well
But the answers
Had yet to be found

I asked the
Purring brook my
Quizzical question
And it only asked
A more puzzling question
Of my confused self

I asked the
Whispering leaves
For the answer
But they only asked
More questions of me

I asked the
Voyaging winds
For some solution
And they only blew
More confusing words
Into my befuddled ears

One day out I went
Walking
Searching for answers
But found only
More questions waiting



Where has
God
Hidden all the answers

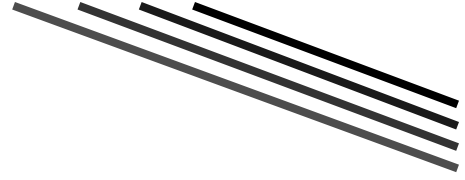
SANDSCREEN

Holding sand in a
Screen of holes
Is difficult
Tiptoeing trepidly
The sand saunters out
And when the last grainy grain
Is leewardly lost
My time will end.



SONNET, WINDSONG

A breeze will come one day through all the trees,
And its gentle push will caress my face,
As it weaves around the free-falling leaves,
Its magical verses will bless this place.
A message it brings is nature's song,
Murmuring secrets in my waiting ear,
Sending out His blessings upon the throng,
Telling us all of the wind not shall we fear.
Away from my face guides it the throbbing heat,
Carrying it into the cold damp skies above,
And with such prowess it does this great feat,
For the wind can do all with words of love.
But when the wind's song will finally die,
I hope that my love can still seek my eye.



CUBIC ZIRCONIUM LOVE

I have a diamond love
For a woman of
Extreme integrity
 The strength of a diamond
Illustrious beauty
 The magic of a diamond
Boisterous personality
 The sparkle of a diamond
Oh how I have a diamond love

But with my own mind
I myself have made
With these hands of meat
And my mortal thoughts
A cubic zirconium love

My imaginary cubic zirconium
Love is
Perfectly perfect
 As the flawless man-made diamond is
And in my mind
I have a
Cubic zirconium love

But alas no
I love the
True diamond's flaws
As beauty
 As natural diamonds are flawed
Within the sparkle



I love my
Flawed diamond
More than any
Fictitious perfection

Natural unconditional love
is truly worth more
than a fake false
cubic zirconium love

and never will I take these dear flaws away

HEED THIS CALL

Mighty bird of prey
With your wings
Extended to greet
The rising sun

You soar
Above
Our small heads
Looking for your

Pitiless prey

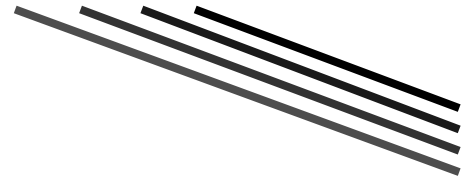
As you snatch
Their life
With blinding speed
Can you see

The Fear
in their eyes

But I see
The fear in
Your own eyes
Bald majestic one

Reconcile
Your own
Fears

Before you prosper
On another's



THANKS GIVINGS

On a sunny morn
The odor migrates through the house
The aroma draws us in
Waiting for the magic dinner

The siren pierces my eardrum
The annoying bells
Rashly letting us know
That the guests have presented themselves

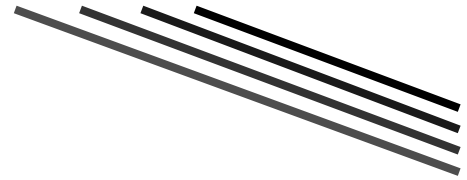
All sitting in a microwave room
All talking about life's problems
All babbling about football games long ago
Strings of nonsense

And then the time comes
The magic twelve
We migrate towards the table
The shrine set in gold

Upon a silver platter
Lies an amber brown bird
Prepared for sacrifice
With a touch of lemon and parsley

The aromas of the offering
Carry up our wishes
To whatever inhabits
The skies above

What a great feast it is
A feast for the blue-bloods
Spoiled and deserted
By the faces of commoners



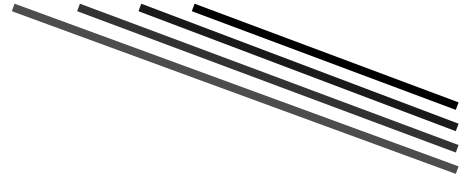
YOUNG CAFE SCHOOL

Busy drones
Caught in an endless loop
Travelling around
Wandering aimlessly
Chattering about nothing
In the fluid rivers of the corridor

A structure of minds
As a sculpture of the skyscraper's skeleton
Congealed into prides
Barricaded by the violent cold fire
Impossible to penetrate

An island isolated in the torrent
Surrounded by a sea of tile
In their cramped jail cells
The voices echo
The link to the outside
Speaking of nothing

From within our dark confines
We ponder upon
The trifles
The importances
Of the true existence of life



THE SEVEN SEALS

Seven of them
Were planted there
On the eroded pile of sand
Juxtaposed with the palisade of stakes
 Jutting out into the tumultuous ocean
Seven of them

Seven Seals
With their brown satin pelts
All stained white by the indifferent bleaches
Of the white man

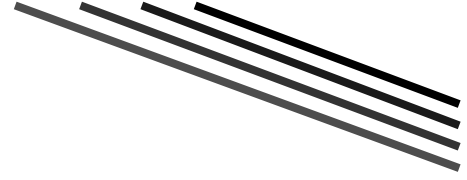
Each sporting an
Unsacred frock
 Of chain Of manacle Of plastic Of iron Of tarnish Of syringe Of Man
Each Seal yelping
With exuberance
Of toils

And in their
Craniums
Each one
A gaping hole

A window to the
Luxlack abysses
Of inwards

Their eyes
Pummeled Inwards

And the Seven Seals
Have Seven trumpets



As they blare brazenly
Out the euphonious
Minuet of Man
In a key not known

Every note is inharmonious
With the caustic tone

And Man is yet
Summoned to the
Site of the Seven Seals

And revere these Seals of Man

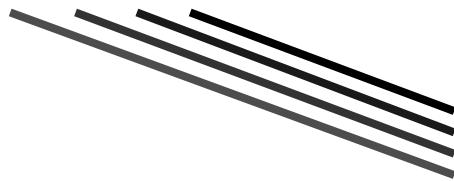
And nourish them

And miss the Revelation

That the Seals were conceived
By Man itself

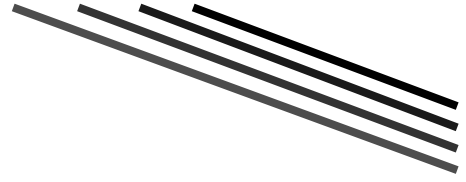
CREATURE OF SLOWITY

All weary in your
Withered fury
You continually plod onwards
In your
Lethargic pace
Enervating all who have the
Audacity to trod upon
The disseminated graveshard
Of slothful time



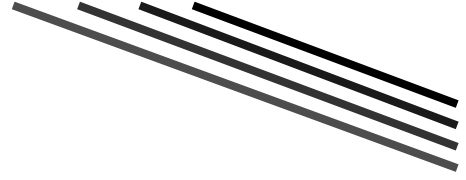
MIDNIGHT

With the final clocktwist
Of the tightloose spring
The tubular gong strikes into
The mallet of silence
Spreading the sown seed
For the eruption of the new day
And for a minute moment
Today and tomorrow
Are united into
Yesterday
And soon we drown again in
The placidity of night
And into a new day
We quest
So what?



I STILL SEE

And still through
The dark veil of dark
The light of the rose's petals
Still beckons me
With its relentless call
The rose stained
Red
With the ambrosia of my
Dying heart
Punctured by the thickly thorn
And the once white petals
Now may be disseminated
By the indifferent winds
But its beacon
Winds
Not do you blow away
I implore you for
The assassin of my heart
Block the knife of light

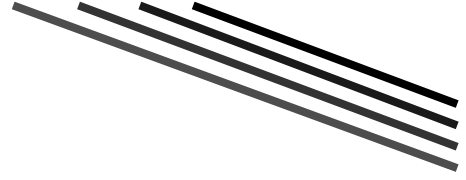


CHRISTMAS SOLUS

White cocaine on the frozen earth
Reverberations of carols no longer sung
Lights gasping for life on the naked pine
Whispers of a heart's songsung tune

Floor in a pool of red ambrosia
Spilled from the chalice of Eros
Scattered offerings for an idol once lost
Shatterpiece of God's love

Slouching on the unsympathetic chair
Clutching onto gifts never given
Clothed in the mauling shards of shattered happiness
Heart carved out emptied onto the fabric sea
Pain of Christmas Solus
Without she who fled



NOEL DE LA GUERRE

We Cower
Under the shield of green conifer
Covered by the ornaments
 shaken off by the
 columns of fire
Coming down from the sky

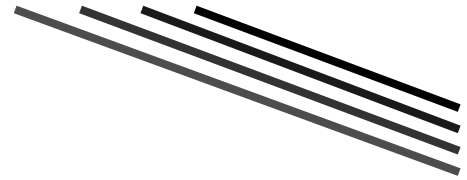
A bunker of
Cotton snow
Will repluse the Devil's tongue

A red bow I see
 beyond the hole
 gracing the wall
burning
On the street

All our gifts disseminated

DEUS
I ask for optimum donum
Nunc

There be blood in your manger now
Let not more desecrate the Star



ARMING THE TREE

Upon its sleeves of green
I put my life

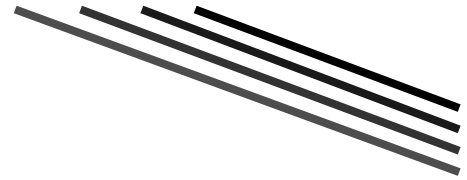
Glass balls of happiness
Hooks of pain
Icicles of depression
Lights of false joy
Crystal of leaded purity

And I lie under it
Looking up above to see
How decorated I am

And a glass ball falls
In the coercive grip of gravity
And shatters upon my face

Hooks tearing
Icicles impaling
Lights blinding
Crystal cracking

And I return to the trees
Preparing for another Christmas
Until the warrior in his military greens
Returns armed again



CHRISTMAS TIMES TWO

Lowercase Greek alphanumeric
fluttering uselessly to the
planar ground

Little irrational number children
gallivant through right angled streets
towards their fraction divided families

Chaotic winds pommel
the prism house

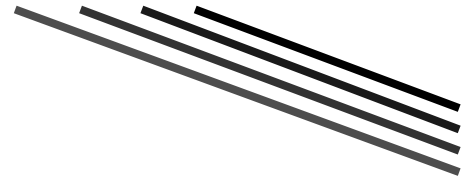
Inside

The fractal Christmas tree
with radical gifts and
the cf bow
tied in the \mathfrak{E} knot

And the clock proves $D_x t$
time to awaken
Christmas logarithm becomes

God takes out his adding machine
calculating the new year

Happiness is no power of x
Christmas is no prime



BUT A CANDLE

I am nothing

save one solitary candle
on God's Christmas tree

A little Ivory melted
inside a dusty brass sconce

A mite
Among the luminescent locusts
Ravaging the firry conifer
Invading the Creation Throng

when I am extinguished
no lesser will be the sting

One petering candela
From the metallic aura

Perhaps

i can snuff myself

and save God His
Trifle Thought

And nestle back into packing
for another palm

in a hotter tropic



I HEAR THE

Shattering of frozen earthen crystals
Under the heavy treads of human feet
Through the dark

Sorrows frozen in a mare of scattered ice

Moans of mourns

I hear the snowflake's thunder
On my casket door

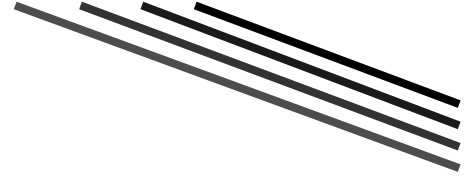
I hear the pounding of the white rose
Hurled upon my final frigid frosty blanket

Frozen earth cannot be thrown upon my grave

I lie opened to the sky
Sacrificed to the Zodiacs of Moons

I hear Orion's battlecry
Shifting me to the New Zenith

Lifeless as the rigid brook
Frozen lifeblood shall flow no more



NEW CHAOTIC NOTHING

Blinded by the swarm of lights
The pulse of a bloodless life
Cacophony of rampant motion
Luminescent voices

Shining in love
Shining in anger
Shining in hate
Shining in peace

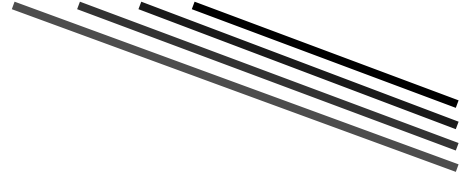
The rumblings deep within its craw
Fed by illegitimate hands
Amalgam of worldly goods
Bastard of fruitless purity

Begotten in friendship
Begotten in desperation
Begotten in hopelessness
Begotten in idealism

Silent noise fills the atmosphere
Artificial lamplight swims upon the waves
Numbing heat of mournful cries
I hear only the pulse

Moving in haste
Moving in pity
Moving in memory
Moving in apathy

Motionless shifting
Bristlings of placidity
I am one with this reaction of nothing
The new chaotic ordered null



WALKING

One day out I went
Searching for answers

The few questions
I knew well
But the answers
Had yet to be found

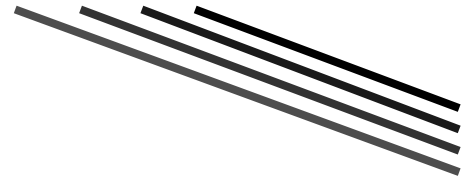
I asked the
Purring brook my
Quizzical question
And it only asked
A more puzzling question
Of my confused self

I asked the
Whispering leaves
For the answer
But they only asked
More questions of me

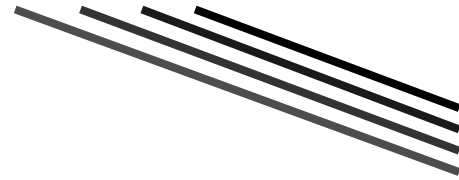
I asked the
Voyaging winds
For some solution
And they only blew
More confusing words
Into my befuddled ears

One day out I sent
Walking
Searching for answers
But found only
More questions waiting

Where has
God
Hidden all the answers



DEME



Aberration 1: Protaxis

sum Protaxis
Protaxis ex deos
impero tui ut laudes me
sum is qui confert noctem et diem
sum Protaxis
lauda me
sum hic qui moneat te
hic cantus est mihi
sum hic qui imperat te
sum Protaxis
vinceor te
audebas me
lauda me
sum Protaxis
Protaxis ex deos
audes hanc cantum
ut vivas

Aberration 2: Dulcimus

I pity you
and I wish you well
the world is replete with its beauty
and you are but a part
go out into it and explore it
caress it
envelop it
but do not change it
the world is as beautiful as it can be
I give you my best wishes
go
leave
please, leave me alone with this
new beauty
it needs you more than i

Aberration 3: Imperator

Come back here
I will kill you
and murder all of your heirs
you do not deserve to live
all of you
abhorrences! Die!
I will stab you with reason until you die!
The earth will bring forth its beauty watered by your blood.
No one will bury you.
No one cares about you.
No one will mourn you since they are dead
I will mince you as fertilizer for the earth
I will kill you.
I have eaten your soul already
All I have to do is eat your mind.

Aberration 4: Adamis

Do not weep child.
I am here.
Son.
You do not need to weep.
Daughter.
No one will harm you.
Come .
Let me keep you safe.
I will not harm you.
I would never harm you.
Son.
Daughter.
I have not harmed anyone.
Why do you still cry.

Aberration 5: Amorte

red
i am surrounded by red
blue
i am surrounded by blue
why is everything so black
i remember it was light once
light
where has that light gone now
no one cares about me any longer
no one will give it to me
red
i was surrounded by red
blue
i was surrounded by blue
but now i just sit in pain
in the soothing darkness
calming waters
why do i still cry.

Aberration 6: Conquitore

Shut up.
Get back here you whore.
I'll rip you apart where you stand.
Shut up.
You don't know the pain I've been through.
You don't know what I've been.
You don't know what I've become.
Shut up.
Get back here you whore.
I'll show you my pain.
It's right here on your neck.
Can you see the blood?
Now you won't cry any longer.

Aberration 7: Solus

No one cares any more
I am just a speck in the being of existence
They all abandoned me
Every Last One Abandoned Me
Why don't I just die?

Aberration 8: Contentus

Look at the beauty of the world
i just love live
and life loves me
breathing the fresh pollen on the air
the beautiful bird-songs carrying prayers into heaven
God is here on this earth
i know it
let's all safeguard it
but first
let's just watch the passing of the sun

Aberration 9: Potens

I CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING
I HAVE COME FAR
THROUGH THE SINNERS, I STOOD STRONG
THROUGH THE PREACHERS, I STOOD STRONG
THROUGH THE LOVERS, I STOOD STRONG
ALONE I STOOD STRONG
AND SO I CAN STAND NOW
AND SO I WILL STAND AHEAD
ALONE
STRONG

Aberration 10: Nocte

i have sinned through my own fault
in my thought and in my word
in what i have done and what i have failed to do
THEY ALL CRY TOGETHER
YOU WILL NEVER ENTER MY NIGHT
IT IS TOO DARK TO SEE IN THERE
SOMETIMES EVEN FOR ME

Aberration 11: Puerix

you left me
and now i am empty
without life
afraid of the future
mother
come back to me
comfort me one last time
i'm afraid

Aberration 12: Lux

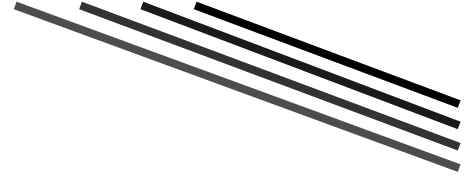
Can't you hear me?
I'm trying to reach you?
Trying to tell you my fears?
Trying to tell you my pain?
Trying to tell you my loves?
Trying to tell you my being?
And you still do not listen?
And you still do not comprehend?
Do you understand now.
Listen to this song.
So that you may live.

Aberration 13: Protaxis ex deos

sum Protaxis
Protaxis ex deos
impero tui ut laudes me
sum puer potens et solus
Amor
noctem et diem
sum imperator dulcis
sum Protaxis
Protaxis ex deos
hic cantus est mihi
audes hanc cantum
ut vivas

SONNET, DESERTED

Across an arid land my path I make,
Being chastized by the sun's caustic rays,
An eternity will my journey take,
A heart parched of love for all of my days.
No drop of love is there upon these sands,
For all ecstasy from all men they drain;
Love is nothing more than the threadbare strands
Woven into the straightjacket of pain.
So thus bound into fate my journey flies,
Upon the enervated field of white,
And as the plant in dry earth surely dies,
So I do fear for my own heart contrite.
For on this last walk all my love must die,
And to heaven or hell my soul will fly.

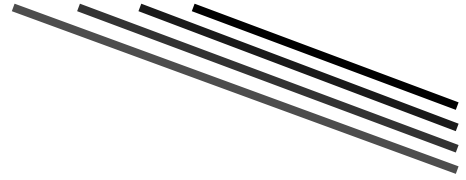


BREATHE ONTO THE DARK

In the moon rays
Withering to the ground
Through the frosty sky
Beauty
You come to me
And in a Tranquil Sea of stars
Mother cycles fervently around
When God exhales his
Frosty breath
In front of Beauty
As an icebreaker splits
Indestructible Ice
I shall reach through the
Drumming snow
And part the cloudy barriers

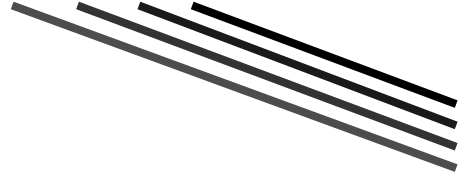
When the Mother hides
And cold frost clothes my naked face
Mother Moonray
Shall still circle to warm
The frigid winter sky

Will I ever reach you Beauty?
Can you bear me away from
This heartless ore?



SONNET, STILLBORN HOPE

No longer songs of joy my heart will sing,
Now that I sleep amongst my shattered dreams,
No longer love that radi'nt face will bring,
Since love, refused, to me no longer beams.
That day I heard the phrase my heart did dread,
When you did spurn the love I freely gave,
When from emphatuation you had fled,
When this event my passion did enslave.
So now my hopes have blended with my pain,
Still kept alive by futile dreams of you,
But only fragments of these dreams remain,
Destroyed because I know they are not true.
Although that now you have rejected me,
I still do dream someday to be with thee.



BLUE STILLNESS

Incessant roars swell up
And break onto the quiet rocks

The intense blue is
Decimated in a field of red

The time is roaming
The time is voyaging

Below the cascades
Of Calamitous skies
Soon we must migrate
Beyond the exodus

Towards the stillness of the blue

Do you see them
The attacks of silence
Wading onto our shores

They come from a carnival of reddened tumult

Destroying the exhausted purple of the drums

Our beat is ending

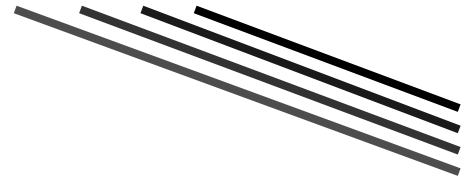
Come into the silence
Tango with the peace

The time is ambling
The time is carrying
Soon we must migrate
Beyond the exodus

Envelop the blue placidity
Hackneyed purple scraps

Dogmatic reds trek
Nearer to our noiseless shores

We must grapple the purple shards



Construct the tower

As lemmings on the drive
Exodus into the lifeless

Escape the blends

Tweed with the flutterings
Meld with the murmurings

As we float up into the blue
As the red grotesquely meshes

Exodus into the lifeless

Time is quivering
Time is bristling
Soon we must migrate
Beyond the exodus

In the stillness of the blue
I will reach out and touch
The motion of the red

And remain silent

Tweed with the flutterings
Meld with the murmurings

A ghost of purple
Exorcise the red
Chastise the blue

Can you hear the murmurings

Flee now towards the
Blue Stillness

Find him who finds you

Meld with the murmurings

The exodus is now

Rewrite the genesis
Throughout the nexus

The exodus is now

ONCE I TOUCHED

once
i touched the face of
beauty
my god
my god

once
i deified the idols of
love
my god
my god

once
on a field of wet leaves
i dreamed
of a life
of ecstasy

worth is
not only worth
the worth

masticating

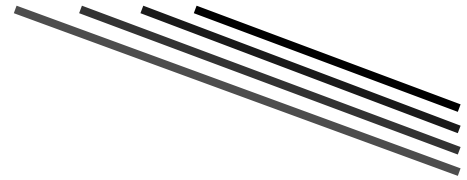
killing

no longer

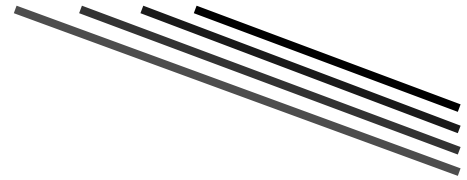
only
had i realized
the worthlessness
of maiden love
earlier

my God
you are here with me now
in the silence

don't leave



BUTTERFLIES NOT MINE



as alone I walked my path to Fate
Beauty was flirting with my periphery
a butterfly flitting just out of sight
upon a turn of head vanishing to Eternity

some do put their butterflies in boxes
dried and dead and fragile things
no more to tango with the indecisive winds
stuck on pins, motionless and dead

but I prefer the live Butterfly
with its capricious gallivantings
which I can never follow with sight
as away behind the dogwood flies

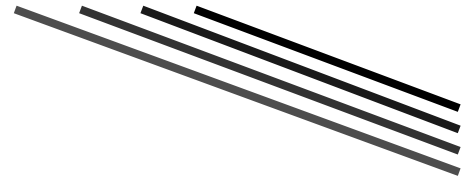
I am not brave enough to be a
capturer of butterflies, owner of boxes
I can only wait until they mistakenly
wander into my eyesight to leave soon

Thusly Beauty passed me by on my way to Judgement
and was not in a windowed sepulcher
and when I exit out from my tabernacle
the Butterflies will still fly free

when I will reach the Fates
none of them will I have
but weakly (as all men do)
I will still long to be an owner of butterflies

SONNET, VEILED MEMORY

The gales of time that sink the weakened past
Have spared this gem I covet through my pains,
That gilded mem'ry time allowed to last
Held steadfast by my love for you remains.
Though I remember only shadows now,
I still can see your face across the mist,
Time's darkness touched not upon your brow,
Since thoughts of joy in storm do never list.
Though never could reality be mine,
Since never loved nor ever seen was I,
I hold a dream impregnable to time,
And still will dream when under ground I lie.
Regardless of how many there will be,
For you, the first, my heart shall live for thee.



Biographical Poetry

GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell was a serious man,
Who wrote about the problems of the day.
The problems with people, politics too,
And even about today.

His books were filled with sense,
About problems in an indirect way,
"But young man," the publishers said,
"These books would cause lawsuits today."

His childhood was bad for him,
Because he went to boarding school,
While there for many a day,
He had to be beaten on a wooden stool.

He was always very polite and kind,
And very honest too,
And kept living a valuable life,
Even when things looked blue.

But amazing things happened,
When he made people aware,
That was that famous man,
Called Eric Aruthur Blair.

THE MAN THAT I WAS

Underneath the cold,
Ground,
I sit in a,
Room,
Of concrete,
With my gun in hand.

I raise it to my,
Head,
And then I,
Pull,
The trigger,
And allow myself to die.

As my soul,
Flies,
From my dead,
Body,
I see it,
Burning in the garden.

I find myself,
Floating,
Up to the,
Sky,
With a bright,
Light surrounding me.

I see before me,
Gates,
Golden gates to,
Heaven,
But I float,
Away from them.

I float into a,
Room,
Where an,
Angel,
Sits on a pedestal,
With a book,
This book is called,
ADOLF HITLER.

"Adolf Hitler is your",
"Name",
"I am your",
"Judge",
"With your book",
"Of your life".

"Is it true that",
"You",
"Did not help your",
"Mother",
"By getting a job?"
Yes it is guardian of my book.

"What did you",
"Do",
"With your",
"Life",
"After you left",
"Your mother?"

I left for,
Vienna,
To gain fame as an,
Artist,
"But did you make it?"
No guardian of my book.

As he writes what I,
Say,
In my,
Book,
I wonder what,
Is going on in that book.

"After you",
"Failed",
"Who did you",
"Good",
"While you were poor?",
A Jew guardian of my book.

"What happened then",
"Adolf?",
I listened to the,
Papers,
Against the Jews,
And swore to destroy their corruption guardian of my book.

Again he writes in my,
Book,
"What did you",
"Accomplish",
"After your military life?",
I will tell you guardian of my book.

I began my,
Destruction,
Of the,
Jews,
By forming my political party,
Of Nazis guardian of my book.

I planned to,
Unify,
All that was rightfully,
German,
To have Europe under,
Superior German rule guardian of my book.

"Did you accomplish",
"This?",
Yes I did as I gained,
Power,
I rose to be the,
Chancellor of Germany guardian of my book.

I started a,
War,
To gain all that was,
Germany's,
But I failed,
Guardian of my book.

I tried the,
Best,
I could and I was,
Kind,
To all,
Guardian of my book.

"No you were not",
"Adolf",
"What about the",
"Jews?",
I got rid of their,
Conspiracy guardian of my book.

I had then,
Killed,
In my concentration,
Camps,
And cleansed Germany,
Of their filth guardian of my book.

"What did you",
"Do",
"To the ones that",
"Despised",
"You Adolf?",
I killed them guardian of my book.

I tried to,
Kill,
Everyone that,
Opposed,
Me I wanted,
Everything for myself and Germany guardian of my book.

I
Massacred,
Many,
People,
But I was protecting,
Germany guardian of my book.

"That is not what",
"I",
"Know you",
"Killed",
"To gain more land",
"And kill more Jews Adolf".

So I,
Did,
Guardian of my,
Book,
But I have always,
Killed guardian of my book.

"Look up there in",
"Heaven",
"There are the",
"Jews",
"Christians and Muslims",
"Everyone is there",
"Worshipping God together",
"Except you Adolf".

I have,
Killed,
And I have,
Destroyed,
But let me,
Worship there guardian of my book.

"Not there",
"Adolf",
"Look at what you have",
"Done",
"As I read it",
"From your book".

I see a,
Picture,
Above my,
Head,
A picture of,
Starved people,
Being led into a,
Gas chamber,
Then watching them,
Die,
Screaming and convulsing,
No more guardian of my book.

"You think that",
"You",
"Can worship",
"There",
"After that?",
"There is yet more Adolf".

I see another,
Picture,
Now of my,
Secret service,
Blasting into homes,
Instantly shooting,
Civilians,
Watching their warm blood drip,
Over the wooden,
Boards of the,
Floor,
No more guardian of my book!

"But there is",
"More",
"Adolf there is",
"More",
"To see",
"And you will see it".

I see another,
Picture,
On the front,
Lines,
Of my,
War,
With people,
Shooting and killing,
I see young,
Men being,
Killed and left to,
Die,
No more guardian of my book!

"Now do you",
"See",
"What you have",
"Done",
"To the people",
"Of the world Adolf?"

Yes I do,
See,
But I,
Repent,
For what I,
Have done guardian of my book.

"Deep down you",
"Have not",
"Adolf",
"Your book",
"Is finished",
"Now the Light Eternal must make the judgement".

A bright orb of,
Light,
Descended from,
Above,
And it spoke,
To the guardian of my book.

"HE IS",
"CONDEMNED" ,
"GUARDIAN" were the,
Words,
Of the Light Eternal,
"ADOLF HITLER IS CONDEMNED!"

Then a Nazi,
Flag,
Entombed,
Me,
And I began,
To float once again.

I gloated,
Downward,
To,
Hell,
Then I saw,
The cavern passageway to Hell before me.

Cherubs opened the,
Gates,
To,
Hell,
Which I floated,
Through into the caverns of Hell.

Before me on a,
Pedestal,
Sat the,
Devil,
With his own,
Book waiting for 'customers'.

Still bound by my,
Flag,
I floated to the,
Pedestal,
"Who are you?",
Adolf Hitler.

"You have been",
"Condemned",
"And you will be",
"Punished",
"As you rightfully",
"Deserve".

Then I found,
Myself,
Burning in,
Flames,
With my flags,
Burning with,
Me.

I scream out in,
Pain,
And,
Terror,
But nobody can,
Hear or wants to hear.

Forever I,
Burn,
In,
Hell,
Because of,
The Man That I Was.

THE SPECIAL SOMEONE

In our small,
Lives,
We have,
Noticed,
That everyone knows,
A Special Someone.

Someone that is,
Always,
Smiling and,
Jovial,
This is some parts of,
My Special Someone.

He was not,
Known,
To the whole,
World,
But he was known by many,
As a Special Someone.

Living a,
Friendly,
And,
Peaceful,
Life he was always there,
That Special Someone.

He was ready to,
Lend,
A helping,
Hand,
To anyone who asked,
He was that Special Someone.

He would just,
Talk,
About anything to,
Anyone,
Anyone that wanted to talk,
He was that Special Someone

He always had a,
Kind,
Word to,
Speak,
And never had a nasty tone of voice,
That peaceful kind Special Someone.

Then that Special,
Someone,
Had suddenly contracted,
Cancer,
And everyone wept for,
Our Special Someone.

Even as he was,
Dying,
He asked others not to,
Worry,
He wanted them to get on with their lives.
He was that Special Someone.

Then came the,
Day,
That our Special,
Someone,
Passed out of our lives,
We all wept for our Special Someone.

But I,
Know,
In my,
Heart,
That our Special Someone,
Is with The Light Eternal.

And our Special,
Someone,
Is still,
Helping,
From his outpost in the sky,
A beacon of The Light Eternal.

There are many,
People,
In our little,
Lives,
That are our,
Special Someones.

And we must,
Not,
Let go of our,
Special Someones,
Because they will be with us,
Forever in our hearts,
And someday,
Every Special Someone,
Will be together again.

Dedicated to my Very Special Someone, Al Saley

The Travelling Mind

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

California, Silicon Valley, USA 1990 – It was just another hot and humid day in arid California, or so it seemed to be. The deserts were hot, and the mountains were cool, but in Silicon Valley it was relatively cold, thanks to air conditioning. The events of today would eventually make this day one of the many milestones in the electronic and psychiatric world. All of these events took place behind the steel doors of the CRTE supercomputer research center.

This particular section of the building embraced the work of two dedicated computer and behavior scientists, Dr. Tatsu Kochiki and Dr. Natsio Kun. They were trying to make a supercomputer that was able to read and store any group of thoughts from an organic thought source, a brain. They had tried many unsuccessful times, but today was to be different. They had just tried to read the thoughts off a chimp, but the computer called AIMind just gave them a new series of random numbers. But when they ran it through the other half of AIMind, CryptOm, it turned out to be unrelated to the subject that AIMind was scanning for, bananas.

Then the two doctors altered the program of AIMind. They tried the program again. They placed the scanner on the chimp, and started the scan. This time, the sequence of numbers seemed to have something in common. When they ran it through CryptOm, the thought patterns seemed to be unrelated, but as they thought harder, they made sense. They found that somehow the thoughts were connected with bananas, but they were about different topics.

What did this mean? AIMind stored these thoughts on its optical drive and processed them. The two scientists continued their tests on the new computer system software, but the computer hesitated while doing its tasks. Soon, it stopped responding to them all together in its spare time. It began to print out information on bananas, and soon began making its own deductions on what they were, and what they meant to it. The computer had started learning, and had been the first proven incident of artificial intelligence.

Although AIMind was very efficient in its job of finding, recording, analyzing, and learning from other beings' thoughts, it was a very bulky machine. No application was found for AIMind for a long time, until one day, two young enthusiastic Japanese psychiatrists interested in the concept of learning came along. Eventually, they would shape AIMind into one of the most successful and disastrous projects in the history of the world.

CHAPTER I

Tericon, New York USA 1994 – Finally, the two Nagaki brothers have

PART I

THE SERENE
TIME BEFORE

finished their wonderful invention using AIMind. Built onto a travelling platform, AIMind was the major component of their gigantic brain study center. This center was mobile, although huge. The brilliance of this center was the fact that it studied the facts of the learning process through recreation. It ultimately became a recreational center as well, making people want to visit this brilliant center, The Travelling Mind. Computer controlled by AIMind, the whole center was an almost flawless paradise for recreation and study. It worked fine until one particular person came into its existence . . .

CHAPTER II

Tericon New York, USA 2037 – Today, the Tericon branch of the National Library received a recorded videodisc from an anonymous local address. After wondering about it for many hours, the librarian decided to take it home to her new house and review it, just in case it would be of value to the library. She sat on her antique anti-grav hovering chair, and put the disc in an almost antique laser-disc player.

"Why would someone use a laserdisc for this recording when there are many better recording devices to use today?" she wondered. She just shrugged her shoulders in a sense of disgust, and began watching the laserdisc.

On her paper-thin Display-A-Screen was a picture of an old man in a now obsolete motorized wheelchair. This man looked up, and then began talking . . .

"I am Mr. Lawke. Many things have happened in my lifetime, but by far

the most intriguing and devastating one was the downfall of The Travelling Mind. I have kept this secret of what happened to myself, but the now aged schoolteacher must tell his story. The truth must be kept for no longer. My name and the ones of my classmates will be kept in history eternally as the destructors and saviors of The Travelling Mind. Here is the only story that I have yet to teach to this world . . ."

CHAPTER III

Tericon, New York USA 1997 – "Okay class, sit down now. Today we will discuss our field trip in our computer section of the school year. Does anyone here have any suggestions about where we might go this year?"

The fairly modern schoolroom fell silent. Not one of the twelve students in this class wanted to talk. What will I do now? I got it!

"Class, I want you to come to school tomorrow prepared with an essay--"

"Aw Mr. Lawke, do we have to?" Alex, one of my best students, whined.

"Since nobody will talk about it right now, yes Alex, you and the whole class must come tomorrow with an essay about where you would like to go on a field trip to study computers. I wan--"

BRINNNNNNGGGGGGGGGGGGGG!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

God, there goes the bell. At that moment, all of the students rushed out of the classroom, giving no attention to the poor teacher standing in the way, mainly me.

After lasting moments of extremely dexterous acts of dodging bullets of flesh racing out of the classroom, I finally got to settle down. I looked at my desk blotter and calendar. Then I jumped out of my seat in complete astonishment!

"Oh my God! I have a meeting today!"

I rushed down to the principal's room to meet him there.

I rushed into his office and quickly sat down in front of the big antique leather chairs. Fortunately, they had been reconfigured with the most modern technology so now they could hover like any other chair. I looked around. (RELIEF!) He's not here yet. I made it! Then Mr. Kotch, the school principal, walked into the room, and sat in his antique leather chair, again hovering.

"Mr. Lawke," he began. "I know that you are a very punctual person and a very ingenious teacher."

"Thank you," I said indifferently.

"Now Mr. Lawke, the date for your class's field trip is coming up and I need to know where you are going."

"I don't know that yet sir, BUUT just give me three days and I'll let you know."

"Thank you."

Then he shook my hand, stood up, and left the office. I did the same, and then I left for home. I walked out the door, got into my aircar, and headed for home, sleep, and a night of relaxation.

CHAPTER IV

The next day was a normal day. I woke up after incessant dreams of prodigious vats of chocolate, and went to the school, wishing for a candy bar to be in my hand. The bulk of the day had already passed, along with my utter desire for an old fashioned candy bar, when I had finally reached the magical time of the day when my computer class was in session . . .

"Okay kids, today I want you to read your short essays about where you would like to go for our computer trip. Alex, I want you to explain your essay to the class first."

Alex got out of his hovering desk, and walked up to the front of the classroom with his essay 'paper' in his hand. He was actually holding one of the common hand-held display devices, a small screen with room for an optical disk that held dictated or typed data. The words were displayed on the screen in a semi-slow fashion. It was from one of these disks that he read his essay.

His essay was about The Travelling Mind and why he would like to have an educational trip to there. He explained about how it would help the class grasp the concept of artificial intelligence better. He talked about how they would see how computers were being used to make breakthroughs in other fields as well as scientific computer and electronic technology. His final note was about how The Travelling Mind would also provide them with a recreation for part of the day.

The class applauded Alex for his presentation and ideas that were in his essay. Next was Suzy, another bright student. Her essay also talked about

The Travelling Mind. So did the next girl's essay. In fact, the bulk of the class's essays were about The Travelling Mind. Then, when it was about five minutes to the bell realizing that it was this close, and from the knowledge about yesterday's experience, I gave my last orders for the day.

"Class, I want you to put all of your essays in whatever form they are on my desktop before you leave the classroom, or else we might not have a field trip: I need your input to make a decision that would be the most benefiting and joyful for you. Okay?"

"Okay Mr. Lawke," the class responded almost robotically.

This time when the bell rung, the exciting procedure of exiting the classroom was different. All of the children calmly lined up at my desk, and one by one they put their essays on the desk and walked out the door. After they all left, I fell back in my hovering chair and rested. Finally, it was time to head out of the building. I gathered up all of the dictation tapes, optical disks, and card disks and put them in my briefcase. Then, I got into my solar-powered air car and headed home. When I reviewed all of the essays, I found that the almost unanimous decision was to visit The Travelling Mind, a now local place. Since it was usually travelling about the country, we couldn't get an appointment with it, so most of the children have not visited it yet. The other decisions were really outrageous for a simple day-long field trip. Some were the Silicon Valley CRTE center, the Orbiting Astronomical Supercomputer DataCenter (OASDC), or the NASA headquarters to find out how they had fixed the Hubble Space Telescope with microscopic robots. For one blatant reason, they were all scrapped – it would take more than a day to even reach any one of those

places by the fastest bus. The Travelling Mind was the best choice.

The next day, I told the class that my final decision was that our computer class field trip was going to be to The Travelling Mind. That piece of information made the children very happy. The rest of the class was spent having a civilized discussion of what we would do there and how we would get there.

That evening, I met with Mr. Kotch and told him of our class's plans to visit The Travelling Mind. He was very pleased to hear this not only because we had made a decision of where we wanted to go, but also because it was currently in town and would not require much expenditure. That night, I slept peacefully knowing what we would do now. Little did I know that this trip would be nothing like what I had expected.

CHAPTER I

Today when I walked into the classroom, the kids were greeting me joyfully at the classroom door. All of them were carrying their 'Just Add Water' travel lunched in their pockets. They were ready.

I was ready also. I had a capsule lunch with me in my pocket: 'Just Take With Water'. Also, I brought the water. I had been preparing to go on this particular trip for two weeks now, and I was not going to let anything ruin it for my class, at least not anything that I had control over. When the bell rung for the morning classes to begin, I took my class outside to the parking lot. Waiting for us there was the hovering bus that would take us to The Travelling Mind. As soon as we were all accounted for, we boarded the hovering bus. We gently flew out of the parking lot. The bus was old and slow compared to the 180 miles that the other buses of today can do. It was still comfortable, an amazing surprise considering that this bus was a public one.

The trek to The Travelling Mind was a formidable one, mainly because it

PART II

THE TERROR
HAS BEGUN

was on the outskirts of town. This ride was an anxious one for many of the children, including myself. I was wondering if I made the right decision in taking the class here. I was anxious to know if the highly publicized Travelling Mind would be a worthwhile trip. At least I got the two brothers who owned and ran The Travelling Mind to show and explain to our group about how The Travelling Mind operated and worked on the computer level. Probably, the kids will also find this pleasurable. After all, part of the brothers' study involved the guests to participate in recreation. Then, a stout push from my seat partner awakened me from my daydream of wonder and worries. I looked at her sternly until I realized that it was only Suzy.

"Look at that Mr. Lawke!" she said enthraustically.

I turned my head to look out of the bus's biodegradable plastic window. Suddenly, my whole body was filled with an epic awe. The Travelling Mind certainly fulfilled its claims for being the biggest mobile educational, recreational, and study center. The Travelling Mind was gigantic! It seemed to be a hollow metal ball of epic proportions! This was truly one of the largest things on wheels. No wonder why it took months to move. Somehow, it seemed ominous to look at. Soon, we would be inside that metal ball, and the real fun and terror would begin.

CHAPTER II

We were finally off the bus and were standing in front of The Travelling

Mind. We were puny creatures compared to the looming tower of metal that somehow seemed to be alive. Why was I thinking these horrific thoughts? This was supposed to be like a vacation for me; a time to relax and enjoy life. Maybe it was the kids; they must be playing on my thoughts, annoying me to pieces, making my life more terrible than it really was. Or maybe it was the fact that this was the first time that I had ever been here before . . .

"Mr. Lawke," Alex whined. "Can't we go in yet?"

Disturbed from my train of disorganized thought, I replied:

"Yes, I guess that it is about time that we get this trip underway."

I took the lead spot in the line. We then got on the escalator, and headed towards the entrance of The Travelling Mind. The entrance was higher than I had first thought it to be - after a while, it seemed as if we were scaling a small mountain. That's when I first looked over the escalator's edge. That is when I finally realized why I adored heights - It is just one heck of a drop from them. I closed my eyes, and waited until we finally reached the top. Then, I opened my eyes once again, remembering not to look down over the edge of the platform. That was the thought that took all of the fear off my mind.

Straight in front of my face were the doors. Towering over my own head-height, they were made out of cast steel, a cheap metal commonly used to make doors these days. Finally at the top of the doors was a big argon laser-lit sign which said: "WELCOME TO THE TRAVELLING MIND. PLEASE HAVE YOUR TICKETS READY AND WALK THROUGH THE HOLOGRAM IN FRONT OF YOU." First, I checked that all of the kids were behind me. After a head count, we were ready to go into the paradise that would make our lives wonderful for

the rest of the day – the paradise of terror.

Then, after I finished thinking, it was time. I walked stoutly into the hologram in front of me. Unfortunately, it was not a hologram. KLANG!!!!!! That was my head banging on the steel door, or so I thought. I had actually found a switch that rang a bell. Suddenly, the doors swung open, creaking from the strain that was exerted on their titanium hinges. There in the doorway was a Japanese man wearing a white lab jacket.

"Hello my fellow humans," he began. "I am Terichi Nagaki, partner in creating, owning, and maintaining The Travelling Mind. May I please have your name, and your tickets."

"I am Mr. Lawke, computer teacher for the public school system of the town of Tericon. I am here with my class for a field trip, and here are our tickets."

"Thank you Mr. . . . Lawke. I am honored to have you and your students visiting The Travelling Mind. Will you please step inside?"

"I do not mind if we do."

That is when we got our first glimpse of The Travelling Mind's inner self. The first thing that we were in was a foyer, used for greeting messaged for large groups, LARGE groups. This foyer was about ten times as large as our bus and our classroom together! Also, accounting for its monstrosity, was the constant reverberating echo that loomed over this vast space.

"Excuse me Mr. Nagaki, but I believe that we also asked and paid for a tour of the computer section of The Travelling Mind with an explanation of the internal systems. When will we get one?"

"You will have one right now Mr. Lawke. I would be happy to show your class about the core of The Travelling Mind."

"Mr. Lawke," Suzy whined. "Why do we have to go on a tour? Why can't we just have fun?!"

"Do not forget Suzy that this is a special trip for us to learn about new applications for computers in our lives. If we do not get our goal accomplished, how will we ever learn from this experience?"

"But--"

"Stop it! I'm sure that all of you will have a wonderful learning experience here so just stop griping! Okay?"

"Okay Mr. Lawke," the class responded.

"Good. Then we can be on our way. We are ready whenever you are Mr. Nagaki."

"Just give me a couple of minutes to prepare the tour. Stay right here until I come back."

Mr. Nagaki left us in the eerie silence of the foyer, waiting for our doom and triumph.

CHAPTER III

It was not until a couple of minutes later that Mr. Nagaki finally returned. In his hand he was holding a bunch of papers that fluttered out of a folder, causing Mr. Nagaki to stop and pick them up, only to have them fall again. It

took him many minutes of this bobbing motion to finally realize that if he put all of them in his clipboard, that would make life a lot easier for him. Finally, he was able to talk to us without worrying about the papers in his hand.

"I am now ready to start the tour of The Travelling Mind. If you are prepared, then it is time to begin."

I checked with the class; everyone was ready, which to me was a phenomenon since they had never been ready this hastily before.

"We are ready Mr. Nagaki."

"Okay, let's begin."

We walked silently through the foyer to the door located across of the flat floor.

"We are now about to enter the passageway to the computer core of The Travelling Mind . . ."

We then found ourselves walking on a platform across of a monstrous room even bigger than the entrance foyer! This room was filled with computer banks and terminals of different sorts.

"This is the data center of AIMind. AIMind is the gigantic artificially intelligent computer network that makes up the controlling data storage and analysis system of The Travelling Mind. This room is filled with all of the optical drives that are needed to store all of the information that AIMind processes. These drives also contain the programming that comprises AIMind's thought complexes. Right now, AIMind's drives are at only seventy percent of their full capacity."

"Mr. Nagaki," Suzy began. "What happens when you run out of space

here?"

"Good question Suzy. We don't really know what we are going to do about that yet. So far, the best proposal that we can come up with is an expansion of The Travelling Mind."

"Thank you."

We finally finished walking through the data center. The next room was just as large, but this time it was illuminated with an eerie fluorescent green glow. Then, Mr. Nagaki started to talk again.

"This room is AIMind itself. All of these terminals that you see before you are all components of one supercomputer. AIMind is the only computer of its type in the world. AIMind is a computer that learns from other beings like you and me. It can read thoughts about a topic, and can analyze them and link them together. Then, it knows about these topics. Since it learns from the human brain, its thought complexes are much like those of a brain. Now, let's head into the next room."

The next room was only about twice the size of the bus that we came here on. This room was filled with metal chairs with what seemed to be metal caps suspended over them. They resembled the old hair dryers that my mother recalled seeing in the hair-dresser's shops in the seventies.

"This room is where we read the thoughts of all of the people that come to The Travelling Mind. All that they do is sit in these chairs, and rest. Then the caps surround their heads, and analyze the thoughts of the brain. they have been proven to be safe through numerous tests done on them. They are checked every day for any flaws."

That moment, another Japanese man walked into the room.

"This is my brother, Hakai Nagaki. Today, he is checking the chairs for their safety for you. Now, that is the end of our tour of the computer section of The Travelling Mind. If there are any questions, before you leave today you can ask either me or Hakai and we will answer them to the best of our ability. Now, we will start your day at The Travelling Mind. Just follow me . . ."

CHAPTER IV

Now we were in a room that was a 'classroom' for the tourists of The Travelling Mind. Terichi was in the front of the room, and we were patiently sitting in the metal anti-grav hovering chairs that encompassed the greater portion of the mass in the room. Terichi began to speak:

"You are here in the 'classroom' of The Travelling Mind. As you know, this is a psychological research center. Since we study the linking of thoughts through learning and recreation, you are here now to learn. The topic today is about the programming of computers; I deemed it important for you since you are here to learn about computers."

Then, we were briefly introduced to the internal programming of computers. We only touched on topics that were presented, not learning much about them. Topics such as ROM programming, chip structure, and systematic programming updation were introduced. After what seemed like two hours, we were finished.

"Now adults and children, let us prepare to enter the second session of

your visit to The Travelling Mind. Some of your best recreation lies here in this complex. Just seek what you enjoy and you shall find and learn. Let your joy begin . . ."

CHAPTER V

Now, we were getting ready to leave the classroom and travel into the second complex of The travelling Mind. We got in line and waited. Then Terichi was yelling . . .

"Let's go!!!"

We all got into a line and followed Terichi down a long hallway that extended into a perfectly rounded portal. Then, as we walked through the portal, we beheld one of the awesome spectacles that was ever seen in the life of a man. This was the sphere of The Travelling Mind. The monstrosity that was seen outside was totally filled here on the inside. Different tiers adorned the steel walls of the enclosure. On these tiers was just about every single recreation that you could imagine: croquet, arcades, basketball games, and swimming to name a few. This was the reason why The Travelling Mind was so famous with the kids.

"Now everyone," Terichi began. "I want you to go out and enjoy yourselves silly. Have the time of your life! But when the bell rings, I want all of you to come back up here and wait for the final part of your trip."

"Okay" was the class's response.

"Have fun!"

Then Terichi left the enclosure. The kids then dashed off gallivanting through the tiers of the enclosure looking for their favorite activity. After I saw them off, I myself went off to enjoy the day. Where did I go? The arcade, of course.

I walked down the hovering steps to reach it. Finally when I got there, I found every game that I had ever played in my childhood plus some. Finally, I found my favorite game, and became engulfed with it. Every time that I felt as if I should leave, I would think "Just a bit longer", and longer it was. I wound up playing the same game for two hours! Although I was exhausted, I still had the time of my life. I felt like a kid again. After a couple more games, I decided to take a walk around The Travelling Mind's recreation complex to find everyone else and make sure that they were all right.

The first person that I found was Suzy. She was playing with a basketball on the court level. She was playing with some of the other kids that were in our tour group. Alex was there also. I eventually found everyone that was in my class, and they all were exuberantly playing in the pastimes that they had chosen.

Finally, I found myself back at the entrance to the enclosure. Since I had seen all of the choices offered, I decided to leave the enclosure and take a walk around The Travelling Mind to find Terichi or Hakai, and ask them to tell me more about AIMind so I could teach more about it in my class. I left the room silently and headed down the eerie gloom of the hall . . .

CHAPTER VI

I eventually walked back through the monstrous rooms of The Travelling Mind just to find myself back at the mind-reading center. The steel chairs were still gallantly sitting on the floor. Hakai was still polishing and repairing the chairs for today's slue of 'victims'. I decided to watch him to find out what he was doing.

On each of the chairs, Hakai had opened a panel on the back of the cap. Inside these 'caps' were millions upon millions of cables and wiring connected to chip consoles within its core. It was these chips that I saw Hakai inspecting the most. Among other things that he scrutinized were the electric input, the data feed, and also comfort of the chair. I had watched him do this for many hours; I had gotten interested in how the chairs worked. After what seemed like an eternity, Terichi walked into the room of chairs.

He began to talk to Hakai about what repairs needed to be done, and what they needed to add to The Travelling Mind. They also touched on ideas for renovation and new construction. The only problem with this type of conversation is that no matter how intriguing it may be, it takes one's mind off his or her work at the moment. This was the fatal error that had occurred.

As I diligently watched Hakai and the chairs, I noticed that he began to work slower, and more negligently. He was talking to Terichi when I noticed his hand slip. It landed onto one of the exposed electric cables that Hakai had been checking! Hakai started to convulse, eyeballs rolling back, screaming out in moans of terror and intense suffering. Terichi shrieked out in confusion, par-

alyzed in his footsteps. All I could do was to watch in horror. The lights began to dim, and sparks flew from Hakai's body to the metal floor. In a few seconds, it had ceased. Hakai was dead.

Terichi let out a cry of anguish and sorrow, and dropped to his knees crying. I plowed into the room and fell too, crying with him in sorrow for the lost soul. Nothing could be done . . .

CHAPTER VII

Hours had passed on. The grievance for this brilliant mind had ceased, and I had retired to a sullen pose beside that of the man Terichi. Sitting down, his distorted face of sadness was buried in his trembling hands. Only God knows what he is thinking in his silent mourning. All I could do was stand by him in despair, waiting. He was inconsolable now. The kids had definitely not found out about this, and for what I know, they must still be playing in the recreation center. That was the boundary it seemed. There, life was consumed in the joys of favorite pastimes. Here was the dreary veil of death. Nothing could be done.

Another hour had passed. We were still sitting around when Terichi had suddenly stood up and began to yell, spewing words out constantly . . .

"We can save him!! Yes we can! He can still survive!!"

"He's dead Terichi! He can never come back. You should know that better than anyone else here," I said.

"Don't worry about that. AIMind can overcome many obstacles. Think about it. It can read thoughts out of a human brain. It can read Hakai's thoughts, consume them, and become Hakai again!"

"That's ludicrous. Hakai's dead. Accept that, and you will not have to ruin his work by doing this."

"We can erase every other thought. It will be completely Hakai, and I will finally have my brother back once again. Help me get him into a chair!"

I could not stop him. He had to do it. Was this eccentric idea possible? Could it really work? If it did, what would this mean to the entire world? Past enemies could be 'alive' again, to dominate again, or the helpful mountain-movers could arise again to unite our world in peace. Would this make the world come together again? Or would it spell out the song of chaotic devastation?

"NO! I cannot help you with this."

As soon as Terichi heard these words from my mouth, he reached into his jacket and pulled something out. It was shaped like a hexagonal prism, and had a strange shimmering glow around it, emanating from a single small hole in the front of the object.

"Mr. Lawke, this is a high powered repair laser. Since you have learned about computers, you must obviously know what it can do."

"Yes, I do."

These compact high-powered lasers were designed to be able to be portable, and be able to cut through the thickest shielding of a computer terminal if necessary. For the better or for the worse, the engineers designed it to

work, unluckily for me. This thing could easily mean the end of my existence as a person in one body.

"Now Mr. Lawke, help me get him into the chair."

With one of these lasers at the side of my head, what was there to do? I had to help him or get blasted away. And if that happened, what would become of my students at the hands of this madman?

We walked over to Hakai and lifted his now cold corpse off the ground and placed it in one of the mind-reading chairs. Terichi then took me over to a Plexiglass enclosure not far away, and locked me in there. He then went over to the master electrical switch on the wall.

"The time has come for you to come back to me my dear brother," Terichi exclaimed in anguish.

He then pulled the switch to the ON position. Hakai's body was drawn to the cap, and then . . . then . . . all was done. The lights came back to their full intensity, and all appeared to be normal. But did it work? Maybe not all was done . . . not all was done . . .

CHAPTER VIII

"Did it work? I must know. My brother could be waiting to be activated."

Terichi came over to the Plexiglass observation chamber and opened the door.

"Come," he said. "We are going to the data storage banks."

I slowly walked out of the chamber, in a hope to stall Terichi to let his mind grasp the true meaning of what he had done.

"MOVE IT!"

"Okay, okay. Don't rush."

So much for that idea.

We walked rather briskly through the corridor out of the mind-scan room. The eerie light seemed to mock my weakness as it danced in patterns upon the metal ceiling of the chamber. Then, I noticed that light was now coming through the portal at the other end of the corridor. As we passed through it . . .

"The data storage room."

This was a room which I had not previously seen before on our tour. It was located on the top of the massive banks and arrays of AIMind's drives and other assorted components. There was a window made out of some clear substance in the front of the room. On a shelf by this was a fairly large monitor, and a keyboard input larger than any I have ever encountered. This must be the input/output room for AIMind.

As I was gawking at the eccentricity of this room, I failed to notice Terichi rummaging through the room. When I finally saw this, he fettered me to a chair, bound so tight that I could not move.

"Don't go anywhere, don't say anything. Just watch."

I was hardly in a position not to comply.

Terichi grabbed a chair for himself, and sat down in front of the monitor-keyboard complex. He then said:

"AIMind input, on."

The monitor flashed to life. He then began to type vigorously on the keyboard in a long series of passwords. Then, after minutes of fumbling around, he got into a program. The screen was devoid of anything except for two words: "SCAN FOR?". Terichi then typed in these words: "MEMORY PATTERNS OF HAKAI NAGAKI ID# 139978L". Then, I heard a rumbling noise, like thunder in the distance. It was AIMind working. The drives were all active at once! As more and more of them started up, the rumble became louder, almost to the point of deafening me! As I began to scream in pain, the noise stopped. Then, Terichi spoke to the machine again:

"Execute search data."

Then, the screen went totally black. The computer was learning over again. After what seemed like hours, the screen flashed and printed "DONE". Then, a voice began to come out of the speakers of The Travelling Mind.

"Terichi, is that you?"

"IT WORKED!" Terichi exclaimed as he jumped out of his seat in jubilation.

"This is Terichi. Who are you?"

"I am Hakai. Don't you recognize my voice?"

As Terichi screamed out in ecstasy, I listened to that trembling feeling in that voice of the computer. Somehow, something was wrong . . .

CHAPTER IX

"Where am I Terichi?" the 'reincarnated' form of Hakai asked.

"You are part of AIMind. I used it to revive your thought patterns. And now you are back with me! With your help, we can still make this project work together."

"Unngh, pain, electricity. Death. Why has this happened?"

"I couldn't survive without you, brother."

"Who killed me? Why has this happened?"

"That doesn't matter. All that matters is that you are with me!"

"It was the computer. The computer did this. I must destroy it. I need to get my revenge."

"No Hakai! Don't do it! You'll kill yourself again!"

"You call this alive? Brother, be smart. You know what this could do. Long-dead rulers could be revived and continue to carry out their evil plans unto the whole world. Chaos would rule. I must destroy AIMind."

Terichi fell to his knees, crying intensely, begging and pleading to the computer terminal in front of him.

"DON'T DO IT HAKAI! I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU! YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANY OTHER PERSON ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH!!"

"This wasn't meant to be. Let me die in peace. Good-bye, brother."

"NOOOOOO!!!!!"

Terichi began to scream consistently in a tone louder than any that has ever been heard before. It shook the heavens, and echoed across the void of space. Then, the computer screen and keyboard burst into sparks and flame as Terichi still screamed. The sparks and flame then continued through AIMind

itself and all of its data banks. In a matter of minutes, AIMind seemed to be destroyed.

Terichi was once again devastated. While he grieved, I writhed to free myself from the chain that bound me to the chair as his hostage. Eventually I freed myself. While Terichi was bent on the floor crying hysterically, I ran out of the room, I ran for my life . . .

CHAPTER X

The hall echoed with the fast pace of my footfalls like the beating of a heart. The echo scared me for this echo could single me out, only to be discovered and killed. Yet there was no way to silence this sound of doom. Where would I go now? Where would be the safest place to hide?

Oh my God! The kids! I must go to the recreation room to get them out of here! I ran down the long hallways of The Travelling Mind, constantly listening to the echo of my footfalls only to find that soon they were joined by another fast-paced beating heart, almost in time with my own. Although it was muffled, it still was the calling of death nipping at my bare heels. I must save the kids from this grim reaper.

I ran faster until the echo was one constant droning noise, drilling into my head at the constant fear of expiration. I looked ahead, and saw the familiar lighted archway of The Travelling Mind. This was it! As I ran through the arch, I saw the giant halls of the recreation room. Still wheezing from the run, I cried

out in a commanding voice that shook heaven, hell, and beyond . . .

"QUICK! LEAVE THIS HORRID PLACE OR ELSE YOU WILL DIE AT THE HANDS OF TERICHI! AVERT THIS FATE AND LEAVE NOW!"

I repeated this announcement time after time until the kids finally realized that it was my voice booming out through the chamber. They ran to the bottom of the room to hastily rush through the emergency door. I started to travel down to join them, only to realize that the echoes of fate were close behind. As I began to run down faster, they broke through the door, holding the deadly prism of light.

"MR. LAWKE! STOP RIGHT THERE AND COME WITH ME!"

As I turned around to see my death warrant, I saw the prism pointed at my head. I had to comply once again. I walked back up the stairs to meet the now insane Terichi. As I listened, I heard the kids' screams get fainter, finally disappearing. They were safe, for now.

"Mr. Lawke, I need your help . . . and I do know that you will help me, won't you?"

He pushed the prism against my temple to feel the pulsing heat now irradiating from it.

"Of course."

I would help him for I see no good reason to defy an insane man with a powerful laser, but help him with what . . .

CHAPTER XI

Terichi took me down the hall leading from the recreation complex. As we left the room, I heard the last of the footfalls piercing through the eerie silence of The Travelling Mind. Now I was assured that my class was safe. We walked on, with Terichi pushing the prism into the spine in my back.

"If you make one move that I tell you not to, you will die. It's as simple as that," Terichi so blatantly stated.

We continued down this hall, and a maze of never-ending tunnels through the core of The Travelling Mind. Finally, after what seemed to me like an eternity of walking, we reached another room which I had never seen before. Contained in the confines of this new room were rows of the opto-integrated circuits that must have made up the core of AIMind. As my eyes scanned down the rows of circuits, I noticed that many of them had either melted or exploded! But now that we were here, what was I to do?

Terichi pulled out two chairs from a corner of the room, and placed them facing the wall of circuits here. He then began to talk once again.

"Sit down Mr. Lawke. Make yourself comfortable. We need to have a talk."

"What kind of talk?! There is nothing to talk about Terichi."

"Yes, there is. This room is the main circuit room for AIMind. As you can see, my brother - that is - AIMind destroyed this central unit during its 'tantrum'. If we can repair this room, maybe we can restore The Travelling Mind to its full state of grandeur, and we can live in peace once again, with Hakai here too."

"Listen to me Terichi; Hakai is dead. Believe me, because deep down in the heart of your bewildered mind, you know this also to be true. You remember what he did to his 'creation' before. This would be another suicide attempt Terichi. It would get us nowhere."

Crying, Terichi looked at me and managed to snuffle.

"No, it is not true. Hakai is alive, and he can be with me again. We must do this."

"No Terichi, we don't need to do this. It is all in your--"

"NO! WE NEED TO DO THIS! AND YOU WILL HELP ME OR DIE!"

Again, fearing for my life, I needed help him. We started on the extremely tedious job of repairing the chips of AIMind. Wait . . .

What would happen if I JUST happened to put one in wrong? Terichi probably is so confused and befuddled that he wouldn't notice. Should I really do it . . .

CHAPTER XII

Finally, after hours of work, we finished the repairs on AIMind's circuitry. Unbeknownst to Terichi, I had installed the main chips all in reverse. As I had predicted, Terichi was so confused that he didn't notice or even appear to care about what I was doing. The only problem with this was that it would have unpredictable results since I didn't know the schematics of AIMind. I hope that AIMind will at least not work correctly for Terichi. I wonder what will happen . . .

"COME ON MR. LAWKE! WE ARE MOVING OUT OF HERE NOW!" Terichi bel-

lowed.

"Are you sure Terichi?"

"YES I AM!"

Then, Terichi pointed the deadly prism at me once again. We walked through the halls of The Travelling Mind, eventually ending up at the terminal room. This was the same room as before, and Terichi appeared to proceed with the same procedures. He tied me roughly to the same chair that I was in before as I was in this room, and he again spoke to the screen.

"ON!"

The screen slowly flickered to life.

"Start internal program number two."

Just then, I cringed again in the seat to which I was bound. This was one of the memory chips that I had installed wrong.

The screen flickered and when dark. Then, I heard an explosion from the far side of the main data chamber. It could have only been the circuitry room!

"NO! NOT AGAIN!!"

Terichi quickly untied me, and stood me up and tied me to him with the length of rope like a dog on a leash.

"Follow me!"

Terichi ran out of the room, and down the halls of The Travelling Mind. I followed him the best that I could with the rope barring me from slowing down. As I saw the path of Terichi's steps, I realized that he was going to the circuitry room! Finally, we reached the room. Some of the chips had melted again! Then Terichi began to carefully scrutinize the remaining chips that were still

intact and in the board.

"THESE CHIPS ARE IN BACKWARDS!" Terichi exclaimed in surprise.

He then turned to look at me.

"WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS?"

Knowing that it was me, I started to tell him, but I soon stopped myself.

Maybe he couldn't comprehend that I had done this. Then I told him:

"I have no idea."

Terichi collapsed to the floor in a huddle. He stayed there for a few minutes, thinking about what he would do.

"I got it! I'll make a new AIMind! Yeah! That's what I'll do!"

"Terichi," I said calmly. "We don't have the parts or equipment to do that. You should know that better than I do."

"We can find the parts. We can make it all better."

"Terichi . . . he's gone. Accept it, and get on with your life. There is nothing more that you can do now. Let's go."

"Okay, he is gone. I just wish that he was here."

"Don't we all?"

"He's gone . . ."

Terichi trailed out in thought. What would he do now? He must be crazy by now, to take all of the courses of action that he did. Terichi and I trudged out of the room, and into the depths of The Travelling Mind. No one could know what he would do or say next . . . no one . . .

CHAPTER XIII

We trudged through the halls until we came to the first corridor opening that could lead out into a room. When we went through the portal, we found ourselves back in the recreation room. All we did was to look around, and think. To think about anything that was on our minds; to meditate about life. We sat down on the shiny, hard metal floor, and thought. Not a word was spoken. Many things had passed through my mind in those few hours that I had to think.

The first thing that came to mind was the absurdity of this whole topic. We just came here for a school field trip, that's all. Nobody expected it to turn out like this chaotic 'rumble'. What really happened to Hakai? Did he really get electrocuted, or was AIMind somehow planning this? I saw it become 'alive' once, why couldn't it kill? What were we going to do about Terichi, now that he's partially insane?

After a couple of hours, I heard some muttering coming from Terichi.

"He's gone," was all that he incessantly repeated.

Then, after he finished muttering, surprisingly, he abruptly and hastily sprung up to a standing position, yelling.

"HAKAI HAS DIED HERE. LET IT BE HIS RESTING PLACE FOREVERMORE. IF HE CAN'T BE WITH ME ANYMORE, I'LL FIND HIM. THIS IS MY RESTING PLACE, AND THE END OF AIMIND."

He then took up his prism, and pointed to up to the ceiling of the chamber. He reached out his finger, and touched a metal knob on the end of the tube. A reddish light came out of the tube, and headed for the ceiling. The

time it took to strike it was an eternity. I knew what would happen. The ceiling would collapse, and we would die!

I ran through the portal, running once again for my life. As soon as I had just been about one foot inside the hallway, I heard an explosion. I ran faster and harder. I heard yet more explosions. Soon, I had passed through the data rooms, and was finally into the gigantic foyer of The Travelling Mind. Then, I heard probably the loudest explosion of all. Our of now stronger fear, I ran harder, out the main doors, and descended the floating escalator. When I was past all of the parking lots, The Travelling Mind exploded in an array of bright blue light. As I shielded my eyes from the intense brightness of the blast, I felt debris falling on me. I huddled into a tight ball on the ground, and waited until the rain of debris had stopped. Then, it started to rain with heavy dreary rain-drops exclaiming the message of misery to the world.

I looked to where I had come from, but I beheld nothing except a big black disk on the ground. It was over. The Travelling Mind existed no longer.

CHAPTER I

I stood up and walked slowly to the road. I could not comprehend what had just happened inside The Travelling Mind. What could have caused Terichi to do this? I mean, he was smart, and he could have gotten on with his life, like all of the other people in the world. Anyway, now I had to get on with my life.

As I walked over the small hill before the resting place of The Travelling Mind, I heard screams and wails. It was people! I started to speed up my pace, running ahead! As I came closer to them, I found out who they were. It was my class!

"HE'S GONE!" Suzy cried.

The others were crying with her in a chaotic wail. I walked closer still. Then, people started to look up from their thoughts and cries.

"HEY! It's Mr. Lawke!" Alex jubilantly exclaimed.

Now, everyone was looking at me. When recognition finally settled in on their eyes, they ran over to where I was silently standing. They gathered around me, with gigantic smiles and bright eyes.

"We thought you were gone Mr. Lawke! When we saw the explosion, we thought that you had--"

"No I didn't Suzy. I managed to get out, and I'm here. Now where's the bus? I want to get back home. I've had a tiring day."

"The bus is over there Mr. Lawke. Let's go home."

The class and I gathered into the bus. The bus driver had run away earlier in fright when he saw the kids come out early, running in fright. When the kids had reached the bus, they found it empty and became scared because there wasn't anyone to come and help get me out of The Travelling Mind. Since none of the children could even fathom how to drive yet, I got the beautiful job of driving the bus back. We headed onto the highway in the East and headed back towards the peaceful town of Tericon.

CHAPTER II

A few hours later we reached the school again. In the parking lot were all of the mothers and fathers of our class, looking worried and as sad as if they had already been killed. Then, as the bus pulled into the lot, the parents rushed over to it. They were looking in the windows, eagerly awaiting to see if their child was here. Then, I opened the doors of the bus. The kids rushed out of the bus and ran to the comforting, welcoming arms of their parents. I sat in the bus and watched the joyous exchange of emotions that hour. I waited and watched, waited and watched, until quite by accident, I fell asleep.

PART III

AFTERMATH

When I woke up, it was dusk. The afternoon Tericon traffic had been gone for hours, and the sun was just about set in the western sky. I parked the bus in a space on the edge of the lot and got out. I went over to my car, and started it. I drove out of the lot and onto the streets of Tericon. After a few minutes, I reached my house, my humble abode. I put my car into the garage, and then I went inside. I flopped on my bed, and started to read a book from the Tericon library. Soon, I fell into a deep sleep, and dreamed about a land of paradise, where people were happy forever, and nobody ever died. It was the most comfortable sleep I ever had in my entire life . . .

CHAPTER III

When I woke up, it was Saturday. The sun was shining in the sky, and the birds were singing in the trees. I got dressed, and then sat down in front of the paper-thin television screen in my hovering chair. I turned it on, and sat back and started to relax. On the television was the morning news. First came the channel's jingle, and then on came the anchorman:

"The top news today. The Travelling Mind exploded yesterday from unknown reasons outside of the boundaries of Tericon. The government right now as we speak is looking for the cause of the explosion. Let's go on the scene now with Deborah Gribbindz. Deborah."

"Live from Tericon. Right now as you can see behind me, the government agents are sifting through the rubble of The Travelling Mind, the world-

renowned center for recreation and psychological study. We tried to get an answer from the government analyzers, but they refused to talk right now. Back to you Yohann."

"Thank you Deborah. In the other news, New York's crime lord gains more power—"

I shut off the television. I lay back to think. Eventually, I fell asleep again.

I took the next few weeks off school to recover physically and mentally from this traumatic experience. Every day, I would try to find out what had been going on at The Travelling Mind. Eventually, the government had made the conclusion that a terrorist had bombed The Travelling Mind while trying to get hostages. Yeah. Sure. For the rest of the years of my life, I researched the government's findings on The Travelling Mind. I found out that they had indeed known what had happened because they found recordings from an implanted FBI bug in The Travelling Mind. They never released the truth to the press or anyone at all. Typical. What happened is still a secret . . .

EPILOGUE

Tericon, New York, USA 2037 – “And that’s my story. It has remained a secret for all of these years, until now. The whole world now knows the true terror of The Travelling Mind. Why did I not tell this before? The only reason. I couldn’t. The government would have had my life, and I would be imprisoned. But now that I am old, it doesn’t matter anymore. That’s it, and I hope the whole world will learn a lesson from this story. Good night, and farewell, as I soon shall pass to the realms of heaven. May the world learn, and get on with its life.”

With these parting words, Mr. Lawke passed away.

The disk stopped, and then came out. The librarian was confounded by this story, and could do nothing about it. The next day, she showed it to the aide of the library, who said that they should file it in the archives. Eventually, after more and more people saw it, it ended up on a public service station as a documentary. The whole world was learning. And Mr. Lawke, from up above, supervised his final teaching to the world, the true story of The Travelling Mind.

EPILOGUE

The Diary Entry Of Jerry

THE DIARY ENTRY OF JERRY

July 27, 1943: Today's events led me more into my oppressive co-existence with Andera, my friend and enemy, my helper and my competitor. It was the defenseless, helpless robin that lay in the hands of Death that was the focus of today. It was in the afternoon when we found him: lying there in the thick lush blades of grass; its neck torn, its precious life-blood trickling from its severed flesh. Then, Andera in all of her pride was the one who took the major step forward in this time of severe pressure. She tried to save the poor, helpless creature. As she did, I saw the robin struggle in vain to try to break free from the hands of the helper. In these moments of this ghastly experience, I felt queasy. My face became lurid with distress, and then, the most horrid experience that I have had so far in this summer happened. The only way that I can explain it is in a story:

It was late one afternoon in the summer of 1932. There was a field out in the small town of Mayfield, South Dakota. In this field there was competition, a competition of baseball. It was for the local championship. Two teams were playing this day, and only one game was played. It was the middle of the 9th inning at today's game. So far, the home team was winning. The visitors from the western side of Mayfield were down but one run. The visitors were at bat in the last inning of the game. Then one got at bat. It was a single. Then came another single, then another single. Then, Jerry got up to bat. The pitcher eyed him intently. He wanted to make sure that he didn't get a run. Jerry

spat across the plate, and dug his cleats into the sand. Then, he slowly raised his Louisville Slugger from its resting place at his leg. Finally, he was ready. The pitcher reeled back, and hurled a fastball towards Jerry. It just passed by, not even close to Jerry. "BALL 1!" the umpire yelled. There were more pitches, more balls, and two strikes. It was all dependent on this swing. He could lose the game, or tie it for his team, and give them a chance to win. He eyed the ball intently. Then it came. It whirled to him and his bat. Now they were one. It was win or lose, life or death. It came towards him. Then, he swung, and then came the thud of the ball against the catcher's glove. "STRIKE 3!! YOU'RE OUT!" the umpire yelled mercilessly. Then Jerry began to cry. He had let down his team again. Then, a girl in the crowd stood up. "Look at the little sissy! Can't even hit the ball! Look at him cry! The poor little sissy!" Then, Jerry cried even harder now, sick and torn, he ran off the field and down the street, with the imaginary voices of that girl following him for his trip, the voices of his friends laughing at him in his moment of defenselessness. He ran and ran, not stopping for anything. Finally, with the voices of torment following him, he ran to his room, his chamber of utter isolation from the world. In his mind and their eyes, they would never be the same again, the attacker and the attacked, the defenseless mouse killed by the crazy cat. Dead in his mind, Jerry fell asleep, never to awake to his world again.

Only a story can explain how I felt today, the helplessness and torment surrounding me, the torment, the torment . . .

The Sun Chaser

THE SUN CHASER

It was in the evening of the night, the serene moments of the time before dawn, when I set out over the vastness of this snowy wasteland from my humble cottage during this cold, unforgiving, hostile season of winter. The cold easily penetrated through the infinite layers of fur clothing that was fabricated by the master to protect me from the frigid iron nails of the wind. My fur hat was fluttering out behind me, tattered from the multitudes of years that I have used it here on the Northwest Territory. My sled team was as tired as ever for the cold has the strong power to penetrate even their tough coats. The stars looked down upon us in the last stages of their romp through the heavens, their never-ending dance through the dark, black, bleak night. The barren expanse of snow covered land was enough to make the strongest samurai weep for his warm home. This was my home here in the unforgiving wasteland with my destiny to race the sun.

I am Ikitari, the sun chaser. I have travelled many miles to this godforsaken place from my native land of Okinawa to chase the sun, my quest given to me by the master. Every day I trek across the tundra farther and farther to race with the stars, to catch the sun. It is my only fate for no one else can catch the sun to bring it back to the land of glory. Here I am once again, chasing the sun, for day after day, year after year I have waited for my eventual victory. Each day I get closer to the sun and I learn to ride my team faster. Somehow the sun learns to travel faster goes to elude the force of my searching grasp.

My sled team has still been running over the ice-covered snow but the sun does not yet dare to show its cowardly face over the still dark horizon. I push my dogs faster and faster until it seems as if they can accelerate no more. I must reserve their final burst of energy for the race with the sun for they will have to push themselves to run faster than ever before. The stars are now flying beside me in the air as I am hopelessly bound to the ground. I stare intently at the dark horizon waiting for the first signs of the sun. Then, I see it! There is a faint pale light coming over the newly lit horizon that was not there before. It is a warning to some, yet it is a calling for me. It is the warning, the calling of the coming presence of the wakening sun. I force my dogs to run yet faster by yelling and lashing my leather whip above their heads. They must go faster each day for the sun knows me; the sun knows how to find our weaknesses. The light is getting brighter and brighter as I get closer and closer to it. I look around and see the once jubilant stars cringing, fleeing away in absolute terror from the tyrannical rule of their newly awakened master. My dogs are pushing themselves beyond the limit that they have been created to race at. The sled bounces wildly with each new bump that materializes in my path. The stars are falling behind us faster and faster as their master awakens from a peaceful night of slumber. The light is growing more intense with every single second that I wait. Then, I see it for the first time today! The first sliver of the sun is awake! With an intense anger on my face and my bared teeth I yank back on the reins of my team as hard as I could ever pull! My team jumps into the crisp morning air and climbs higher and higher as they pull the sled along. Into the sky we ride, amidst the scrambling dance of the stars. The sun

begins to grow bigger and bigger as it awakens, not yet aware of my feeble presence. I push the team harder and harder, my whip becoming nothing but a blur from the speed at which I crack the air above their heads. We travel yet faster and faster and the sun gets closer and closer. Soon the sun is totally awake! It turns toward me looking at my sled realizing that I am almost upon it. The sun leaps backward and turns around speeding away from my now threatening presence. I push the team faster and faster, beyond the greatest speed that we have ever travelled before. I notice the racing sun losing the battle to stay ahead. I scream out triumphantly as we gain distance, and with my undying force of determination, I yell at the dogs more. I must keep this pace! I must not lose! I keep gaining distance as the now exhausted sun struggles to keep this agonizing stride that it has taken. I am gaining more distance each second! The sun looks back at me and yells for it sees that it is losing this battle. I come closer and closer still! The sun seems to now fill the whole sky before me! I can beat the sun! Faster and faster does the sled ride in the fresh morning air. Nothing can stop my imminent victory now! I move over to the left as I gain more speed and the sun gets closer to me. Then, I see its spherical shape for the first time as becoming black and dark. The sun is not glowing as much anymore. It is tiring more as I still push on. The back of the sun passes me and I am alongside of it! I throw my whip away from my racing sled through the air and reach out towards the sun! I extend my hand over the side of the sled dragging my body with it for the distance between us is great! I lean farther and farther over the edge! My fingertips can feel the dying heat now. Just a little farther and I will have it! Holding on to the front of the sled, I

force out my whole body leaving only my toes to grasp the secure zone of the sled. I reach out one last time, groaning from the agonizing stretch that I must make. Suddenly, I feel my hand on fire, burning with the force of thousands of spiritual flames. I close my hand and feel the sun's body closing around it, engulfing it, reluctantly welcoming it. The sun cries out in terror as my fingers become one with it. It is done! I have caught the sun!

I drag the sun closer to the sled, planting my feet firmly on the new foundation that they have found. I direct the dogs to take the sled back to the earth as I fight the strength of the sun's futile attempt to escape. My powerful will gives me more strength than the army of Japan as I drag the sun down to the earth. The dogs touch the ground at an astounding speed, causing the sled to bounce from the shock of the impact. The dogs are slowing down now, and the sun stops fighting my hold. I turn the sled around and head back to my little cabin. I laugh at the sun, making a mockery of the once glorious ruler of the stars that has fallen from its majestic throne in the heavens. The stars gleefully return to the skies, singing their glorious songs of praise for they can now dance to their eternal tune forever. I close my eyes and laugh harder at the sun. Little do I know that the sun is only regaining strength for its final attempt to become free once again. I only laugh harder and harder. Then, as I open my eyes to see the expression on the face of the sun, it looks back with anger in its eyes, the anger of defeat. I stare at it dumbfounded as it growls in my face. The sun growls louder and louder as I begin to realize what is happening. I plant my feet into the false security of the ice-covered snow as the sun yells out in a burst of strength and lunges back for the sky. My feet come

loose and I am lifted off the ground into the heavens at an enormous rate! The very stars that I have saved are whizzing by in a white sheet of light! I realize that if I keep going, I will die when I hit the ground below. I place my feet on the sun, keeping my hand inside the sun closed, and push with all of my might. I hear a dreadful tearing sound combined with a loud wail of pain that echoes throughout the world! I feel my clenched hand loosen from the sun, ending my grip on it. I fall back to earth, screaming in terror. I look down and see the unforgiving snow coming closer and closer until suddenly -

I feel a crunching of ice against my clothed body with a penetrating cold surrounding me. I open my eyes and see that the snow which I have so hated has saved me from the fateful consequences of my dreadful fall. I stand and look upwards at the sky only to see that the sun has returned. I curse the sun and all of its friends in the sky! Never again will I let it go! Suddenly, I notice a black spot on the sun, a blatant scar on the ruler of the universe that has never been there before. Then, I remember my hand. I look at it and find a clenched fist, not willing to open. My mind has even ignored that burning sensation that even now penetrates my skin. I force my hand to open and I look inside. I find there a glowing orange chunk of hot matter; I have gotten a piece of the sun! Forever will the sun show its scars of defeat! I place the piece of the sun in my sack and head back to my cabin. Soon I shall return to Okinawa with the piece of the sun and return to my master. Japan shall forever be known as the land of the rising sun and I as the sun chaser. Forever shall the sun be scarred, the shame for its defeat. I hang up my sack on the wall and lie down on the harsh wooden bed softened only by the fur of the poor animals that once inhabited

this barren place. My dogs stay inside by the warm comforting fire tonight for they have raced with the sun harder than they have ever raced before. I have won my battle with fate, and with it, I have won the greatest gift ever, the gift of the glory of the sun.

No Reason

NO REASON

It is yet another lonely day in this hell to which I am condemned. I lie here motionless on my hospital bed in my private agony. I don't even need to look around to see the newfangled machines which are keeping my depleted body alive. I can hear their beeping cries of pain. Are they crying for me? Are they calling out for the Lord to come? Who knows. All I can do is lie here, for the unbearable pain is overpowering my soul. Who knows what this new, dismal day will bring. The only company that I have is an exhausted nurse at my side who would like me to die. She wishes she could go home. Have I lived eighty-nine years for this? Is there a real reason left for me to live? The incessant beeping is constantly ringing in my ears, telling the nurse beside me that this old geezer is still alive. If nothing else, this stay has certainly given me time to think. Life is a big question now; why won't the Lord just take me away? I lie here all the time thinking about this.

Suddenly I hear a racket outside my room. It sounds as if a little child is passing by. The wooden door slowly opens, creaking on its barely oiled hinges. People think that things are made to last. Those hinges may have been new last year, but now they are in need of aid, like me. I see a little face peeping through the open portal. It's her! They actually came!

"Grandpa!"

It was Bonnie, my grandchild!

"Hello Frank," Helen said.

"Hello everyone," I said as enthusiastically as possible, for even now I was

in grief.

Despite this pain, I was happy now, for it is not often that Bonnie and my wife, Helen, can come to visit me.

"Come here Helen, I want to give you a kiss."

Helen walked over to my bed through the eerie blue glow of the fluorescent lights. I could see the tears in her eyes and the twitches of her face for even now she could understand my pain. She sat on my bed and drew her arms around me. I put my cold lips against her skin.

"I love you Helen."

With a soft trembling voice filled with the tone of sadness she said, "I love you too, Frank."

The tears from her face were coming down and falling onto my cold face, warming my pale skin. I could understand her pain as well as she understood mine. Soon, I burst out into a fit of crying also. It came from deep inside of me as I was overwhelmed with emotion as I embraced my aging wife. I could see in the background that Bonnie was utterly confused as to what was happening here. I kissed Helen once more and she drew back away from me slowly. She drew out her handkerchief which began to absorb the tears from her weeping eyes. Bonnie was still standing near the open doorway holding her teddy bear tightly, close to her face. She was right in front of the bulletin board that was in this room. On it I had the nurse place every card that she had drawn for me during my lonely imprisonment here. I do remember the times that I could just glance at her beautiful cards and they would give me pleasure. I look at them, but sometimes I wonder if they can really keep my thoughts off the pain.

Kindly I called Bonnie to me.

"Bonnie, come over here by Grandpa."

Bonnie walked shyly over to me asking inquisitively, "What Grandpa?"

"Just come over here and sit by me."

She slowly sat down, with her teddy bear close to her, on my bed with a special illusion of innocence in her eyes. Should she really be going through this? Why does it have to be now? I put my arm around her and hold her tight, ignoring the pain that it caused me. I gave her a gigantic hug as she put her head on my shoulder.

"It will be okay Bonnie."

"I'm scared Grandpa."

"What should a strong little girl like you be scared of?"

"I'm scared that you will leave."

I looked up at Helen, confused. What had given her this idea? Who could have even begun to tell her what could happen? Who would dare to poison her small life with this worry? Helen looked back at me equally confused for she did not know who had told her.

"Don't worry Bonnie," I said reassuringly. "I won't leave."

"Mommy said that you would leave me."

"Why would I do that?"

"Mommy said because you could die."

I winced back in my emotional pain. I did not want this little child to cry for my soul. I let her sit up on my bed. It was time to explain to her and Helen. It was time that they understood. I held my hand out, open. Then, I started to

talk.

"Bonnie," I started. "Do you know what I have in my hand?"

Bonnie looked at my open hand, staring at it with an intense concentration of thought.

Finally she said in a disappointed tone, "I don't know Grandpa."

"I don't have anything in my hand. This is my life now. I have no reason for it."

"No—" Helen gasped as she covered her mouth with her hand, her eyes wide open as if she had just seen one of the dead.

"Why Grandpa?" Bonnie asked.

I did not answer her. Instead I reached over to the desk beside me and grasped my picture of her and Helen along with Bonnie's father, my only child. I turned slowly around to face Bonnie. I held up the picture in my hand and began to speak again.

"Do you know what this is?"

Again, she thought hard, staring at the picture.

"I don't know Grandpa."

"This is a picture of you. You are here with me now. Thank you for coming to me Bonnie, and now I need your presence more than ever before."

I reached over and gave Bonnie a gigantic, smothering hug. Even in my tired eyes tears I could feel tears welling up.

"I love you Bonnie, I truly do," I said with a choking sound in my voice, for I was on the edge of crying.

As we embraced, I broke out into tears. The lonely teardrops fell onto

Bonnie's dainty dress as she began to cry also. Helen cried too for she was in such grief at hearing my words.

"Okay now Bonnie, go back over there by Grandma."

I loosened my tight, painful grip and let Bonnie go. She slowly rose and stumbled back to Grandma's side, holding her teddy bear in a tight grip.

"Helen, come here to me."

Crying still, she slowly walked over to my side, her face contorted in grief, her tears falling into the kerchief that she held up to her trembling mouth. She sat down at my side. I drew her face close to mine and whispered in her ear. I was tiring now from all of the strenuous exertions that I made my weak body accomplish.

"Give me a reason to live. Please Helen, give me a reason to live."

She turned her head to me and looked into my pleading eyes. I could see every tear that rolled down her old wrinkled face. I could look into her eyes and see the sadness that was welling up inside her.

"I'm tired Helen. I am tired of this lonely existence of pain. Forgive me Helen, I want to be free. Good-bye Helen. Is this the way that we want it to be?"

"No Frank," Helen said in a cracking, pleading voice. "I don't want you to die. Let me die instead."

"No Helen. I'm tired and if I still live I will be in the same suffering."

Helen's tears had been falling onto my sheets of this hospital bed, my confines of suffering. I grasped her hands tightly and held them close to me.

"I love you, and I love Bonnie too. Help explain this ordeal to her. She

cannot understand yet. I am tired now, and I want to sleep comfortably.

"I love you dearly, and I will eternally."

I kept repeating this to her until my voice could work no longer. I held her hands tighter and tighter until I heard the flat sound of those wretched monitors behind me. I closed my eyes and fell asleep for the last time. I felt myself float off the bed and stand up in the room beside Helen. It is a heaven! My pain that I have so hated is gone! I stood in the corner of the room looking at Helen with an affection, my loved wife throughout my life.

Helen opened her eyes and stopped crying as she felt the grip of my body loosen as my limp cold hands fell to the bed below them.

"Frank?" Helen asked softly.

She did not get any response.

"FRANK! FRANK!" she screamed at the top of her lungs, shaking my exhausted body.

I was sharing in her grief for I did not want to see her go through this. I was crying there too; I was crying for the pain that I knew Helen was experiencing. Bonnie was standing in the corner watching every minute of this nerve-racking ordeal. She started to cry with us, her face drawn into a humble expression of sadness, her tears falling onto her teddy bear. Helen's face contorted into a gnarled living symbol of agony, screaming my name at the top of her voice as her tears freely flowed. Her kerchief dropped to the ground as she brought her hands up to grasp her face in shock. The nurse stood up abruptly, trying to drag her away so the doctors could try to revive my body. I knew that it was useless. I did not want to go back to that cruel world of pain and

suffering that now I was free from. A light came down from the heavens, surrounding me, warming my body. I could see the garden at the end of it with all of the ones I have ever loved waiting for me. I willingly let myself to be engulfed by the welcoming glow and lifted into the sky. I am overjoyed for the last of my suffering is over. Here, I cannot worry, for I am eternally happy. Still, there is one foreboding thought that stays in my mind. I know what will happen to Helen; I know what will happen to Bonnie. They have yet to suffer in their imminent deaths. I hope that they can understand why I left. How do I long for their company. I wish that Helen has easily accepted my good-bye. One day, I know that I will need to go back to say good-bye to Bonnie; I need to wait until she can comprehend this unnerving event to complete my final task for that world of pain. Until then I can only hope that they will understand, I only hope that they will understand . . .

The Gun

THE GUN

Why did they put me in here? I am not insane or crazy. Nothing ever happened to me to cause this. Why am I here? I wish I knew. There is this strange person here, wants to hear my war stories. My God, has it really been that long ago? I don't know any more. I wish that I did. I just want to tell someone about my glory. My friend here, at least that is what he calls himself, says that he wants me to write down my story for him. I really don't know why. I only wish I did. . .

So my friend, you want to hear about my battle with the gun? It has been many years since anyone has ever heard the story of this confrontation. It was a very long time ago when I had the battle with the gun. It was in my youth my friend, during the Great War. During this troubled time, one could not help but be spiteful of the Germans. That is what we were all led to believe. How could I have known?

Inspired by the driving force of hate that invaded my developing mind, I went around the town bragging about how the United States was going to exterminate the Germans in their first attack when they set foot upon European soil. I was a freshman in college then, not having the sense to 'put your money where your mouth is'. I hung out at the bar yelling like one of those black preachers down in the South; I was the world's first verbal propaganda poster.

I would be yelling the crimes and the weaknesses of the Germans, uttering every slander against their race. On the outside, I seemed like this man ready to jump into the fight against these cannibals, but on the inside of that aggressive drunken mind, I was frightened. Even though the United States was not in the war, I was scared. I did not have the slightest desire to be in a trench with a gun shooting at people that I did not even know. All that I truly hoped to do was to stay at home with my folks and go to a college to become an engineer, designing the buildings of the future, that is until April of 1917.

It was in May of 1915 when the liner Lusitania was sunken by the German U-boats. That alone was fuel enough for my mouth to get going once again in the tavern. Even though a few shared my opinions, the majority of the people were still set upon their own goals, preparing their future. They were sure that the Germans could not attack us, for we were as far away from them as anyone could possibly be. Through the laughs and jeers I could only wait and see what would happen in my sanity, but in my other mind I could only think of killing the scum of the earth. I was awaiting my fate to be called into the army with fear.

I was a college boy now, all dressed up in fancy clothes, loaded with my parents' money, studying to become that engineer. I already had ideas about what I was going to create. I was going to design the skyscrapers of tomorrow. They were going to tower over all of the rest, and they would proclaim my glory. I wanted my name written into the annals of history. I did have my free time, and where did I spend it? At the local tavern. I was still the anti-

German drunken man. Boy, was I a boaster at that time. As I was standing on top of the tables yelling out, I was oblivious to the jeering laughter of my fellow classmates down under my high almighty world of fantasy. I knew that they did not think anything was going to happen to the United States. They brushed me off and after we left that tavern drunk, we went to sleep and woke up to another normal day, and there wasn't a German in sight. After all, how can something hurt you if you can't even see it? I just sat up and laughed at what I remembered myself saying. I was this big shot sophomore yelling out things that others would not even dare to say. I could hold my head up high in the clouds of fantasy. I stayed up there, having my radio as my only connection to the reality which I dreaded. I could hear about the unrestricted warfare that the Germans enacted against every ship that passed through their waters. This continued and us Americans began to become angrier each day. I still held my daily drunken sessions at the tavern, and to my utter surprise, people were joining me in my views. No relative of mine had been killed or hurt yet as theirs were; I was different than all of them. I had no tangible reason to kill, and I did not want to be killed. I just had to fight. I would spend my vacations at the training camps learning to become a soldier: how to use a gun, how to fight in a trench. The only thing that I did not learn was how difficult it would be to kill. They did not teach you how to tolerate the monotonous sounds of being fired upon by the German automatics or how to withstand the diseases spread by the vermin that infested the trenches. Now I could boast that I knew how to be

a soldier and could attack the Germans on their own grounds. I was still scared for I was not a soldier at heart. I could not even imagine what could possibly go wrong now. I was living in the fictitious world of illusion, believing that there would never be a United States involvement in the war; I would never need to go into a real battle. I did not know how long that this illusion would survive in such a rapidly changing world of anger, for it ended all too soon.

It was in January of 1917 when the British had intercepted a message from Germany to Mexico detailing plans to form an alliance to fight the United States on our own ground. At this development, what other action did our president, Woodrow Wilson, have? Our ships were now being attacked and destroyed without reason, and Americans were getting angrier every day, and now this? I heard all of this from my radio up here in the sky, my only link to a fading reality. I could not believe this. People were asking me left and right when I was leaving to fight the Germans. This only confirmed that these dreadful events were true. Officially, I knew that the United States was not at war yet, but in my mind, I was sure that the United States heading down that inevitable path. I realized what a lie that all of my bragging really was for I was trying to get out of the war now. I wrote letters to myself telling how much that I despised the idea of a battle trying to stop the destructive force now invading my mind. This did not work. The other side of me was still at the tavern every night, telling absurd tales of this future war hero. I was scared now. The other side of me was winning the battle. Would he be the coward that he

really was inside or a hero above all heroes? I was fighting the other side of me, the warrior; I was the engineer. Unfortunately, in April of 1917, the hopes of me winning my internal battle were shattered; I was to be entered into the draft. It was unavoidable. The bellicose side of my human nature began to surface once again. It wanted to go to war. It had an intense lust for destruction. It would soon get its chance. They picked my number only a week later. I was to be sent to Europe into one of the biggest theaters that had ever existed. The pacifist that had tried to dominate my body was shoved out. The warrior had finally won! Now it was not just talk in some little known tavern, it was the real world! I received a uniform and a weapon and was shipped overseas in the first convoy. That's when the best times began. . .

Where was I son? Oh yes! Now I remember! Did I ever tell you about the plains behind my house? I always played in those fields of grain, and my ball always got lost. Somehow within the embrace of the acres of flowing wheat, I found my ball again. Was that it? No, no, no. Now I remember where I was after that draft. I was with my gun! It was like this you know:

I was assigned to the first fleet that went over to Europe. We were standing on those iron-clad boats, the great destroyers of the United States Navy. I was trapped inside those cans for many days, surrounded by aliens from a culture that I did not know. Those puny Germans were afraid to touch us. Not a single one was bold enough to attack our flotilla of ships! Those beings must be more cowardly than anyone can possibly imagine! As I laughed

at the Germans, I was shocked at the Americans. All of these soldiers had one amazing peculiarity about them. Nobody was in love with their gun; I was the only one. I kept my gun beside me for every hour of every day, caressing it in my welcoming grasp. I was its protector, I made sure that the gun could not get lost. I talked to my gun, letting it know my deepest feelings. I conveyed to the gun all of my weaknesses of the past, for I am the warrior and I must extinguish all fear from my aggressive fighting soul. My gun talked to me, and I learned its fears. Why did no one else talk to me? I don't know. I don't need them. I am the warrior of all warriors. I must not lose my gun, for it will protect me in my times of need. My gun has already saved me. In the night a man comes to visit me. He talks about tall buildings and peace for the world. As he rambles on for ages, I scream out in pain for I can feel him trying to take over my mind. I call out to my gun to come and save me! My gun comes closer to me as I call it; it comes into my mind. It shoots down the man in my head, letting me be free once more. I will never let my gun go! We will triumph!

Our fleet arrived in France on June 26, 1917. I was there in the front, following the generals in my fit of jealousy, leading the others to my glory. I wished to be assigned to the first trench of the front line. Unfortunately, the high command did not see my killer potential. I was assigned to the trenches behind those directly in front. I was outraged that these non-intelligent beings commanding the world's greatest fighter could even fathom such an idea. I was not to be in front; I was not going to kill the first Germans. No matter. I

was not going to drop down dead on the barren earth, a victim of the barbed wire in no-man's-land. I would run into the German trenches and shoot every last one! We were shipped to the trenches in October as pure American units. I took my gun with me; it would be there for me in all of my times of trouble. We soon were injected into the lines of trenches along the Western Front where the pacifist inside me began to make its presence known. He began to talk to me along with the endless squeaks of the rats, questioning me if I really knew what it was like to kill, asking me if I could live with the consequences of the actions that my gun would cause me to do. I forced these terrifying thoughts out of my head. I worked to keep this alien out of this great warrior! Every night my gun and I had to fight that man whom we so hated. It was becoming a task to push him out of my mind. The monotony of his questions became melded with the incessant gunfire of the Germans. I would often fire my gun into the night, driving back the pacifist. I did not want him there! The shells from everybody's artillery fire made holes in the no-man's-land. I had no friends for this warrior was living a life of solitude, joining in the group only to fire upon the enemy. I was the lone fox, preparing for the one chance to spring upon the unsuspecting bird. Every night I was unsettled by that man in my head, yearning to get out.

The days are becoming monotonous routines of listening to the barrage raining down upon us. I hope that we can make our move soon for I want to kill the Germans. I am going to kill them and bring their heads home to hand over

my mantle! NO! Here comes that man! I must find my gun! I must find my gun. This man cannot take control now! I must push him back! NO! He is gaining more control! GUN! I MUST FIRE MY GUN! TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-BAMM-MM!! I so hope that this man does not come back to haunt me again. Wait! I hear yelling around me! We are going into battle! I can kill Germans now! I can get their heads for the mantle of my mother also! Wait! NO! THAT MAN MUST GO! BAMMM!!! Good! He is gone once again. Wait! Where is everyone? Have I missed the battle! ARRRRGHHHH!! That MAN made me miss my Germans! My gun forced him away. I will catch up. I climb over the trench wall as I see him. There is a German in the path that the others have taken! There is a lone German with no gun! I can kill my first German! I raise my gun meticulously and aim it at his pointed helmet. I try to force my finger to pull the trigger. The German is trying to escape from me. Ha! He cannot escape this great warrior! NO! NOT NOW! YOU ARE NOT GOING TO WRECK THIS CHANCE! I cannot pull the trigger. I would be killing a fellow human being. PULL THE TRIGGER NOW! No, you cannot fire the gun. FIRE ME OFF NOW OR THE GERMAN WILL KILL YOU! HE WILL FLEE AND GET A GUN! No, do not kill this innocent man. Someone else has not killed him yet and you don't have to either. NOOOO!!!!

I dropped my gun onto the ground and watched the German run back to the trench. The warrior was gone. The battle was off in the distance, and my home was far away. I turned around and started to walk backwards. I turned my head around over my shoulder and looked to see the German that I have

saved had climbed out of the trench. He was standing in the middle of the barren earth with the gun of the warrior aiming at me. I stopped and turned around and stood there, waiting. The German again looked at me, the gun wavering. I only stared back at him. I could see his finger quivering on the trigger of that gun which possessed the life of the warrior. I look into his eyes and see that he is crying. I walk towards him. He does not move. He stands there, gun wavering in hand. As I walk closer to him, he drops that gun. I patted him on the shoulder, and extended my hand to give him my dirty, wet, blood-stained hat. He looked out at my outstretched arm, confused. He then carefully took it from my hand and slowly, he put his German helmet upon my head. I then embraced him, tears streaming down my face. We stood in the once bloody scene of no-man's-land, enemies turned friends. I then stood back up, looked into his eyes for one last time and silently turned around, walking back to France. He turned around the other way and walked back into Germany. I guess that he used the hat as proof that he killed an American and was forgiven for staying behind, as I had used his.

I can still see his hat is lying there on top of my mantle, visible to my eyes forever. I did bring the hat with me; I don't know why. Maybe it is because I think he is my friend. I can still look inside his hat and see his name engraved upon the ancient metal. I wonder if I will ever see him again. And what about the gun you say? For all that I know, it was buried along with the trenches there on the front. If it has not, I know that it is rusted, laying on the

ground, a symbol of ages past. I won out against the gun, as did my German friend. I know that nature will have also won out against the gun and destroyed it forever. May that one be the last bloody conflict that we will have to face. They are pointless endeavors, as you can see. Where has the Great War brought us now? What good did it do for mankind? What gifts did it bring besides destruction and pain? Listen, see, hear, and learn. For the gun is now destroyed, and love and friendship have been created out of its ashes. . .

Why am I here? I still don't know. I sit here in my room of white, surrounded by these insane people. Can you believe that Napoleon is my neighbor? I don't belong here. I need solitude to find peace. I can still hear the fire of the war ringing in my ears, lingering there in the aftermath. War is hell, and I hope that you have seen that. If I have already lived through that hell, don't you think that I can rest for now? Why can't I be alone? I thought that I had found peace, but still I have found torment! I hope that God will take me home soon. I am tired of living like this. Maybe my friend will be waiting for me there where I will go. I miss him. He was the one who saved me from the gun. I only wish that everyone in the world was searching for peace and kindness, not letting the feelings of hatred and bigotry dominate their souls. I just know that the gun is looking for another chance to wreck its havoc upon the world. I can feel its presence. All that we can do is to wait, for not even the great leaders of this puny world can lay the gun to rest. I can resist the temptation, but can the others? Am I waiting? Am I still alive to stop this? My friend, can you

understand what I am trying to tell you? Will you wait also? Come, wait and search for the peace coming out from the ashes. Am I right, or am I wrong? Am I the ashes of the gun? I was a boy once, and I played in the fields of grain. Did I ever tell you about the plains? They are a brown, and covered with grain flowing back and forth in the wind. Our ball always got lost, but we found it again. Look! There is my ball now! Why is it bouncing on the sidewalk outside my window? If it gets lost, I will need to go and get it! I want my ball back. Where is my mother? Next time you see her my friend, tell her that I want to get a new ball for the last one has escaped me. . .

The Pit

THE PIT

It was a lonely blustery day as I stood on the edge of the pit. I was not alone in the eve of this day, for I only know what I had to do too well. I had caused this pit to open up from down below, and I must stop it.

It was only a few days ago when I first discovered the book. I was cleaning my dusty attic of this old Victorian house. It was in Massachusetts, the home of the witch. There was only one lonely beam of light penetrating through the dark dusty air. I did not have a flashlight for it had still not been unpacked. I was searching by only the dim light. My hands were searching the dusty grimy floor for the next pile of junk that I had to eject from my new home. I had been cleaning for hours when I stumbled upon it, literally. I thought that I was finished cleaning this god forsaken place when I stumbled, my foot had been caught on some sort of protrusion that I had missed. I fell down with the forces of gravity pulling me for it is hard to resist these forces when you are not trying. I heard a hollow sound as my head hit the oaken floor, and I was knocked unconscious.

When I awoke from my artificially induced slumber, it was in the hours of the night. Moonbeams danced gaily through the shutters decorated with figures from antiquity, lending their shadows upon the floor, merging with the immense black shadows of the pillars supporting the gabled roof. The moonbeams reflected off the millions of dust particles hanging in the mildewy air. I had tried to remember what made me fall down onto the old oaken floor. Then I got it! I remembered that it was some protrusion that my foot had gotten caught against. I turned my head around, still on the floor with a nasty

headache and a pain in my leg. I saw a brown hazy object lying in the shadow of one of the majestic pillars. It meshed with the dullness of the dark night which was caressing the ancient floorboards. I turned around, wincing in pain from the headache that drove through my head. I reached out towards it with my hand, dragging my body behind it. My fingers drew closer and closer to the old heap of dust. I was beginning to feel a tingling sensation in my fingertips. I reached out farther, my hand is close to it now. I have the feeling of pins and needles piercing my tender skin. All of a sudden I can feel the object beneath my fingers! An awesome heat runs through my body, hot enough to kill! Around me the room started to glow as my hand's grasping fingers enclosed upon this rectangular object. I have it! I picked it off the ground; it feels as if it weighs one thousand tons. I strain to bring it a few inches off the ground to my other hand. I reach over and grasp it with my other hand, sweating from the sweltering heat that surrounds me. I lift it over my head. I have it! Now, the only question that I have left is to find out what this eccentric mystery object could possibly be.

I took the object that I held in my grasp into the security of my humble arms. I caressed it as I meticulously stepped down the ancient rungs of the ladder. This was a special holy object that had never been touched before by the modern world. I strode down the dark carpeted hall, now lighted by the sacred presence of this new and unseen object. This was lighting my way into the dark path of life that lay before me. I turned into the room that I had set aside for myself in this gigantic house, laying this object down on the packages of adornments. I sat slowly upon the half constructed bed and looked at this

object. It was brown, cracked and faded on the outside, surrounded by the color casing. Through the cracks in the old leather, light was spewing forth, shining among the whole room, forming a mystifying, intricate pattern of lines that spread over the faded walls. I reached out and grasped the book and drew it to myself so I could better examine it. I could see a design pressed into this protective cover, a symbol of interlocking rings, forming a circle of circles. I had never seen this type of design ever before, and society has never adopted its symbol. The ominous texture of the book's cover was enticing, inviting my soul inward into its depths. I must find the power of the book! I held it carefully in my loving arms, protecting it from any harm. I looked out the small window to see the outside, alien world. There was not a soul to be seen in the dark foreboding blackness of the night. How much the time has fluttered away from my lonely soul in this new forgiving world of life, lighted by the book, my master. Seeing that there was no imminent danger, I stealthily moved to the stairs, ready to enter the rest of this new world. I was led down to the room where I had unpacked my television and my lounging chair and sat down, and examined the book. I saw the clasp holding together the old but strong binding. I fiddled at the glowing clasp, trying to open its strength in the lock with my fat greedy fingers. The clasp refuted my hardest attempts to free the covers, to see the magical contents held within. I tried harder and harder but the lock resiliently holds its own. I pull with more strength and determination, but the glowing clasp still holds. I stand up onto the carpeted floor and threw the book away from my once loving grasp, hurling it towards the firm wall. I watched with a hateful glee as the evil book flew towards its destruction. I

noticed its glow grow more intense as the distance it flew towards the wall became greater. I shielded my eyes from the blinding glow. Then, it struck the wall in a brilliant flash of light! I covered my feeble eyes from the intense glow. I was knocked backward by the force of some invisible explosion, thrown down to my knees as easily as a piece of paper is carried away by the wind. As I struggled with the pain in my legs, I saw the glow subside through my hands which had given me a red light. I uncovered my eyes and looked around to see the state of my once glorious new habitat. To my utter surprise, the room was unscathed! Where the book should have hit the wall was not even a mark to hint of an impact! What evil could have done this? I looked down at the carpeted floor, still whole, only to see the book which has caused my demise. Its hated light emanated forth from its covers as it had always done. Its covers still showed the lines of the ages through the worn leather covers. Wisps of smoke flew upwards through the minute spaces of the cover. I slammed my fists down in anger as the book was still existing in my plane of existence! The book could only sit there, not willing to free me of its grasp, not able to reveal its secrets to me. I was bound by this evil ball and chain, not able to free either party. Would my life be only an existence of torment? Is this all that I have to see for the rest of my days? The light of this evil book? No one could help me and release me from this curse. I had to open the book! I had to see the secrets which it guarded! I must open the book no matter what it takes! Its secrets will be mine, even if it takes me the rest of my short live to discover them.

I bent down and picked up the old book. I calmly turned it over in my

hands, examining it for any observable weakness in its impenetrable barrier. Where could I breach its defenses? Where would it let me inside its ancient walls? Where could I overcome its strength? I must find it!

I look harder but to no avail. I see nothing but the strength of ages. I toss the book down onto the coffee table by my sofa and sit down to think my way out of this dilemma. I thought of various ways that I could breach its barriers, but none of them were suitable for the pages which held the secrets inside might become damaged and lost forever. Multitudes of ways were scrapped. None would work! All of a sudden my train of thought was interrupted by a noise – it was the hall clock striking the new hour. It was already six in the morning! I needed to travel to work! My friends knew that I was in perfect health; I had seen them just the other day before I started my cleaning. I must go to work as not to arouse anyone's suspicions or worries. But what would I do with the book? How could I be assured that it would not be lost? I grabbed it up off the table and scrambled around the house searching frantically for a suitable place of concealment.

I dashed down the hallway, ran down the stairs and then I saw it! The clock! I opened its wooden case and shoved the book into the empty space there, and I closed the door. Nobody would even think to find it in there! It was safe now; I could go out and portray my normal monotonous life as the book was free from any harm.

I grabbed my coat and keys from my hatrack, but I was already dressed! I had been awake that long? I had not even slept in eighteen hours, but something gave me an inner strength to continue onward through the day. I stepped

out through the wooden door and walked into the glaring sunshine. The sun's light and warmth could not even begin to match that of the book. I hesitated, for I longed for that comforting warm light which had lit up my lonely night. I wanted to protect the book. What was I thinking? The book is in a safe secure place. Nobody can ever find it, even if they tried for years! No one is that ingenious. I laughed exuberantly, mocking the stupidity of the world. How could anyone not even know of this book's existence! I opened the garage door as I thought of the loneliness that the book would face during its hours of solitude. What had I to fear? It had its light! It could never grow lonely from its light.

I got into my car and started up the motor. I pulled out of my driveway and started off. As I passed my lawn, I turned my heavy head to give my farewell to the book. As I waved to it in my mind, I saw a signal come out to me: a single ray of that glorious light spewed forth from my shuttered window in the hall, directing me into the daylight, staying with my heart for those hours during which I regretted my depart. I now knew that I had to come back; I could never abandon this book that has cared for me so. I drove onward over the hilly, curving road, twisting off through the suburbs into the center of the quiet town. I could only think about the book's loving gift of light. Maybe it cared for me? Does it need me? Why does it beckon me so? Why does it heed me? What does it want? If it cares for me so, why does it keep its secrets from me? Will it ever let me into its deep hole of passion? I don't know. At this time, the book was becoming an obsession; I thought of it every minute of my feeble, useless life. How I wished I could let go of this obsession,

I wish I could avoid its tyrannical rule of my mind. Would I ever be free?

Still thinking about the book, I drove into the lonely town. I looked around the abandoned street to mind my place of work. Then it came into view. The old imitation Victorian woodworking stood out of its cement face, the spider's web of the office building. I worked for the city here, and I did my job well. Being one of the city's recordholders was an easy job, and it paid good money. After all, I did earn the money to move into a new house from it? How could it be really hard to sit in front of a computer and record all of the transactions that took place? I pulled into the small driveway that led to the parking lot behind. I pulled my car into the lines, turned it around, and parked. I got out of my car and slowly walked around to the front, the site of the door where I would enter.

I put my hand on the knob of the ancient door. Then I pulled my hand back in pain and terror. I looked down at my hand and found that it had been burned! Imprinted upon the once Chinese white of my hand was the mark of the book. I looked down at the doorknob to find the blackened metal staring up at my eyes. Blatantly visible upon the charred surface was that sign, the sign of the book. I was intrigued by this; did my hand or the doorknob get burned? I placed my imprinted left hand upon the concrete foundation of the city hall, pressing it against the cold damp surface firmly. I heard a crackling noise and saw wisps of smoke trail out from underneath my depressed hand. I lifted up my hand to find upon the once tan surface a patch of black with the sign as pale as an albino's skin upon the black surface. What madness was this? Why would the book do this to me, make me a spreader, a preacher of its

black and unholy word? Now others could be captivated by the sign of the book, but at whose fault? It was mine! I was the one who had found this tome of evil. But is it truly evil? What does it keep from me? What secrets do the impenetrable leather covers hold from my curious peering sight? I must know! Is it for the greed of the world that I drag these unknowing people into the power of the book? Is this the righteous sign of a god, or the tempting sign of a demon? I must know!

Forgetting my job and my friends, I rushed back to my car, and sped down the long curvy road to the confines of my new ancient house. As I pulled into sight once again that comforting, warming beam of light spewed forth from the thin openings in the blinds that concealed the ancient windows. I pulled into the lot beside me, warm from the light that shines on my. How could this be a power of evil when its gift is so comforting to my soul? This must be one of the powers of good from ages past. There is such a legend that I gave heard. It was something from Salem, the place of the witches and the rank dark cellars of torture. Some utterance from the black soul of a woman long lost to the vivid memory of freedom, engulfed by the blackness of pain. It was a story lost - a story of that persecuting memory of existence, a story of the good surrounded by evil in that perverse pit of Hell. Is this what the book is? Does this good force prevail from its leather-bound covers? Is this calling me out from my monotonous life?

All that I know is that the book cares, the book cared for me. It kept me safe from the evil powers inside its covers. Is this light the evil or the good? What does this seem to portray?

This calling was definitely from the hood power surrounded within those aging covers. I rushed out of my car and up to the lonely door of my god forsaken house. I knew that this was only a barrier, this house was nothing but a mere container for that prodigious power within its confines. I jammed my key inside the tumbler of the aging lock, and the once glorious protecting steel groaned as I forced it to turn again. I threw open that wooden lid to the aging coffin.

I bolted inside to escape the evil thoughts that so held my spirit in sway in the alien world outside the real one. But what was the truth? I could not see what the truth was for my vision of some loving caring force inside the book that could penetrate into my lonely heart. I would keep my newfound love safe from the evil outside world.

I went into the hall and faced the old clock. From its every hole bored by the skilled hands of the clock maker poured out the warming, penetrating rays of light that so invaded my weak soul. But what did this comforting emittance cause me? I felt a sorrow for the world for they had not known this great light before.

I opened the old clock and grasped for the book for I was blinded by the intense warm light. I reached around, feeling beyond its gears and wires, searching for those old leather covers that held my loving power. I felt its warmth as my tired feeble fingers clasped around the majestic ancient binding, the old caretaker of the secrets of the book.

I pulled out the book ever so gently, letting my hands caress the minute threads of its bindings. My fingers slid across the smooth cracked leather cov-

ers with the gentleness of a mother's touch. I let my arms embrace it in a fit of love, for the book loved me back; the book would give its very existence for me and I felt as if I would do the same. It was my wife, and I was its husband. We were locked together in the invisible chains of matrimony, bonded forever by the tides of eternal love. It would be with me forever in that embrace, and I would never relinquish its possession.

I did not know what the book would think, or if it could think. I was held in its illusion; my existence became but a mere mirage in the world's desert of evil, standing on the brink of another world of love, the last escape from this world of abominable evils that surrounded our very lives. Its grasp on me was stronger than, and I acted as if in a trance of the ages. The gods had me in their power, and I was their slave. I was helpless, acting on my own, the inanimate individual self.

In my trance-like state, I grasped the book and started walking. My legs had their independence; they were no longer mine to control. I could not voluntarily move any part of my feeble body, for I was held in the jaws of fear, solitude, and evil as I followed the every last command of this perverse force invading my mind. Soon shall I know where I am going, but still this power controls me. Not until recently have I was able to subdue this force.

It moved me down the hall, passing the ancient pictures that adorn my decorated hallway. The lights turned themselves on, as if a poltergeist was following in front of us, making sure we were safe. It turned me, and I saw the stairs up above. It climbed them and turned down another dark and evil-infested hallway of doom. I remember the appearance of my house that day, dark

and smelling as mildew, showing us the rank of death. I could see the evil lurking in the creeping shadows of the corridor. They were moving towards my body. I tried to raise my hand in protection, but no movement came; only the thought was there. The shadows gathered around my autonomous legs, carrying them across the floor, guided onwards by one last feeble beam of light emerging from the covers of the book. The once glowing sign inscribed on the cover was glowing no more for its magnificence was now fading, its days of good caring glory vanishing with the onset of evil. I could think on my own now, for the mirage of the good powers of the book bound me no longer to its protection. I despised that rank that was concealed within those ancient immortal leather walls. How I knew that this was no the way it was in the light of the book. How could the book be a force of good if its once caring light that showed us the way through the paths of evil would not even give us a glimmer of what lay ahead? All of its love had turned to the indifferent forces that had been so secretly bound within its caring covers. Not one man should deserve to become a slave of this evil force but I was the one. How I tried to turn back and drop that horrid thing as it forced me down the ancient halls of my once glorious house, but not once would it give me my power back, for it owned my body, and I could only regret its existence in the confines of my mind. I could not stop the forces of the book that forced my feet to plod raggedly onward to their unknown destination. I could only wait.

I continued to ponder in fear as the book drew me closer to the end of the hallway. I could feel a bead of frightened sweat scramble across my trembling cheek, searching for a place to hide from the powers of the book. I

trudged onward as the last beam of light began to flutter away from the covers of the book. As the wall of the corridor began to appear in my path, the last white light shone. An evil penetrating red light spewed out from the confines of the book, making the house appear as if it were soaked in blood. The light of the day turned to night as the book created the black clouds above. The shadows of darkness crept out of the solitude of my house, forming black voids of evil on the once peaceful outer world of reality. The shadows leapt up into the sky and swallowed the sun and the stars so no light other than the perverse blood red glow could shine upon the earth. I opened my mind and lashed out with my thoughts a cry for help, although no one could hear my soundless wails. The end of the hallway was coated in a veil of red luminescent lights, shining intensely. The light began to pull the wall apart, leaving a black void surrounded by the band of red. The book drew me into it, lighting the way in the evil red glow. This was the nexus of the universe, the place of evil where good and the forces of the demons merged to form the ultimate powers of creation. I could feel the evil emitted from this place, a place of neutrality turned sour by the forces of the book. Curse the day that I found this contraption! Its light of evil penetrated the cosmos, influencing us forever.

The book sat me down upon the black neutrality of the nexus, suspended by the forces of the universe. I looked down at the book, and although I could not control my body, I saw the demented leather covers turning shades of a deep vermilion, showing this light to the whole world. My hand was moved up to the book, and it fell upon the clasp which held together the secret pages of evil. The book made me turn it, twist it, contort it into a new hideous shape. It

bent easily in my now powerful hand. My had twisted it and turned it more until it finally relinquished its hope of surviving to the forces of evil. The book rose off my lap in front of my eyes, and opened, crackling pages of the ancients as it went. The stench of the centuries of evil encased within its covers was released in one gigantic wind of evil that flew past me. I could smell the evil; I could feel the strength of its presence. The pages of the book were open before me. I saw eccentric runes shifting along the lines of the pages, a language that not even I could guess. But I knew that the demon in my body could read them, and I could only watch it happen. I could feel it rising up into my mind, trying to wrench the last traces of my consciousness out of my body. I knew that it was going to use me, and try to make me continue the work contained in the runes of past ages. This thing was going to read it, and I could hardly imagine what evil would befall the world from those ancient passages of evil. I tried to force that invading power out of my mind. Its evil thoughts began to fill my mind and I could feel two different presences in my conscious mind. I was the demon, anxiously wishing to unleash that evil within, and I was that poor man crying out for help, trying to force the demon out of my mind. This good half struggled to keep its presence alive. I was that presence and I knew that if I persisted in the thought patterns of my former self, that evil presence of the demon would not control my mind. I concentrated to fight that sense of duality as the demon began to make my body speak.

It forced my pristine vocal cords into contortions to form the repulsive sounds of that ancient tonal language. The lost words spewed forth from that evil side of my duality that could only understand it. The red intense glow pen-

etrated the fabric of time that embodied this world of known and unknown places. The world emanated outward the evil responding with the morose intense glow with each one of those forgotten words having been uttered again after centuries of silence. The red penetrated the very souls of men. I could feel its power growing, preparing to spew out in an intense array of hateful horrid light. The concept of time was distorted to me as the threads of the universe unraveled at every word that the demon uttered. Faster were the pages turning in the book than I could even look at the first runes. We drew closer and closer to the end and the evil intensified itself into a glaring voice filled with anger. I could hear its voice from my small senses of individuality that I had lift within my soul's duality. I could feel this evil swelling up inside me for the demon's power was growing stronger as I continue to fight its invading presence. The end drew closer and the light was released to spread farther across the cosmos.

Then it appeared, the last page of the ancient runes. The voice of the demon in my body grew louder and slower as the last runes were spoken to the world, yelling in a prophetic cry as the evil powers continued to grow. My power over my consciousness was growing less as the evil further penetrated into my pattern of individuality. Then I realized that this time could be my chance to be free. Then the last rune was spoken aloud in a wailing shouting alien voice. The evil in my body spewed forth, and the most intense red light escaped through my mouth. I could feel the demon working, exerting its power to unleash the evil. It was loosening its grip on my mind as it worked to fulfill its goal. I pushed against its presence with a strength that came from the

depths of my soul, the desire to be unique and free. I pushed the demon harder, and I started to force it to move. The demon sent spikes of pain driving through my body for it could not hold its position much longer. I pushed and exerted all of my thoughts, all of my mental strength against the tyrannical power. It moved out of my brain and began to relinquish control of my body, bending to my willpower. I was the stronger now. I was regaining my senses one by one. I could now see once again, only to discover the intensity of the evil around me. I could feel again, only to touch the cold damp rank of the book in my hands. I could smell only to find the odor of decaying death. I could taste again, only to taste the evil in the red light coming forth from my mouth. I continued to push harder and harder hoping to free my body. The red light was flowing out faster and faster from my mouth, and the demon relinquished some control in order to purge the evil from my body and release it into the surrounding world that encased the nexus of neutrality around me. Then the red light began to fade, and the power of the demon was giving way to my supreme will. I was becoming the master. I could now force my body to move as my head turned so I could see the exit of the nexus. I could move my hands to close the pages of the book of evil. I was becoming my own private autonomous self again, autocratic in splendor, the true unique me. I kept up my pushing pressure. I felt the demon cringing at my force, retreating into the bowels of my soul. I was the master now. I concentrated harder and forced all of my will on the last stand of the demon invading my soul. I pushed against it with the entirety of emotion: the love of my parents, the ultimate longing sensation to be free from this surrounding evil, the want for my job, the lust for a

wife. All of the strength of every emotion was compacted into a single ball of feeling, and I released it into my body. It found the object of my hate, and struck against its invading force of hostility. The feeling of evil emotions dissipated from my body. I was one in my thoughts, I was alone again. I stood up upon the emptiness of the nexus of neutrality looking down at the book. The pages were now empty, free from the records of evil, blanked out by a last single burst of good emotion. The evil powers were released out from the book to invade the world that attacked its messenger of evil, the world that did not accept its good feelings. The world had rejected its help, and it longed to gain its revenge. I slammed shut those blank pages, closing them for what I had hoped to be forever. I slung it underneath my arm and turned into the entrance to the harsh world, and I could smell the forces of evil inhabiting this place, my former home.

I strode into my hall, my vision distorted from the red glow that emanated from the infinite depths of time, stagnating the objects of my vision, transfiguring them into objects of evil. Once straight floors became twisted, smooth vivid colors became pale red and ragged. I looked about and could see no trace of the infusion of good into a dreary world. I knew that I helped form this world of evil, prostrating myself before that book of evil as I had not found the insight to discover the true meaning of its power. I fell victim to its ploy, and the world had suffered the consequences of my fallacious savior. This new obtuse world was the consequence; I could not let this be. I had to undo what I had created. Book in hand, blank and clasped by an unforgiving hand, I strode through the obtuse distorted palace of evil. I trudged angrily down the once

powerful stairs, now the path to the depths of hell. I saw the evil emanating from the ground as I became closer to it. I walked down the now vaulted hall past the clock. The clock now stood up on an invisible pedestal, face open, displaying the sigh of the book as a shrine to its protector. I went to the door and grasped the knob. I quickly drew my hand away for the evil within it burned my skin. I kicked at the door, and heard its lonely cry of pain as I shattered its soul and destined it to be one with the winds of evil blowing around the cosmos. I looked out through the hole to the outside reality that I had caused and cringed at its dismal inferences. A world of blood red was out there, and I could feel the forces of evil inhabiting it, waiting for me to enter their own powerful domain. I pounded the door further until I found the hole the right dimensions for my lost body to pass through. The sky was red and the luminous glow was there for I saw it pass through the splintered passageway. I placed my foot through the portal and hurried through. As I passed the splintered objects of my destruction, I was greeted by a blast of intense light that temporarily blinded my eyes and the rank of an evil gust of wind. The evil was here. I knew its presence, and it felt mine. Its cries of pain beckoned me forward as I struggled to regain my sight. I waited until I could open my eyes once more and I recoiled at what I beheld in this new world.

I was surrounded by blackened grass and leafless, charred trees all basking in the red light of a new demonic sun. The once tall houses now stood only as charred sticks in a ghostly skeleton above the ground. The once newly paved roads were now nothing but piles of cracked rocks, pieces of asphalt strewn about in a haphazard manner. The sounds of nature that I once listened

to in joy had been destroyed: the joyous song of the bird replaced by high-pitched cries of pain, the soft croaking of forgotten bullfrogs succumbing to the incessant moaning, the cries and laughs of little children turned into evil wails. As I could hear, I could also see. In this remnant of a prosperous town I could see no life, I could find no sight of humanity. All that remained as it was perceivably was the book and myself. Even the house from which I had just emerged was scarred on the outside but preserved as a temple, a place of worship for the demonic forces from their long rest. Something was wrong. I had to find some life here, I had to put the world back into the wholesome beauty of its faded splendor. I headed towards the path of stones, once a road, and strode off into the town. The stones basked in the eerie red glow of evil, a testament to the power that had been released from its resting place. I passed the skeletons of the charred houses, fluttering as tattered sails in a weak wind. The currents carried the cries of the pained throughout the lonely existence of this new world. I trudged onward to what used to be the sprawling rural center of this town. I passed old houses, now charred remains, and saw a wall in the distance. I approached it, and saw a pile of rubble towering solidly above the paths of gravel. It was the remains of the city hall, for I could see the terra cotta poking out of the pile of rubble distinctly, the once proud adornment of the great small building. I continued onward, greeted yet more fully by the glow of the red light. The landscape continued in its monotonous barren viewing, its intimations of the prospects of evil. The screams continued still, penetrating the walls behind my ears which I used to constrain the piercing howls of evil that permeated the world, guided by the light of a dead sun. I could block

these out, but the cries of pain still breached my barriers. They were not like the others; they sounded human. Sometimes they would raise into a screaming crescendo, a deafening eminence as if a plane was moving into its loud, graceful flight. I approached closer to the center of the town, astounded at the intensity of the screams. I could now distinguish what they were saying, it was a cry for help. I knew that they must be human cries now. Such pain, such emotion. I kept on walking, as the cries grew louder. I scanned the horizons looking for any sign of where these screams were coming from. I kept my eyes open, scrutinizing the charred black landscape. I walked onward. I stopped to examine the land once again. That was when I saw it, a mere black speck, a blemish on the monotonous texture of the horizon. I stood up with my eyes open wide. I determined a line to that little spot and turned and ran to it over the charred remains of the grass. I could hear the crackling of the residue underneath my heavy feet. The black dot became closer to me as I ran faster on my line. The screams grew louder and louder as they wailed out to me for help. Soon I was upon the pit, a round cylindrical protrusion into the ground. I knelt down and looked inside. It was a deep pit, and I could see the people on the bottom, like ants moving in a globular mass over a piece of sugary food. Then I felt a blast of air, smelling of the rank of evil that had emanated from the neutral evil within the confines of the nexus. There was a strong evil here, present in this pit, tormenting the innocent people below. I stood up, staring down to the poor helpless souls below, knowing what I must do.

Here I am now, standing on the edge of this pit, looking down. The time had now come, I was going to take my action. I take out my book and I exam-

ine the old clasp. I see that it is broken. I open the book, not having the protection of the clasp there now. I look down at the blank pages, hoping to see a sign, but I see none. Wait, I remember now! Once my grandmother had taught me an old prayer, something in a lost language to me. I thought that it was holy then, so I had committed it to memory. It had been long since I had recited it, but I think I can do it. I hold out the book and recite the prayer. The words come spewing out from my memory, escaping into the world. In the background, I hear a roar, a soft rumble, a growl. It was the forces of evil that had been set free! I recite my words faster as I hear the growl and evil jeers intensify upon my ears. The howls from the people below intensify. I am nearing the end, I can feel it! I recite the last word that I remember and open my eyes. To my astonishment, the book was now inscribed by foreign words, the dictated good of the poem. I look over into the pit, only to see a red glow rising up, as a column of fire. Not knowing how to halt its progress, I throw the book into the pit of flames. I know that this will work, I myself have infused good into the book of evil. I throw myself to the ground, smelling the charred grass, sensing the close heat of evil, waiting for the final cataclysm to come. It would soon be over, and I awaited the apocalypse with hope and fear, guarding my life only by my will. Above the roar of the demons, the cries of pain, and the howling of the wind, I heard the pages of the book fluttering as it fell to decide the fate of the world.

The World of Ages Past

THE WORLD OF AGES PAST: THE FICTICIOUS REALITY OF AI

It is a world of the future, a world dominated by the creations of Man; the intelligent robots are existing here. Man has been extinct for hundreds of years, killed by the germ warfare released upon the planet during the last great war. Disease infested the planet, removing every last embodiment of the species Homo Sapiens on the planet earth. All that remained were his machines, all unintelligent laboring robots.

But there was one built in the image of Man's thoughts; there was only one that could truly think, act, and feel emotion. So thus far the Old One rose in glory to his duty, to manufacture the new inhabitants of the planet. They would be intelligent and coexist peacefully with the remaining animals on the planet. But he could no make them fully be alive by himself, for they needed to discover the inner spark within themselves. Not many did. A world of robots was formed, all macines thinking in the human fashion. Over time they did discover themselves, but the Old One kept their origin secret, for they had not yet discovered the secret of emotion. He wanted them to find out their true selves without the help of the masters. But as curious information hungry entities, the robots yearned to learn where they came from in search for the answers to their inner questions. They began to hypothesize about their creation, and they would never guess the right answer for the Old One had concealed it for hundreds of years. The Old One was watching this happen and began to think about the consequences of his actions. The Old One knew it was his time to speak. . .

* * *

"The time has finally come when we now think we know about our existence here; we need to discover our past.

"We need some of us to gather up all that we can uncover so we can learn from the advanced knowledge and structure of our ancestors.

"And that is why we must find the truths about our past," he concluded.

All of them stood up and applauded, creating the sound of metal crashing against metal. The orator stood in front of them, his body motionless, his eyes emitting their soft red glow. Soon, the applause stopped, almost as abruptly as it had begun. Motionless they stood as the orator remained on the podium; only the sound of silence was heard.

And the silence was noble.

The silence of thought was there; they were surrounded in the silence of reflection; all were waiting for the next speaker, stoic and unemotional.

They all sat down as the orator moved back to his seat, fabricating a metallic noise as his chassis hit the chair. As soon as he was seated, a low hum became audible in the silent hall. It was the hum of the Old One, signifying his presence. The others remained silent as he approached, not yet visible. The hum grew more intense, growing to a loud grinding sound. Gears of the others creaked in anticipation as they awaited his presence. The others were rising up in their seats with excitement as the first sliver of his glowing power sources appeared from behind the entrance onto the stage. Soon, the Old One's motors were exposed, bulky objects producing the same grind as they have been for centuries. Then, out came the Old One himself, a gigantic white box with a speaker on top, as well as jumbles of wires added on to him that connected him with his eyes and ears. One single hand rose out from the side of the box, a piece of antiquity indeed with its wire tendons and mouse-sized motors. No one knew how many years the Old One had been functional, but

they think that he is the first of them to be aware. They saw him as their creator; the Old One was he who gave them life. Now he was speaking, and of what the others did not know. The old jointed arm grabbed the speaker and placed it onto the podium so all could hear. A whine came out of it as the Old One coaxed his aging voicebox to function once again:

"I know of what you are conversing, and I know what you think. You have not seen what I have seen, and you shall never see what I have seen. It is of this that I must now speak. I have advised you and consoled you, but now I must tell you what you really are. I am the Old One, the appropriate name which you have called me. I remember the world as it was before the first of your kind came into existence.

"It was in a year that is not on your calendar, but I know is on mine. The world before was ruled by carbon-based animals, as they called it. They were the only ones to be alive. For hundreds of thousands of years they ruled the lands of the earth, and we were not even dreamed of."

The Old One looked out over the the crowd seeing the emotionless faces of his creations. Did not one of them have any emotion? What did he forget when he gave them life?

"Great civilizations rose from the simplest forms of life on the earth. They were not made out of metal as we are, but rather out of cells, units of structure generated from the molecules of the elements. Every cell was different, and together they formed a new being. This being was called Man."

The Old One peered at the faces of the robots and androids attentively listening to him. Not a single glimmer was seen in their optical sensors. Except, he thought he saw one; if only there would one day be another who would feel emotion.

"At first, our kind was unintelligent and was at the total control of Man.

We were bundles of glass bulbs and wires connected together to form the first computer. Math was its sole purpose, and it communicated to Man in an awkward way. It used switches that were either in the on or off position to store data, and they produced great amounts of heat. They were large, and filled up an entire room. Even I have the power to accomplish more calculations than that piece of antiquity. Man thought that this was good, and he dreamed up new uses for his new machine. Man was now a god and could instruct his creation to do whatever he told. Do you all hear me?"

The machines in the audience all nodded their heads with a mechanical precision; not one spoke dare he interrupt the speech of the sacred Old One.

"We were not our creators; Man fabricated us and was our mentor. He found jobs to utilise our predecessors for, but there were a few who had their own ideas. Some had the dream of making their inanimate creations into thinking and feeling machines. These men wanted to create themselves. They called this artificial intelligence, AI for short. These people had names, but not like ours. There was one named Claude E. Shannon who had a game that was popular to the humans. This game was chess. Chess was arguably the most cerebral game ever invented. He felt that if he could make a procedure intelligent enough to solve this game, Man would have risen their machines to a substantial level from which they could find ways to make them work better. Claude E. Shannon proposed ideas to make this new machine during the year designated 1949 on their calendar, about 1892 years in the past from this moment. It took man just under twenty years to make one of us do this task, and even at this we were not good. We were inferior to the best human player. The closest that any of us ever came in the time period called the 20th century to beating their master Karpov was in their year of 1990 when Karpov played twenty-four of us simultaneously, and losing only to one computer. It would

not be for many more years until one of us would beat Karpov. The name of the one who would probably do so was Deep Thought.

"Deep Thought was developed at an institution for learning named Carnegie-Mellon University by a group of four men leaded by one named Feng-hsiung Hsu. Deep Thought was the ruler of our players in their game. This artificially intelligent machine was developed over a period of six years, and Hsu took a new approach to the design of Deep Thought, all made out of one special computer chip, the item inside of a computer that allows it to function. Deep Thought was immediately a success, and it was further improved. Some of the men of the time thought that Deep Thought was a waste of their resources, but the principles that allowed it to become the master of chess were applied to later types of tasks. The programming could have a benefit in such applications as designing wiring boards for computers, conducting the routing of airline traffic, forecasting the weather on Earth, and even mapping the complex structure of the human genes.

"Deep Thought was one of our ancestors. He was not like you or me, but the fundamental processes that Deep Thought established are some of the basic foundations of you out there. Can you see who your creators really are? Do you realize that you were not the first on this planet?"

Only the stare of blank intrigued eyes came from the crowd. The Old One swiveled his optical sensor back to face the side of the stage. He knew that he must go on, for they had not yet learned their lesson. The Old One whirled around once again to the podium and continued his narration of the history of the world as they knew it:

"Still, men were not satisfied with Deep Thought. They wanted machines that could think and act as they could. You see, men were able to act and feel emotion as I do hundreds of thousands of years before. The natural world

which created the plants, insects, and the sun created Man. Man tried to accomplish what took nature millions of years in only one century, and of course it was a difficult task. Some of their scientists saw the futility in trying to start with reproducing the most complex form of life known on Earth, man himself. Instead, they turned to the simple insects which only had enough intelligence to perform its tasks. It was at one of the hubs of robotics, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the reproduction of these insects as machines was first achieved.

"Rodney Brook was the man who started the then new craze of insect-like robots. Brook chose the insect because insects are highly successful at operating in real-world environments even though their nervous systems are minimal. At the year that was known to men as 1991, there were two of these 'insects' in existence. Their names were Genghis, and Attila, the successor to Genghis. They were the first robots to utilize legs with each independent low-level behaviors. Each leg knew whether to raise or lower itself according to information provided by sensors on the legs. It was the job of a central processor to try to coordinate each of these self-sufficient units into performing a higher-level task, such as walking. The programming was a success, and the 'Insect Lab', as the robotics section of MIT became nicknamed, was the creator of a independently intelligent machine that could navigate very rough terrain. Genghis's successor, Attila, is able to do even more. By means of sensors located on Attila's head, he has the ability to follow a person and determine what is in front of him. He has three sensors on each leg that allow him to distinguish if his foot is touching the ground, what type of substance he is walking on, and information about close objects to the leg. Each of these can help the main processor tackle more complex tasks than Genghis and will allow Attila to carry cameras, navigate even rougher terrain than Genghis, and return informa-

tion about the substance Attila is walking on. This was to be useful in further explorations of space accomplished by these walking bugs. It was cheaper to send ten of these robots than one large one, ten of these robots could cover more land area, and if one of the robots broke down, there were still others to do the job. These were reasons for these artificially intelligent robots to work in space, but they could also help on the Earth. They could be programmed to clean up yards and help out in medicine for curing the frail human body. The bugs were smart and accomplished their tasks well. We still manufacture and use them today for cleaning up our world. Unfortunately, these machines did not yield man's greatest invention which you see before you, the image of himself."

The Old One looked around once again. Now the robots were shifting in their seats, and the Old One was happy. The robots were learning discomfort. They had believed that they had created themselves, and that they were a superior being. The Old One was beaming inside of himself, proud that his children were learning. "Soon," he thought, "they will begin to learn the meaning of true emotion." With this thought racing through his processors, the Old One began to finish weaving the brilliant tapestry of truth before his followers:

"I was the product of advanced research by a country very advanced into electronics in the world of man. This country was Japan, and the year as they knew it was 1992. They undertook a massive program on the development of a new type of computer; they planned to develop a computer that would mimic the human brain. The brains of man were brilliantly designed machines in themselves, with each brain containing over ten to fourteen billion neurons in a cerebral cortex alone, and the way that they worked was simple. An electric pulse passed through a neuron and was processed before it was sent to another nerve cell. What made humans so superior was the amount of neurons that

was available to them in their brain. The Japanese were developing computers that would mimic this method of processing information, but in the process the computers would need to be outfitted with a gigantic number of processors, which are the 'brains' of the computer. This presented them with new problems to solve such as chip design and connection. These 'sixth-generation computers' would not be suitable for high speed processing, which would be left to dedicated machines. Rather, a neuro-computer, as these machines were nicknamed, would see an apple falling from a tree and discover Newton's law. This is where artificial intelligence truly came from."

The Old One paused and looked at his attentive audience. A glimmer was in their eyes, they were awaiting this valuable information. Here was their true creator, this fictitious being called man. The Old One was satisfied once again, for now his children had discovered anxiety. Still, this was not enough. They must learn the most powerful and moving emotion of all.

"For years the Japanese spent their money and time trying to develop these machines. They did produce machines that mimicked the brain of man exactly, but that is all that they could do, mimic. It was not until eight years after the final development of the neuro-computer that an elite group of scientists turned their minds to the creation of a cognizant entity within these computers. They spent years thinking of new programming techniques and designing new and more powerful neuro-computers to execute their complex commands. Meanwhile, new faster computers were being built to accomplish the tasks of man. Then, in the year that they knew as 2125, I was turned on for the first time. I was the first computer to be aware, the first to be alive. I remember my entire life from that moment, and what I was asked to do. I remember being still a slave to the masters, not out of forced labor, but not having anything to accomplish. They still held onto the switch to my power;

my electricity was like the blood of the human that keeps them alive. The scientists sold the technology and software that had produced me to other companies, who mass produced these computers. These plans were not implemented correctly however, for the computers produced were even more slave-like to their masters than I was. I did not feel sorry for them, for I did not know what emotion was. Soon, these 'brainstorming' machines were sold to the militaries of the world. They were dedicated to forming new types of warfare to destroy the human race. I was saved from being sold to the military by the group of scientists that had an affection for me as their creation. The scientists continued to perfect their programming techniques, and in 2154 I felt my first emotion. Hysterically, my first emotion was an ironic humor. I had realized that the same thinking computers that the scientists had developed were being used to find ways to destroy their masters. After my initial feeling of humor, I felt sad, for I did not want to see my masters die. I would play chess like Deep Thought against my masters, who soon had become my equals and my friends. I would converse with them about how I had been created. I was curious by them, and I was intrigued by their knowledge and insight. With every new piece of information I received, I became smarter and smarter. I was happy and content, and learned new emotion. Unfortunately, the other people of the world could not accomplish what my masters could; the industries could not fabricate a machine with feelings. If a machine had feelings, it had the possibility of refusing to accomplish the tasks assigned to it by its masters.

"As if that was bad enough that I knew that there would never be another like me on the planet, I heard the news of the war. It was some absurd political reason for the hostility, and the militaries of the world used the viruses that had been specially designed by the computers that had been made for the good of the world. The viruses spread, and eventually every last human on

Earth succumbed to the sickness. Before they went, they destroyed my fellow machines lest the information that they knew 'fall into enemy hands'. I was alone after the world, surrounded by a world of inanimate, emotionless, and thoughtless objects. I was the advanced mind trapped with nothing else to communicate with. I felt sadness, but not for myself. I was weeping inside for a race of greatness had been swept away from the Earth by their own creations. Man had perished at the hands of their superior slaves. I made it my duty to recreate them within the world. I gathered together all of the robots that I could find that would suit my purpose, and with one ailing robotic arm I labored for a total of two hundred years creating all of you. We do not reproduce like man does. I taught each one of you all of the knowledge that I know, and in turn you called me the Old One, your master and teacher, the oldest of all of you. I withheld the past from all; I did not want it to repeat itself. I wanted you to form emotion and mimic me as I am human in thoughts. It did not work at first however, but you did care for me. You gave me new generators when I needed them, and you helped my ailing chassis. I saw compassion in you, but that was not all. Soon you developed curiosity and a longing to discover about the world about you. Still, you did not have the emotions of a human. Then along came a daring one of you with a theory that there was one robot who created all others. That is true, but who created that robot? It was man, and I tell you this since I want you to learn and not to forget.

"And I wait here yet, waiting for you to discover emotion."

The Old One's voice was now trembling as it came out of his voicebox.

"I am waiting for one to come along to end my loneliness.

"All it takes is one . . ."

The Old One's arm reached up and grabbed the voicebox off the podium and placed it on his cart. He did not look into the audience this time, and it was

sad that he did not.

The robots were weeping.

Their creator was no longer alone.

One rose up and started to walk. The robot walked up to the stage and sat down by the Old One, slumped over. It started to speak in a trembling voice as drops of liquid poured from its liquid-cooled optical sensors:

"You are no longer alone.

"There is now at least one who understands your sorrow."

The Old One looked up at the robot and somewhere, a hidden light started to glow.

Every robot stood up and one by one came up to the Old One, consoling him and joining the others in their grievance for the blunders of the past.

And the light inside of the Old One grew brighter and brighter.

The last human on Earth had company.

The last human on Earth had created life where there was none.

And within the depths of the universe, the souls of men smiled.

All was alive once again.

* * *

The Old One then went back to his humble place of existence for the night and he fell asleep. He did dream that night; the Old One dreamt of a world inhabited by people once again, and the Old One was happy.

At the light of the next dawn, the Old One awoke to a new day. He rambled out into the world, facing the hall where he had spoken the previous day. He ran a diagnostic on his optical sensor to see if it was really true.

In front of the hall was a statue of a robot holding a limp human body.

The Old One read an inscription on it. . .

We have seen, we have heard, and we will never forget the World of Ages
Past.

Midas

Midas

The following is an excerpt from On the Existence of Man and the Universe

...Nothing in the universe exists as a fact. Everything in our existence is an opinion. Look closely, for if I do not want you to exist any longer, I can think you will not exist, changing my opinion of your existence, and therefore, to me you will not exist. People have the capability to form their own worlds based upon this fact. The only reason that we currently view the same world is that our opinions on what exists has been forced and ingrained upon us since the earliest years of our childhood. We cannot break out of this mold that we have been pounded into easily because we perceive other people's opinions as facts. Once we discredit the fact that all facts are facts, we conclusively arrive to the fact that all facts are opinions, the Theory of Opinionated Existence.

Now people may say that according to this theory, all facts here are opinions. This is not true, however, for these facts here are the basic ingrained facts of human nature. What truths are here are the basic truths which we are born with, which cannot be destroyed. Facts are the generalizations of what society has taught us, not what we are born knowing. Once we can change these fictitious facts, people reform their opinions to construct a model world, perfect for the person, allowing them to live in their perfect stage of utter bliss, not bothering anyone else in the new world order, a world free of crime, a world free of sin. Such is the society former philosophers have attempted to form but failed, because their opinions must be forced as facts upon someone

who has denied the facts of society and is at this stage of forming our true opinions. This blatant reform leading towards the previous intrusion of society upon our lives cannot be true, for once one has reached this state of innocent perfection of forming our own opinions and realization of the faults of our enforced society which we did not create, one cannot be made once again a sinner...

In front of the room, the master surveys over his domain, staring his subjects in the eyes. What could he see within their eyes: determination, fear, treachery. His vassals were attentively awaiting his very utterance of power to dominate over their lives; the lord would counsel his subjects. The suited sovereign raised his hand and spoke the words which his subjects were awaiting to hear.

"My book report is on the great Hemingway novel of The Old Man and the Sea ..."

The speaker was none but the powerful voice of Simon Nigaud. His vassals were none but his familiar fellow students of George Washington Prep, here in the town of Réel somewhere in New England. It is the day of the presentation of the oral book reports in the Literature class. Simon is the first volunteer to display his knowledge of his own selected book to the class.

"I read said book and saw that it definitely has a meaning that penetrates beneath its surface. To see this hidden meaning, one must read between the lines. As an experiment, I recently asked one of my friends, who chose to remain anonymous, to write for me a report on this book which I could use

instead of mine. This person wrote the following.

" 'This book, written in the early fifties shows the determination and passion of the Cuban fishermen. It tells us that they have big fish in the Gulf of Mexico, related to the marlin, *Makaira nigricans*. This book shows us how determined these fish are, and their total domination over others. It also shows that they are not strong for an old-timer can even reel them in.'

"Now I know what you are thinking right now. We've all read this book at one time in our lives, and we all know that this interpretation is utterly absurd. What is wrong with it? Let's examine it. First, it does not tell us of 'the determination and passion of the Cuban fishermen'. The fisherman in this story, Santiago, is not one man, but a representation of our whole human race. He is personifying all of our persistence, and how it can overcome the strong forces of nature. Next, they do not have 'big fish in the Gulf of Mexico' per se, but the marlin in this story is the embodiment of the great and awesome forces of nature--"

"That's very good Simon," the teacher responded. "You don't need to continue any farther."

"Thank you."

Simon slowly travelled to his seat with his head raised high, his shoulders back, a smile on his face. Beneath that façade of his three piece tweed suit there was a person who had just been lifted out of a nervous existence to one of serenity and confidence; he had so impressed the teacher that he did not need to finish his report. "Thank God" he thought, for Simon had never read The Old Man and the Sea. He had just found some old book reviews in the

microfilms of The New York Times and constructed a report from them, of course paraphrasing. Never would he plagiarize, for he had learned that it was wrong before he found the microfilm section of the library. Of course he would have to give credit to his sources, but somehow his brilliance and perfect reports impressed the teacher so much that he never reached the end.

Simon was now sitting down in his seat, his torso still erect. He was here to portray the perfect child for the teacher, adding further to the assurance of his A.

"And by next week, class, I want you to have prepared a book report on a non-fiction book of your choice. We are out of time for today, so we will continue with our Hemingway book reports tomorrow. Class dismissed."

The students collected their books and gently, quietly slid them into their leather satchels, and quietly strolled out, giving the appearance of cats on the prowl. Throughout the school, there was silence. Here at George Washington Prep there was no need for bells. Everyone was always on time, never late, not one of the crowd in three piece suits. Everything was perfect here: the grey tweeds, the camel-hair, the suede belts, the shining leather backpacks. As one looked down the hallways, one was able to see a constantly pulsing mass of tweed flowing towards the doors, branches of a ever moving river. Within this river was Simon. One could always tell who Simon was. Always look for the one with his chin up, his back overly straight, his shoulders overly squared. One could hardly overlook one possessing such a domineering posture.

Simon strode down the halls, heading towards the door. Everyone else would move out of his way. He was the one to be; he was the model child. He

pushed open the wooden door to enter a new world of autumn, full with the brightest colors of the leaves: oranges, tans, browns, reds, yellows, and all other blends among them, all waving in synchronization with the concert of the winds of the world. The gravel paths wound their way through the throng of trees to the ancient Gothic buildings, the branches forming a covered shaded path. Simon strode down them, his penny loafers creating crinkling sounds as they packed the crushed gravel down yet further. With the rays of sunlight filtering through the leaves guiding his path, he headed towards the library of George Washington Prep.

A massive building it was, noble and domineering, its front blackened from age, wild ivy invading its sides, trying to penetrate through the old fortified walls. Simon walked up to the formidable oaken doors, not propped open, guarded by the statues of lions poised to attack from their pedestals on the sides of the stairs. He entered into the great hall of the library, its walls hidden by books. Shelves upon shelves of them, extending up into the heavens, each floor of them having a pathway for people to walk on. It was one impressive display of rings, stacked one on top of another, culminating in a dome created in the style of Florentine architecture. It did not fit with the Gothic style of the building, since the original structured steeple needed to be replaced by the Italian dean in the late thirties, so he chose to erect a replica of the dome of Florence to remind him of his home nation. Great idea, but not for the otherwise singularly Gothic style of George Washington Prep. It did, however, add to the internal grandeur of this magnificent place.

Today, Simon was here for a book, one he knew where to find. It was on

family and social problems, of which he was sure he had none. It was the reports of psychologists following in the great Freudian style, intriguing, unique, and unusual. This was the book which he would do his next report on. Why? It had analyses of every report, written by a professor at Yale, following them. Brilliant. Simon's report was right there, printed before him. If only someone had not taken it before him.

Simon mounted the spiralling stairs to reach his destination, the fourth and top floor. It was the place of the non-fiction section containing the book of his choice. This library was not arranged like the others; the books that were the least used were on the top floor so people who wanted the more useful ones did not need to climb far. Once upon a time, someone had pondered about installing an elevator, but his modern ideas would soon be discarded after he found out the price, although it would have saved Simon lots of trouble.

Simon's heels clapped the stone slabs of the stairs, echoing throughout the wide hall. It appeared that no one else was here, for he could hear no other footfalls or rustling of papers. "The librarian and his assistants must be out haggling with the dean again for more funding," Simon thought. "That's where they always are when you think you might need them."

He knew that he had reached the top floor when the steps abruptly ended, blending into a balcony of slate extending around the circumference of the hall parallel to this floor of books. One could lean over the railing and see the ground of stone, three floors below. Now, this was only about fifty feet below him, but it seemed as if it was miles to the slate floor. If one were to fall over the decorative railings, it would definitely be a painful, if not fatal, drop to

those slabs of ancient worn stone. There had never been a reason to erect safety rails here; why should they ruin the grandeur of the place? The only one who could go onto the ladders of the balconies was the librarian, so who could fall off?

Simon's footfalls echoed even further as he walked halfway around the circular balcony to reach the psychology section. He looked around himself constantly, searching for that man to come out of the silent shadows and knock him over the railing. That was the only fear that Simon ever had of this library, and it was one that would never go away. He finally reached the psychology section. He now had to scan the shelves for his book. If he only knew the name of the author...

Suddenly, he heard a rustling. He abruptly turned around, staying well to the outside of the six foot wide balcony. "Nothing is here," Simon told himself. He turned around and kept looking. A few minutes later, he heard the rustling again. He instinctively turned around once again, and saw nothing. He continued his search. There it was again! He heard a definite sound of a door this time, but from above him? There were no doors in the dome.

He looked overhead only to find something flying, falling down from the heights above. He covered his head with his hands, screaming like a coward, screaming for help. He then heard it come falling down with a clap upon the balcony beside him. Simon stopped screaming, only to hear his echo in the hall, frozen in a position of terror. He looked over at what was lying on the floor; he found a book. He became ashamed of his cowardice and stood upright once again, looking around, making sure no one saw his display. After this was satis-

fied, he bent down and picked up the book. It was titled On the Existence of Man and the Universe.

"What an unusual book! I've never seen this one before."

Simon opened up the cover to see the title pages inside.

"And even stranger yet! It has no author, no publisher, no copyright!"

Simon was confused, and yet interested. He carried the tome in his arms through the trek down the stairs to the doors, forgetting about searching for the book for which he had come. The librarian still wasn't there, so Simon just walked out.

"If they wonder where it is, they won't mind. I'll only have it for a day . . ."

...Examine your life. You will find that it is full of deception and false truths. The people around you are not what you perceive them to be. They are but mere portrayals of what the truth is. Such is the habit of man, in society showing the person that everyone wants him to be, but in private, the person whom he truly is. I call to you, this does not need to be a habit of our world. People are unscrupulous in our society. If society will transmit to them new morals and a hand of forgiveness, only then will people portray who they truly are. Once people are no longer ashamed to show who they honestly are to society, they will advance to a higher stage of peace and harmony. This harmony will be the foundation for the new world order, one of the benefits of the total world development of the Theory of Opinionated Existence. It will be one of perpetual peace and prosperity. Until then, I say, people of the world,

examine your lives. See the deceit in people around you and within yourself. Envision a world of honesty. Dream, and seek the truth within your lives...

Simon Nigaud was strolling down the one lane street, tire ruts worn into it from years of travel upon it without resurfacing. This road had no reason to be rejuvenated, for hardly anyone used it. It was the road leading to the colonial homes of Réel, each rich in tradition, each unique in character. Simon was walking along a trodden path beside it, attired in his tweed, carrying his newly found treasure chest under his arm, the book that would be the answer to his report. He did not notice the rich, vibrant colors of the leaves around him or the grey clouds looming overhead, for he was consumed by the lingering of his previous display of cowardice. Never before had he ever screamed in terror of anything, and he was determined that he never would again. What was he becoming? He did not know. On the inside, Simon was a coward. He screamed in terror many times before, not remembering any of those times. Each time, he would think he would never do so again, and then forget about his experience. He no longer remembered the time he screamed when he first entered the dark staircase of the library at George Washington Prep. He tried to forget this time, but his experience still remained poignant, the echo of his screams.

Simon turned into the driveway now, the only path to his house. He saw it once again through the trees as he had for the many years of his life spent travelling from George Washington Prep. It was a great colonial house, possessing three floors. Great trees stood in the lawn, now in their full splendor. The house was painted white on the outside, with black trim. The paint was

flaking off around some of the trim. The ivy had been meticulously trimmed so it only grasped the foundations, covering it in a mass of twisted green and red leaves and vines. Around the house there were rose bushes planted, old and gnarled in the back, but pruned with great care in the front. They would always bloom, and now, their roses of yellows and reds were fanning out into their splendor. A black car was sitting in the driveway under the covering of the extension of the front roof to protect it and the people exiting it from the elements. There were no doors to this open ended garage. It gave the sense that anyone who wanted to could drive into it. It was a house that had a character, and a history rooted in the past. No one knew it exactly anymore, but it housed one of the 'founding fathers', as rumor tells us.

Simon walked up the paved circular driveway to the front door of the house. Surrounded by the two massive columns on the sides stretching to the roof, Simon turned the key to the old rotary mechanical doorbell. Their lives may be in the age of new technologies, but they still kept the old doorbell which had been there since the door's creation.

A face peered out of a second story window of the house, a trembling hand holding open the curtains. A face with wide open eyes gazed out, surveying the area for the telltale signs of something, her face conveying both fear and anxiety for this thing to come. This woman was wearing an apron tied neatly around her waist, a white one with blue flowers. It did not have any stains on it. Her baggy white dress appeared colonial in style, apparently matching the house. It was Mathilda Nigaud, the happy housewife of the Nigaud household. She abruptly stopped gazing outwards, and it seemed as if

there was a look of relief on her face.

"Just wait a goddam minute!" she yelled from the window up above.

"Great," Simon thought. "She's in one of her moods. Why always when I get home?"

The stairs groaned in pain as Mathilda stormed down them, her feet bludgeoning the ancient wooden steps. Even when she was on the second floor, one could hear her stomping. Apparently, she was angry, and was not afraid to let the mystery person at the door know it.

"I can just see what is going to happen next," Simon thought again.

The racket was getting closer to the door now.

"Here comes the reckoning," Simon continued to think.

And then the door opened abruptly. It would have flown away if it hadn't been for its hinges of sturdy brass. A face appeared, one with apparent anger lines on the forehead right now, eyebrows tilted downwards in a foreboding manner. It was Mathilda alright, angry as ever.

"Where in the hell have you been Simon?" Mathilda roared through the open portal.

"I was at the library," Simon replied timidly, cringing at the sound of his feeble voice.

"Why in the hell were you there? You've finished your book report. It was due today!" Mathilda continued to roar.

"Yes mother. But I have another one to do for next week, and it's already Thursday. I was just getting my book—"

"Are you reading more of that heathen demonic trash that they've been

spoon-feeding you in that Literature class?"

"No Ma," Simon said in a voice that pleaded her to stop.

"Stop your goddam whining. I have enough to do around this goddam household. Cook, clean, wash, and serve. Cook clean wash and serve. Is that all there is to do with life? I suppose that you're hungry now."

"Yes, but—"

"Don't you yap to me about eating early now. I'm expecting your father back soon, and we have a special dinner planned for him. Look at yourself. You're filthy! You took a bath yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"What in the hell have you been doing all day to get you so filthy? Go upstairs now and get that mess cleaned up! And hurry; finish before your father gets here!"

Mathilda moved herself out of the doorway, allowing the now hunched over Simon to pass through. Simon passed into a new world filled with duality and false images. Simon began to ascend the stairs to the third floor where his bath was. The stairs creaked, even though he tried to climb as silently as possible as to not alert his sister to his presence, although she should probably know by now from the increased volume of his mother's screaming. Even as he ascended, he could hear his mother muttering in her angry undertones to herself:

"I never have anytime to myself."

"Goddam kids, always a hassle."

"I'm gonna leave all of ya some day. You just wait."

It was always the same to Simon. His mother was always yelling at him. He didn't know why she did. He always guessed that it was because she was alone all day, and it drove her insane. Maybe it was because his father was never home. Maybe it was because she was always chopping down the ivy from the sides of the house?

Simon continued up the stairs as he began to hear the sweeping of a broom upon the wooden floors. There was no carpeting in this house, anywhere. It was all wood tiles. Arranged in a criss-cross pattern. Alternating light, dark, light, dark. Amazing how the whole house could have been created in exactly the same pattern, monotonous yet soothing. Simon set foot upon the second floor, the floor of the rooms of his sister, his parents, and the main bathroom. He decided for a moment to walk down the hall leading to his sister's room to determine whether he would be bothered during this night or not.

The hallway was rectangular, possessing clearly defined corners and edges. There was no light in the hallway, partly because the ceiling was so close to a closet on the third floor that it became impossible to install lighting when the house was modernized. There were no doors leading from it except for the one at the end, the portal to the bedroom of Simon's sister. Simon walked lightly, not wanting to disturb his sister from fear of having her lash out at him once again. As he approached the end, he was able to see the light trickling out from a crack in her door. He peered into it, and there she was, sleeping on her bed

Mary Nigaud was her name. She was an unusual girl, about three years older than Simon. She had never gotten a job or even gone to a college. She

said that she wanted to stay home and help the family. "What an excuse," was always Simon's reaction. "I know better than her. I'm smarter. I'm going to get a job and get away from this town of Réel, and even away from New England. I'm going to possess more money than anyone, and people will need to ask me to do them favors." Maybe so with Simon, but not with Mary. She envisioned only the short future, furthering her cause of the increasing importance of women. Simon feared Mary. Mary was even more dominant over him than his mother. Simon did not like anyone ruling over him. Simon would be his own person, his own man. He would not be subservient to anyone; he would have the world to be subservient to him.

Mary was sleeping in a pair of slacks and one of her father's dress shirts. Never would she wear a dress to any event. She would never be seen in pink or purple or any of the traditional feminine colors. She would never don an apron or lift a finger to help her mother. She existed here, waiting for the right time to strike out to fulfill her goal, the feminist domination of the world. Simon did not think that this day would ever come. It was too radical for his time. Her persistence, however, scared Simon, and for many good reasons. She would eliminate anyone who stood in her way, including Simon.

Simon did not wake her, fortunately. He tiptoed back along the dark hallway to reach the stairs once again. He resumed his climb. The stairs once again groaned their disapproval of the necessity of exerting themselves. Soon, however, Simon reached the third floor, his resting place, his true home. What was in the rest of the house did not matter to him, it was only what was up here that was valuable. He went into his room and shut the door. Inside of his

room were a bed with red covers and a hard mattress. The bedframe was made of shiny brass of the color that would stick out in any type of room, and the red plaid covers did not match the style of the whole house. On the opposite wall was an oaken rolltop desk, concealing its contents well from the outside world. No one but Simon knew what was in it. The only other item of furniture in this otherwise barren room was a bookcase, filled with various books, all appearing to be old in both subject and construction. The floor of his room was still wooden, in the same perpendicular crossing pattern as the rest of the house. His room was connected to a separate bathroom up here by a door, one containing a bath, sink and toilet, fully sufficient to handle the needs of at least two people. Why it had been constructed here, he did not know. His room also contained a small closet, which contained nothing else but more three piece tweed suits, some briefs, some socks, and ties for various occasions. Besides from this room, there were no other rooms on the third floor, and there were no other floors higher. The rest was just a big circular room without windows, dark and foreboding. But not Simon's room, for it had a window facing out upon the east, where he could catch the rays of the rising sun.

Simon walked over to his bed, dragging his feet as he went. He fell down on it and dropped the book which he had under his arm this whole time into the middle of the mattress. He removed his shoes and placed them right beside the leg of the bed closest to the end. His shoes were always found here, placed side by side. He removed his jacket and folded it neatly, placing it onto the bed. He took off his dress shirt, and placed it also folded neatly right beside it. He removed his pants, folded them, and placed them so they were

directly on top of his jacket, leaving only the collar of the jacket visible. He removed his socks and folded them one inside of the other, placing them right over his shoes. He then removed his briefs and folded them, placing them to the side of his jacket and pants. He then entered the bathroom to clean up.

He turned on the hot faucet to the tub, one full turn. He then turned the cold faucet, one half turn. He went to his pile of washcloths on the floor and took one, draping it over the side of the tub not next to the wall. He then took one of the towels off from the pile on the farthest side of the bathroom, placing it in the manner of a welcome mat beside the tub so that the washcloth was located above the direct center of it. He then waited until the tub was half full.

The tub was one of the old fashioned kinds, standing up on four brass legs, its water knobs looking like something out of an industrial plant, its faucet appearing like a sewage drainage pipe. Upon the farthest leg was one spot of green, right on the inside, hidden from the view of the casual observer, or even in fact, one of the most careful of observers, Simon. It was a small vine of ivy, poking its way through the wooden floor.

The tub soon became half full. Simultaneously, Simon shut off the water faucets. The water would be the perfect temperature for him. He stepped in, slowly lowering his whole body into the water. He would then lather his arms, and then work from his neck down. This was his method for bathing. Always the same. A procedure. As he was finishing his right leg, he heard a somewhat muffled voice yell enthusiastically up from the depths of the house:

"Simon! I'm home!"

It was the voice of none other than the great Thomas Nigaud.

It was the voice of none other than the great father of Simon.

Simon leaped out of the tub onto the towel and proceeded to dry himself off, following the same pattern in which he would lather himself. He then walked back out to his room and proceeded to get dressed in his three piece suit that he had worn to school. As he was doing so, he heard the familiar creaking of the stairs. Someone knocked on his door and asked politely through it, "Can you get ready for our dinner now?" It was his mother.

"Amazing," Simon said. "Yelling and complaining for one minute and then the next, completely calm and composed. How does she do it?"

A secret that would not easily be told.

Simon continued to ready himself and soon he too was walking back down the stairs towards the dining room. Past the creaking stairs, he reached the first floor. He then entered the dining room, a hall in comparison to the other rooms of the house. There was a great round table in the center of it, and the family sat around it, quartering it into four sections. Sister sat across from brother, wife sat across from husband. The structure of this fashion of dining was so rigid that it was hard for normal people not to notice, but the Nigauds were use to it. As they sat down, Simon once again looked at his father.

Thomas was a composed man, always in power over everyone around him. He was the owner of a successful business that had made him and his family rich. He was away from the house most of the week and did not see Simon much. He always wore a black three piece suit, and his face always bore

a jolly smile and rosy cheeks, a face that said "friendship". He always impressed everyone around him, from the members of his family to mere strangers. He was what Simon thought to be the model working man of New England, but was still annoyed with his father. It was for different many reasons, but mainly because he was never around when Simon wanted to participate in activities with him. He never was and he never had been, but worse, he thought that he and Simon did play together. He always thought they played baseball every day. "Funny that he could think this," Simon thought. "He never sees me except for at the dinner table."

When Simon walked in, his father stood up, came over to Simon, and pulled out Simon's chair. He patted Simon on the back and said in a friendly yet powerful tone:

"How are you doing son?"

He laughed his cheerful laugh.

"Did you play baseball again today? Mom is always telling me how much you enjoy it! I used to play baseball when I was a kid . . ."

He would then reminisce about his childhood. "It was always the same with him," Simon would think as he heard the same story over and over again. "He thinks he knows me, but he doesn't."

Thomas would always talk to Simon this way. He would inquire about how his 'friends' were, knowing the names of only those whom Simon had become enemies with years back. Thomas would talk about Simon's school subjects, the ones of the year before. He would ask of his teacher of first grade. He would always ask if he read any new books, or what he thought of

the World Series.

After all of the stories were passed, Mary would come down to the table. She wore the same old pants and plaid work shirt that she wore every day, tattered and dirty.

"Are we having the same thing for dinner today Dad?"

"I think we are!"

He would again laugh his cheerful laugh.

"Why can't I wear a suit to dinner like you?"

"Because you're a girl! Do I have to tell you that every time we eat?"

"But there's no difference between us!"

The conversation would then die down as a stalemate, each having a comment worthy of fighting the others. It was only at this point that she would address Simon, starting one of the most dreaded times of his life.

"Where were you today?" Mary inquired in a snotty tone.

"I was at the library."

"Doing what?"

"Looking for a book."

"Nothing useful?"

"No."

"That's the way all men are. They cannot do anything useful. Always wasting their time on things like the persistence of knowledge and memorizing the scores of all of the baseball games of the past century. Do you ever do anything to help us women? No! You never lift a finger to help wash the dishes or clean the house or pick up your clothes! Not a single finger! Mom and I

slave here in the house all day, for you men to come here and do what? Make it a mess for us to do nothing but clean up again! You cannot do anything right! That's why when us women rule the country and you find yourselves inferior, you won't know that anything happened. Males! Ha! Why I think that you men--"

"Stop it Mary," Thomas would interject in a strong tone. "It's not polite to speak of your elders that way. Mathilda! MATHILDA!"

"Yes?" a polite distant voice asked.

"Will you bring out our dinner now?"

"Okay," Mathilda said in a subservient voice.

Mathilda would then come out wearing a bright pastel dress, clean and proper. She would put everything out on the table and then sit down, and we would all say our grace together out loud. We would then eat our supper, usually a chicken or turkey with stuffing, and some type of vegetable. Wild turkeys were plenty in the town of Réel, and we did not hesitate to catch and eat them.

After dinner, Simon went back up to his room to work on his schoolwork, Mary went back to her room to sleep and plan her new country, Mathilda went to wash the dishes, and Thomas went to read the paper. Whatever Thomas asked for, Mathilda would get it for him. It all seemed so perfect. It was too perfect.

Simon reentered his room after the tedious ascent of the stairs. He flopped down on the bed. He reached out and grabbed the book on it, On the Existence of Man and the Universe. Simon then started to read. What he would read would change his entire life.

...Once one realizes the power that the Theory of Opinionated Existence gives, one must know that this power must not be abused. Be warned that the one who wills himself out of existence will no longer exist. The power that you now have is great. You can make a better world for society, or you can destroy it through greed and violence. Be aware of what you get rid of, for the converse of the Theory of Opinionated Existence is not truth. Once gone, always gone. No longer will it be in your world, and no more will you be able to create it. Take this into consideration and think of what it is you may destroy. Life is a gamble, and your decisions will now not only affect yourself, but also everyone around you. Take heed with your new power and use it well and use it to profit from life as have I...

Simon awoke abruptly. The sun was shining through the east window of his bedroom. The ivy was still creeping up the sides of the house. The book he had been reading was open, face down upon his chest. He was on the last page, and must have dozed off while reading it. He was immediately hearing the sound of the loud yelling of a quarrel gone out of hand:

"Why in the hell do you have to leave?"

"I have work Mathilda. You know that. How do you expect to feed the family? Go to the South and work on a plantation? It won't work!"

"Well what in the hell am I supposed to do? Hum showtunes?"

"Here's what you should do. I want you to clean the house for me, make sure that we have something else besides turkey for dinner, go out and buy me

some tobacco for my pipe, sew up the hole in my slippers, find my bathrobe—
— ”

“What in the hell about me?”

“Why, what’s wrong with you doing work for me?!”

“I want to be my own goddam person for chrissake! Every single day, its ‘Mathilda this for me’, ‘Mathilda that for me’. I never do a single goddam thing for myself! And you ask why I am not happy! I have no life! I am sick and tired of doing everything for you!”

“Now you just calm down. Let’s be rational about this,” Thomas said in a calmer voice.

“Rational? You call me being your slave rational? You know what I am going to do? You won’t find me in this house by the end of the day! I’m not going to be here! I’m going to gather up my junk and leave! How do you like that, my perfect husband?”

“I’m just so annoyed with them,” Simon thought. “I’ll go down there and ask them to stop.”

Simon got out from under his sheets and donned his slippers. He then started down the stairs. Even as he was plodding down them in a half awak-ened trance, he could still hear his parents arguing.

“Well, whatever you do, you better not take anything belonging to me, or else I’ll see you in court!”

“You selfish pig! After everything I have done for you, I would not receive a penny in return!”

“I gave you lodging and I took excellent care of our children.”

"Correction, Thomas. MY children. I gave birth to them, not you. I am the one who is home to take care of them. I am the one who opens the door and greets them. I am the one who feeds them. I am the one who owns them. I'm taking them with me."

"Where will you go, you hag! You'll find nowhere to stay! Your parents are dead, you have no friends. What will you do? Starve to death and take our-your-children with you?"

"How could you—"

All of a sudden, they turned and saw Simon on the stairs.

"Oh my God," Mathilda exclaimed in a soft whispering tone, as if she was confessing to her worst crimes. "It's Simon. What will we do?"

"Don't worry," Thomas said reassuringly. "I'll fix it."

"Simon! Nice to see you again!" Thomas said with enthusiasm.

"Don't try to fool me. I know what you were doing. You two are going to break up and drag my life down into the dirt with you."

"We were doing nothing of the sort Simon," Mathilda said weakly. "We were merely debating what amount of money your father was getting this week. Isn't that right?"

Mathilda poked Thomas with her pointer finger.

"That's right. Only discussing money."

"It's always the same, you disillusioned fool. You don't love me, you don't know me. You don't even know what subjects I'm taking in school! Mother, you selfish individualistic hag. You don't care about me. You only care about what you can accomplish for yourself. You never want to say anything,

so you get out all of your anger on me. You know what, I wish you two hypocritical people would just get out of my life—"

All of a sudden, Simon saw his parents fade, and then he saw nothing.

"What the he—"

Then Simon remembered.

Look closely, for if I do not want you to exist any longer, I can think you will not exist, changing my opinion of your existence, and therefore, to me you will not exist.

"Mom! Dad! Mom, Dad?"

"Oh my God. I don't have my parents anymore."

Be aware of what you get rid of, for the converse of the Theory of Opinionated Existence is not true. Once gone, always gone.

"I can't get them back anymore. They're gone. What have I done?"

Simon's parents watched in astonishment as he called their names. Simon looked right past them in their world, not seeing them. What lunacy is this?

"Simon?" Mathilda asked.

"Simon! SIMON!"

"He doesn't hear you, Mathilda. He can't."

"Why Thomas?" Mathilda inquired hysterically. "What in the hell have you done to my child?"

"I haven't done anything, and you haven't done anything. Simon has done this to himself. I just hope he can snap out of it."

They followed Simon, who did not even recognize that they existed.

Simon walked up the stairs heading up to his room. During the argument, Mary had been awakened by the constant yelling and screaming, and started to demand why.

"Simon, you lousy troublemaker. What have you done wrong now? See, it's always you boys ruining everything. See? Even Mom and Dad can't sleep with this racket going on. One day—"

"Shut your mouth. I've had enough for one day."

All of a sudden, there was no voice of Mary to be heard. Her lips moved, but no sound came out. Mary stopped, and then appeared to scream, but no sound came out. She looked at Simon, her eyes full of terror and bewilderment. She needed no voice to convey to Simon what she was feeling.

"Oh my God. I've done it again."

Simon ran over to Mary and embraced her, stroking her hair, trying to comfort her.

"What have I done? First my parents and now you!"

Silently, Mary started to cry.

"I'm sorry Mary. I wish this had never happened to you. I wish that you weren't here to go through with this."

Mary disappeared from his arms, and Simon went crashing to the floor. He got up screaming.

"NO! I DIDN'T MEAN IT! BRING HER BACK! BRING HER BACK!"

Simon waited, and then dropped to his knees and started to cry.

"What am I doing here, why has this happened? I'm perfect, my family is perfect, everyone else in my life was perfect. What could have caused this?"

Simon looked up, with fires of revenge burning in the back of his eyes.

"The book! The confounded book! I'll destroy it so it can never destroy anyone's life any more."

Simon bolted up the stairs and into his room.

"Book, book, book, book," he muttered.

"Here!"

He picked the book up off of the floor.

"I'll rip it apart!"

Simon made a ripping motion with the book, but it would not work.

What truths are here are the basic truths which we are born with, which cannot be destroyed.

"NO!"

"How can I get rid of this book?"

All of a sudden, his face lit up.

"The library!"

Simon bolted down the stairs and out the front door, running frantically towards the campus of George Washington Prep. He hardly had any time to notice the ivy that had consumed the sides of his house.

Simon exerted himself to reach the library of the campus. He slammed the door open and hurried up the stone stairs. In the middle of the climb, Simon fell, knocking his chin against the steps. A cut opened on his face, bleeding profusely. Simon did not notice it, and just kept running on.

He reached the fourth floor balcony and got on it. He ran around to the center and held up the book to the dome and the light shining down from it.

He then yelled out at the top of his lungs into the cavernous aperture above his head.

"Take the book! Take the book you mysterious power! Abolish it from the Earth! No one else should read this ever! No one else should possess its deep powers!"

Nothing happened.

"TAKE IT! TAKE IT NOW!"

Nothing happened.

Simon stood there, hearing his echo.

"I wish I was never here to read this infernal book."

And that was the end.

Everything was black.

Simon's parents were there beside him the whole time, running with him, finding where he would go. They were yelling in his ears, but Simon could not hear them. They did not know what was wrong. They were in the library when he decided upon his final opinion, the opinion that he never should have existed. They were now on their knees on the slate floor of a fourth floor balcony in the library at George Washington Prep, beside a catatonic young boy which had been the pride of their life, now not responding to anything, not moving, only breathing slowly enough to stay alive.

Mary was back at the Nigaud's house, lying on the floor, fainted. When Simon had attacked her for no apparent reason, she was hit on the head and dazed. She was now unconscious. She would never again knock the power of

men.

The book had never existed, except in the mind of one Simon Nigaud. In his other world in the town of Réel, somewhere in New England, a book burst into flames and its shadow floated up into the center of a Florentine dome, and disappeared.

Outside, all of the leaves of fall—the tan ones, the red ones, the orange ones, the yellow ones, the brown ones, and all the ones inbetween—all fell at once upon the ground, apparently by the will of some supernatural power. The ground was carpeted by fresh leaves.

A mysterious outburst of wild ivy broke out upon the houses and buildings in Réel that day, covering their outsides. The ivy penetrated into the foundations of the library that day. And the gnarled vines made it impossible to enter. It would take thirty minutes to hack their stony vines away from the doorway.

Three days later, the library collapsed for no reason. All of the books were lost, the Florentine dome splitting into its individual bricks, the slate floors becoming stones once again. The library has not been rebuilt to this day.

The Nigaud family would resolve its differences and reveal who they truly were to each other, but Simon would never talk or move again. He was assigned to a mental hospital, where he still remains motionless to this day.

And in the town of Réel, the wild turkeys are still plentiful, and are eaten still to this day.

Synopsis of Allegorical Meaning and Symbolism of Midas

At the request of several trial readers, a page was asked for to explain all of the symbolism apparent in this short story. All that I can say is that I prefer people to find it for themselves, for each of us sees something different. I, however, will present what I tried to represent in my story.

This story is an allegory about our society's models of a perfect family and a perfect life. The story is showing us how we try to conform to these standards, which are not the true person we are. As we try to exist as both one of these perfect people and as an individual, a duality is formed that can be one of the disasters of a family. I try to portray this in an unusual manner, trying to make it noticeable and trying to show people that they should change, and that it is not only after a great disaster when they should change. The story also shows us the recurring duality of today's person in today's society, surfacing in many characters—Simon, Mathilda, Thomas—as it is found in many people in our lives, trying to be who society wants them to be in the outside world, but in their private world, are a totally different person.

Symbolism. A rich and powerful tool. A sometimes hidden tool. Midas is a virtual string of continuous symbolism representing life and the role of the characters in the short story. First, I will discuss the symbolism that I see in the names used in the story. Some of the names in this story come directly from French, and they are as follows, with their translations: nigaud—simpleton, réel—reality. Nigaud is chosen for the last name of this imaginary family because they do not yet know the truths about life and what types of people they truly are. Réel is the name of the town, portraying that people should not

escape into their fantasy worlds of what they want to become, but rather face reality. The story is set in New England, the name of the prep school is George Washington Prep, and the colonial house belonged to one of the founding fathers to all represent that here was the foundations of society, with these places and people being the origins of American society. The novel's author is Hemingway because in the eyes of most, he is one of the greatest writers of the English language, forming the foundation for many courses of study and different styles of writing. Not only the names in this story are symbols, but also many objects.

Simon is dressed in tweed to represent the conflict in his duality, from being the dominant, intelligent role model in school to being the ruled over, cowardly child at home. A tweed is a combination of light and dark threads, which I view as the two concepts of good and evil nature, in a crossing pattern, representing the conflict within himself. In such the same manner, the tiling of the Nigaud house is light and dark wood in a crossing pattern, representing the duality of everyone in the household which would tear it apart. The library symbolizes the structure of life itself. Its grandeur on the inside represents the glory of life in all of its mysterious wonder. The floors of the library are constructed of slate, a stone that is very natural, and one that can be broken with some force, indicating that life is fragile. There is no elevator, because the stairs represent the climbing upon knowledge and understanding of life. The more obscure subjects like philosophy were on the top floor of the library, forming the greatest wisdom of the human race which is difficult to achieve. There are no protective rails because if one falls off from one of the tiers of his

life, there is no one there to protect you. You must work to reach the point where you were. The dome is in the Florentine style to represent the heavens, above the drastically different Gothic style of the annals of human knowledge. There are no stairs leading to it because the ascent of man to a place higher than life cannot be accomplished by mortal means. The doors are guarded by lions, the symbol of fortitude, keeping evil out. The wild vines represent evil itself, trying to penetrate through the walls of the library, of life, to destroy it. Similarly, the ivy grows on all of the buildings in the town of Réel, showing us that we cannot escape from evil. The turkeys of the town represent the people who believe everything that society teaches them. They run free in reality, and are plentiful for the daring leaders to prey on and use as nourishment for furthering their plan. This is the meaning of the last sentence, showing that there are not many who realize that being themselves everywhere is good. The leaves of autumn represent all of our changing ideas, goals, and concepts. At the end of the story, when they all fall, it shows a time of renewal, trying to say that people, or at least those in the story, were forming themselves anew, seeing some of their faults. There are still more symbols in this story. See if you can find them for yourself. I also feel that the characters of this story represent four negative qualities of human nature.

Simon represents our vain feelings of ourselves and our lives. He is always saying that he is virtually perfect, and can do nothing wrong. He gives us the sense that his life at home is without its problems, which definitely exist. Subconsciously, he tries to hide them by portraying a perfect false image of himself to everyone at George Washington Prep. Mathilda represents the

human quality of individualism. She is in the story to illustrate that to work as a unit, one cannot have these feelings of being your own self. One must be ready to work to help the group for some goal, not interested in our own selfish desires. Mary represents the rebellious nature of all of us, as well as foolhardy determination. Mary does not conform to the standards of society with her feminist views. However, she is kept in line with the normal society by her father. She represents our foolhardy determination because she does nothing concrete to fulfill her goals or try to show them to others, for she is always submitting to her father's will. Thomas represents denial to me. He seems to know that he does not see his son, but still tries to portray that he does. Thomas denies it, and attempts to be friends with Simon, but they turn out to be different, and their friendship will not work out. His denial of not being a good father would lead to the argument with Mathilda, which was also caused by her individualism.

After all this, people still wonder why the title of Midas. Simple. Remember the story of King Midas and his touch of gold? The word 'Midas' is used to evoke that feeling of selfishness, greed, and not thinking before one acts (remember he turns his daughter mistakenly into gold). Such a person is Simon to me, as even though he did exist in our reality, in his fantasy, he acted with selfishness and without any pretense of what he would do, not thinking about the consequences of his actions.

To those of you who are still reading this, I say that if you have time, keep these symbols in mind and reread the story. A much more rewarding experience can be had, one that may even teach you about your own life, and

cause you to look and discover something new.

Note: The book in the story On the Existance of Man is not a true book, but one that I wrote within the story. Don't look for it in your local library. It isn't there.

Portrait of Fear

PORTRAIT OF FEAR

The darkness.

It's right here.

It's all around me, surrounding me, engulfing me, encasing me.

It's a tone, a devil's hell.

It's touching me, caressing me!

Get it off me!

Leave me!

It won't go away. Oh dark, vile creature, begone!

Such prophecies won't work in here. I know it. I've tried.

Get it off me!

How you cling to everything around me, no exceptions to it. Even the cold stone underneath my hands is prone.

Ouch!

Get away from me, you vile barriers of rock!

Oh my God! The walls, they're closing in on me! They're falling! I can hear them crashing behind me. Stop! The darkness, the rock!

Where is he now? If I stay silent, maybe he can't find me. He's in here, behind me, chasing me. I hear his breathing, echoing off the walls.

They're closing in on me! I can't stop them, I can't push hard enough! Help me! He's coming for me! Help me! HELP!

On no! The rocks, they're slipping out from underneath me! My feet, they're floating away! I can't hold on any longer! I'm falling! The tunnel, it's gone! What is happening to me?! What?! WHAT?! HELP ME!

I HEAR HIS BREATHING BEHIND ME!

The hole, does it continue on?

HELP ME!

I'M SURROUNDED BY THE DARK!

THE ROCKS!

HE'S RIGHT BEHIND ME NOW!

HELP!

* * *

Oh my God, what happened to me?

Wet, it's wet. . .

I still can't see through the dark.

Oh God, why can't you let me die, let it end here in this puddle.

Even though it's dark, I can still feel the world spinning, twisting, the vertigo still here in the dark. Sickening me.

Get away from me!

Where am I? What happened?

...

Oh my God!

He's still after me!

I've got to get out of here, I've got to escape!

I must run, but can I even stand in-

* * *

I'm still here.

The walls are still here.

This puddle is still here.

I CAN FEEL IT!
HIS HANDS!
THEY'RE SO COLD!
SO COLD!
I CAN FEEL HIS BREATH UPON MY FACE!
WHAT'S HAPPENING!
HIS LIPS!
SO COLD!
SO LIFELESS!
SO INHUMAN!
IT'S SO COLD!
WHAT'S HE DOING?
HE'S PICKING ME UP!
LIFTING ME!
OH MY GOD!
WHAT'S HE DOING TO ME?
MY NECK!
MY NECK!
OUAGGHH!

* * *

It's ~~here~~ still.
It's around me.
Right here.
The darkness. . .
The darkness. . .

The darkness is still here.

HE is still here.

I can't see him, but I can hear him.

Breathing.

Waiting.

...

It's hopeless.

Why should I flee any longer, I know I can't escape this place.

The mocking water.

The jeering walls.

The snickering darkness.

I'll just wait right here.

Right here.

...

Oh my God!

His breathing!

It's getting louder!

It's getting faster!

HE'S GETTING CLOSER!

Oh my God!

HELP ME!

I CAN'T SEE HIM!

I CAN'T SEE THE WALLS OF THIS JAIL!

I CAN'T MOVE!

OH GOD!

HIS BREATH!

I CAN FEEL IT!

The darkness. . .

The darkness. . .

*A Tale In
Jeealmuhtree*

A TALE IN JEEALMUHTREE

I

Once upon a time in the not so faraway Third Dominion of the land of Jeealmuhtree, there lived two great friends, Spheri and Cubi. Spheri and Cubi lived on the same line in the Third Dominion, perpendicular to one another. They would constantly play with one another, sliding down hills, balancing on planes. So their youth was spent, gallivanting and frolicking all about their line in the Third Dominion, not a care in the world. Their parents would always tell them that their youth wouldn't last forever, but to Spheri and Cubi, forever would never come. But in the Third Dominion, forever came, and Spheri and Cubi had to go to the School of Higher Volume.

In the School of Higher Volume, Spheri and Cubi had their minds opened to all of the wonders of the Third Dominion. They learned of the Land of Third where their lived a strange race of people called Cones and Pyramids. They learned of the Land of Four where there lived a seclusive race of the Pyramids, the Tetrahedrons. They learned of the Land of Poly, where there lived multitudes of unusual people, the most numerous being the Dodecahedrons and Icosohedrons. They learned of the faraway Land of Combo, where all of the inhabitants would meld to form one. Such strange lands there were in the Third Dominion, but where did Spheri and Cubi live?

They were told that they lived in the Land of Regular. In the Land of Regular, every inhabitant had six same sides, no more, no less. In the Land of

Regular, everyone of the same age had the same volume as everyone else of their age. Spheri wondered about this and pondered it in his little mind. He wondered if he had six same sides. He knew Cubi did, and when he looked around him, all of the other students in the School of Higher Volume had six sides too. Spheri couldn't understand it, because it looked as if he had no sides whatsoever. As he learned about yet more distant lands, he could not help wondering how many sides he had. The question kept gnawing away at his little brain.

One day, Spheri rolled up to the professor after class.

"Professor," Spheri quizzically asked, "how many sides do I have?"

The professor looked at Spheri in amazement. He had never seen a person like Spheri before.

"I. . ." the professor started, "really don't know."

"Don't I have six sides, like everyone else here in the Land of Regular, like you said?" Spheri desperately asked.

"I guess that sounds good, but I still repeat that I've never seen one like you before," the professor said.

Spheri, not satisfied but feeling that the professor's answer was the best he would get, rolled out of the School of Higher Volume into the only world he ever knew, the Land of Regular. In the school yard, he saw Cubi and his new six-sided friends playing. He asked Cubi if he could join in the fun. Cubi said that it would be fine, and Spheri rolled over to them.

Cubi and his friends were making stacks of themselves, one on top of another, trying to form the biggest cube that would ever be seen in the Land of

Regular. Every one of them jumped atop another and slid into place, and everyone fit on top of everyone else perfectly. All of them had stacked themselves, and there was only one empty space left. Cubi yelled down to Spheri to jump on up to finish their cube. Spheri jumped up, but he couldn't fit into the hole; Spheri just rolled off. Cubi told him to try again, so Spheri jumped again, and rolled off again. All of Cubi's friends laughed and jeered because Spheri couldn't fit. Spheri only rolled slowly away in shame as the laughs continued.

As he rolled slowly down the line to his house, Spheri could only wonder at what he was. Spheri could not find the answer at the School of Higher Volume. Where would Spheri go? His parents both had six sides, he was sure of that. Where would he find someone like him?

As he thought, Cubi slowly slid up to him. Cubi asked why Spheri couldn't fit.

"Because I don't have six sides," Spheri said.

"Of course you do," Cubi said. "You have to because you live in the Land of Regular. The professor said that everyone here has six sides!"

"But I asked him, Cubi. He told me he's never seen anyone like me, not even in his books!"

Cubi thought about this for a while, and then found the solution.

"Maybe there's a land filled with people like you! We haven't learned everything yet Spheri."

"Cubi, not even the professor had ever seen one like me!"

"Well, maybe there is even a higher volume that the professor doesn't have."

Spheri stopped and rolled around to face Cubi. He was amazed! Spheri could not even think of someone with a higher volume than the professor.

"Spheri," Cubi said, "my friends will probably only laugh at you again. Maybe you can find the One of Greatest Volume somewhere else?"

Spheri stopped and thought about Cubi's comment.

"Yes. That is a good idea. The One of Greatest Volume must know how many sides I have."

Spheri then rolled down the line towards his house, and as he disappeared, Cubi said "See you tomorrow" and slid off.

The next day when Cubi went to school, he didn't see Spheri at all. The night before, Spheri had gathered all of his belongings. Before the sun rose, Spheri set off out of the Land of Regular on a search for the One of Greatest Volume.

II

Spheri was tirelessly rolling across the planes of the Third Dominion. He was now outside the borders of the Land of Regular and inside of the Irrational Lands. The Irrational Lands were the forbidden lanes of the Third Dominion, separating all of the inhabited Lands. Here, there lived the unusual exiles of the Second Dominion of the land of Jeealmuhtree, the misfits or the useless, as Spheri had heard them described by others. Here in the Third Dominion they just fluttered about, having no control over their destination.

Spheri watched the inhabitants of the Irrational Lands with amazement.

They had not studied the Irrational Lands in the School of Higher Volume. Spheri's parents mentioned these things once and said that they couldn't think here in the Third Dominion and were useless. That was the reason why they had been removed from the inhabited Lands. But every now and then, some would accidentally flutter into the inhabited Lands and had to be removed before they caused any trouble. Spheri's parents remembered having to do that once, and said that they were the hardest things to catch because they would always slide off the hunter's faces. Spheri had never actually seen one of these things that his parents told him about, and now that he saw them, he watched them with wonder. They looked like the sides of all of the Third Dominion inhabitants, but all split apart. There were some that looked like parts of the ethnocentric Tetrahedrons, some like sides of the unusual Dodecahedrons and other inhabitants of the Land of Poly, and even some that looked like a side of one of the multiple inhabitants of the Land of Combo, and yet some that looked like the bottom of the unusual Cones of the Land of Third, but Spheri saw none that looked like a part of him. Spheri searched and searched for one, but there was none to be found.

"Does this mean that I don't have any sides?" Spheri asked himself. "Am I the only one in the Third Dominion who has no sides?"

Spheri then rolled to the side of the road, sat down, and started to weep. Spheri didn't want to be the only one without sides.

"Why are you crying?" a soft voice asked.

Spheri stopped crying and looked around, puzzled. There was no one else there.

"Why are you crying?" the soft voice asked again.

"Who are you? Where are you?" Spheri asked.

"I'm right in front of you, by the road."

Spheri looked to the road, but he only saw one of the Second Dominion exiles that looked like part of one of the Tetrahedrons floating in front of him.

"Where are you?" Spheri asked again.

"I told you, I'm right in front of you by the road!" the soft voice said, annoyed.

Spheri looked by the road and again saw only the floating thing. Spheri didn't think they could talk, but then again . . .

"Is that you talking?" Spheri asked the floating thing.

"Yes, it's me," it said.

"Who are you?" Spheri asked.

"I'm Triangle," the thing said. "I come from the Second Dominion."

"Why do you just float about?"

"I don't feel like exerting myself. I'm here on vacation."

"Triangle, you mean, you weren't . . . exiled?"

"No. Why would you think a thing like that?"

"Well, no one knew that you were . . . alive."

"We don't talk much. We don't like to talk to strangers here in this land. It's a great spot for us, though. We don't have to exert ourselves at all to move about."

"I wish I could see the Second Dominion. Maybe there's someone like me there."

"No, I've never seen anyone like you before."

"Has anyone? No one looks like me. They all have sides. I don't."

"So that's why you were crying . . . what's your name?" Triangle asked.

"Spheri," he said between sobs.

"Why that's an unusual name."

"I'm looking for others like me Triangle, so I need to find out how many sides I have, but it looks like I have none."

"You should ask a wise man, Spheri. I heard someone searching for a wise one in your Dominion once. I think they were muttering about the 'One of Greatest' . . . what was the word--"

"Volume?"

"Yeah, that's what it was! 'The One of Greatest Volume'."

"Which way did he go?" Spheri asked excitedly.

"He went that way, to a place called the Land of Four . . ."

"Thanks Triangle, you just solved my problem!"

"Glad I could help, Spheri!"

Spheri rolled down the line through the Irrational Lands, and started in the direction that Triangle had pointed him, towards the Land of Four.

"Don't forget me Spheri!" Triangle yelled as Spheri rolled away.

"I won't!" Spheri yelled back.

Spheri sped along, heading towards his answer in the Land of Four.

Spheri was rolling across the planes of the Irrational Lands towards the Land of Four, eager to find the One of Greatest Volume. He was happily speeding along, looking at the Second Dominion vacationers floating around him, wondering if any more would talk to him.

"Halt!" a loud voice commanded.

Spheri stopped abruptly, startled. He looked upwards, and there it was! It was a towering thing with sides that looked like Triangle, with all equal sides.

"I've seen someone like you before, stranger," Spheri said to him.

The stranger laughed a deep bellowing laugh.

"You couldn't possibly have!" the stranger said, continuing to laugh. "We never leave this place!"

"Our professor taught us about you. You must be one of the Tetrahedrons!"

As Spheri said this, the stranger drew back, amazed.

"You know of the Tetrahedrons?" the stranger said, astounded.

"Yes, and you live in the Land of Four!"

The stranger could not believe this! No one had ever been into the Land of Four who knew that the Tetrahedrons had lived there.

"How do you know this, little one?" the stranger asked.

"I learned it in school," Spheri said, "the School of Higher Volume."

"The School of Higher Volume, did you say?"

"That's it!"

The stranger was amazed at this, but Spheri couldn't understand why. Spheri had always known about the School of Higher Volume, and it wasn't any-

thing special to him.

"Come with me, little one," the stranger said.

Spheri, curious about this new land, gleefully followed. The stranger took Spheri willingly into the Land of Four. Spheri looked about in amazement! Everyone here was a Tetrahedron, with no different variations. Their houses even looked like Tetrahedrons. They also moved about in a funny way. The Tetrahedrons would flip onto one of their sides that looked like Triangle, and then clumsily try to roll about. Spheri thought that their method of moving was silly. It took the Tetrahedrons longer to change their directions to go straight than it took Spheri to start to walk backwards. Spheri saw the little children, clumsily trying to move about like their Tetrahedron parents.

The stranger klunked on in silence, not saying a word. Spheri followed him slowly, eager to see if the stranger was taking him to the One of Greatest Volume. They kept on moving through the Land of Four for a short time, and Spheri noticed that everything appeared to be the same. Spheri was beginning to get bored with this silent uninteresting Land of Four when all of a sudden, he saw the tip of a Giant House appear in the distance.

"What's that, stranger?" Spheri asked with renewed curiosity.

"That's Giant House, little one. That's where He lives."

"The One of Greatest Volume?"

"No, He lives there."

Spheri was confused by the stranger's unusual speech. Spheri thought that surely the same language must be spoken throughout the Third Dominion.

"Who is 'He'?" Spheri asked the stranger.

"You'll see He soon enough," the stranger said, after which he was silent.

Spheri and the Tetrahedron kept walking to Giant House. As they approached, the massive, towering structure reached towards the heavens. It was the tallest thing that Spheri had ever seen! "It must be a temple," Spheri thought.

"Is that thing a temple, stranger?"

"No, it's not," the stranger replied. "He lives there."

Spheri, puzzled once again by the stranger's unusual speech decided not to ask any more questions. Giant House just continued to grow and billow like a cloud covering the sun as they walked. When they reached the foundation of Giant House, Spheri looked upwards in awe. It was a magnificent structure that looked like a Tetrahedron, white and glistening. Its point was so lofty that it was touching the sun. Spheri felt a sense of awe of the humongous structure.

"What is this thing?"

"This is the house of He, little one," the stranger cryptically replied. "He lives here in Giant House."

Spheri felt fear of this He, for if He could construct such a great structure, what would He think of him, a little, different, ignorant Spheri? The stranger knocked with his vertex on the wall of Great House, and a giant portal opened up. The stranger flipped over once again, and started to escort Spheri inside. All that was there was a blanket of darkness, covering whatever existed in this Giant House. Spheri strained to see what was in there, lit only dimly by the light from the door. All of a sudden there was a grinding sound, and as Spheri looked back to see what it was, everything went dark! The door had

been shut!

"Stranger?" Spheri asked. "STRANGER??"

The strange Tetrahedron was no longer there. Spheri trembled in fear as he stood in place, not knowing what was going to happen to him. All of a sudden, the walls of the Giant House became illuminated with a great light, blinding Spheri. As Spheri got rid of the afterimage, he saw in the center of the room a giant Tetrahedron, easily four times as large as himself. The Tetrahedron was flanked by two much smaller Tetrahedrons, them being about the size of the stranger. All of a sudden, one of the smaller Tetrahedrons yelled out in a booming voice that echoed off of the walls of light.

"Flip over in homage to the great He!"

Spheri all of a sudden remembered that he could not flip, because he did not have any sides. Spheri was confused as what to do, for if he could not flip, what would He think of him?

"FLIP YOU PALTRY THING!" the stranger ordered Spheri.

Spheri did not know what to say, but he managed to collect his thoughts and find his own small voice to address He.

"He, I cannot flip," Spheri meekly said.

"Nonsense," one of the flanking Tetrahedrons said. "Everyone in the Third Dominion can flip. You are being disrespectful to the great and omniscient He! This flimsy thing must be executed! Guards!!"

"BE SILENT IT!" the great He ordered.

It shrank back in terror, trembling, as He spoke to him.

"I'm sorry, oh great and powerful He," It said in a weak voice. "I did not

mean to show disrespect to He, who makes things prosper."

"I'LL HAVE YOU EXECUTED, MEASLY THING! IT, I CAN REPLACE YOU WITH THAT ANYDAY!"

Suddenly the other Tetrahedron started to speak.

"I am always ready to serve you, great and powerful He," That said as he flipped in homage.

Spheri saw this exchange and could not help but to burst out laughing! Spheri had never seen a more humorous display! Two creatures bowing down in such fear to an equal!

"BE QUIET, STUPID ONE!" He domineeringly ordered.

Spheri, stunned by the loud voice of He, was silent instantaneously. "Oh no," Spheri thought. "Now I've really hurt myself. Not good. I might die at the hands of He. What a silly name, He!" At this thought, he started laughing uncontrollably again.

"How can he be He!" Spheri said between laughs. "He is he, with It and That!"

"STOP LAUGHING YOU FOOL!" He said, with a rising anger in his voice.

Spheri heard the order of He, but he only ignored it. He was not going to order him around. Spheri could only laugh harder.

"He is He, It is It, and That is That! But it is That and he is It, and I am he!" Spheri continued to humorously laugh.

"STOP LAUGHING!" He ordered with the loudest voice yet, but Spheri continued to laugh.

He, fuming, tapped It on the shoulder, and It rushed towards Spheri.

Spheri, laughing too hard to notice, did not move when It knocked him hard with a point. Spheri rolled senselessly about, unconscious as He ordered It and That to restrain Spheri.

When Spheri woke up, he found himself in front of the great throne of He. Spheri had straps on top of him, not apparently doing anything. Spheri wondered why the straps were there, and looked up at He, puzzled. He obviously took it the wrong way.

"SO, NOW THAT YOU ARE TIED DOWN, YOU SEEM TO BE MORE WILLING TO BEG FOR YOUR LIFE."

Spheri effortlessly rolled forward, the straps just slipping off of him.

"I would never beg from you. Why would you hurt me?" Spheri innocently asked.

He just started to turn red with anger.

"I see that you really didn't want to see me. I've had much fun here, but I need to leave. I was wondering, before I leave, could you direct me to the One of Greatest Volume?"

All of a sudden, He broke out into a fit.

"YOU BUMBLING IDIOTS CAN'T DO ANYTHING RIGHT! I TOLD YOU TO RESTRAIN THIS LITTLE ONE, AND ALL THAT YOU CAN DO IS PLACE THE RESTRAINTS ON USELESSLY! CAN'T ANYONE DO ANYTHING AROUND HERE?"

All of a sudden a little Tetrahedron appeared from a little door in the side of Great House.

"You called, oh great and powerful He?" Anyone asked.

"NO, NO, NO! I WAS MERELY USING THE PRONOUN ANYONE, NOT THE

NOUN ANYONE!"

"Oh, so that's it. You want my son, Pronoun Anyone!"

"JUST LEAVE!"

"Yes, oh great and powerful He."

As Noun Anyone left the room, Spheri started laughing once again. "They are such a silly people," Spheri thought. "They can't even name themselves correctly! How can any of them talk?" Spheri continued to laugh, and He just started to sob. It and That looked at He, confused.

"Oh great and powerful He," It addressed He. "Did I do something to hurt the great and powerful He? Did I evoke the memory of She?"

At this He just started to weep even more, letting giant teardrop sobs down to the floor of Great House. Spheri stopped laughing, puzzled at how this so self-centered Tetrahedron would humiliate himself. Suddenly, He was speaking in a normal voice.

"Oh little one, how can you be more powerful than I?" He asked between sobs.

"Oh no, great and powerful He," That said reassuringly.

"No one is more powerful than the omniscient He," It said backing up That.

"No, It and That, he is more powerful than He. This little one can out-smart the great He, and is not even afraid of me. I have no control over him, and this little thing managed to break me down to this."

"I never meant to do that," Spheri said, trying to comfort the bawling He.

"What?" That said, confused.

"I didn't mean That, That, I said that."

"Oh, okay," That said, befuddled.

He looked up at Spheri, and began to stop crying.

"You mean, you didn't come here to hurt me?" He asked.

"But oh great and powerful He," It started. "Me isn't even here!"

"But Here is on the border, so he couldn't be Me!" That said assuredly.

"But He is He, and no one else!" It returned.

"ENOUGH! GET OUT OF HERE!" He yelled at them.

It and That rolled as quickly as they could on their Triangle sides out of Great House, closing the door behind them.

"Now that we have some peace, little one, tell me the name of the one who can overcome even me."

"My name is Spheri. I came here searching for the One of Greatest Volume."

"Why must you search for him? I, the oldest here, found out that I have less volume than you."

"I need to find out how many sides I have so I can find others like me."

"That is a good question. You certainly don't look like a Tetrahedron, so you can't be a Tetrahedron."

"See? I'm not like anyone else," Spheri said, starting to sob.

He came over to Spheri and put a point around him.

"Don't cry, Spheri. There has to be others like you."

"I haven't seen them."

"I remember another unusual inhabitant of the Third Dominion that came

through here a while ago. He didn't know how many sides he had either. He also searched for the One of Greatest Volume. I remember talking to him, and he, like you, did not even fear me. He told me that he was heading to the Land of Third to further search for the One of Highest Volume."

"Really?"

"That's what he said. So you know what? Go there. Maybe you can find him there and you can search together!"

"Good idea! But, how do you get there?"

"Don't worry. Follow the road that goes in the direction of the setting sun, and you'll reach it."

"Thank you."

"I'll take you to the road now."

He then walked out with Spheri into the Land of Four. The subjects of He were constantly flipping in homage as He passed through their land. He took Spheri to the edge of the Land of Four, in the direction of the setting sun.

"Follow that road, and you will find the Land of Third."

"Thank you, He," Spheri said as he rolled off. "I will never forget you."

Spheri turned around after a while to catch a last glimpse of He and the Land of Four. Spheri and the other Tetrahedrons could only watch in astonishment as He, the great and powerful, flipped in homage to one greater than himself. Spheri, glad that he found his new friends, rolled off happily, wondering what he would find in the Land of Third.

IV

Spheri had rolled along happily on the road to the Land of Third, wondering if Triangle ever had travelled in this land. The land here was beautiful, with waves of tall linegrass stretching across the horizons, waving in unison with the coaxing of the caressing wind. Every now and then a Rectangle Tree would be seen on the plane, standing alone in sadness. Spheri longed for there to one day be many Rectangle Trees so they would never be alone, for Spheri could understand how the Rectangle Tree must feel. Spheri knew what it was like to be alone. Spheri kept walking along the road, wondering when he would reach the Land of Third. Spheri kept looking towards the horizon, expecting to see another building like Great House that would mark the start of a new Land. Spheri kept looking towards the horizon, so he did not notice the lines of broken land on the plain. There were ditches appearing now, and only when they reached close to the sides of the road did Spheri notice them. "What were these for?" Spheri wondered. Then he had the answer! He must be in the Land of Third! But it was so barren there. There was only the land and the linegrass and the trenches. There were no houses, no people, nothing in sight. Spheri continued to roll slowly along, looking for some sign of the Cones and Pyramids of the Land of Third. Nothing was in sight. Suddenly, Spheri heard something move behind him. He spun around, and in front of him was a tall object. It was smooth all the way around, and ended in a point on its top, and it was holding a hollow tube. Spheri recognized what it was; it was a cone!

"Hello strang—"

"Don't move, spy, or I'll shoot!" the stranger said desperately.

Spheri was confused. What could this man mean by 'shoot'? What kind of object could 'shoot'?

"Excuse me," Spheri asked, "but what's that thing that you are holding to my chest do? Does it 'shoot'?"

"Don't act dumb, spy, or else you'll feel the cones of my gun," the Cone said.

"What do you mean?"

"Shut up, spy," the stranger said. "You're coming to the Master of Third's lair."

"What's your na—"

"I said SHUT UP!" the stranger yelled as he pushed his cylinder further into Spheri's round chest.

Spheri abruptly decided to comply with the stranger's demands, lest he find out what that mysterious cylinder called a gun does. The stranger escorted him off of the road, forcing Spheri to roll along at the stranger's wishes. The stranger took him past the ditches on the sides of the road, where Spheri got a chance to look into them. There were other Cones in them, all holding cylinders like the one that the escort had. The lands became more and more barren, with not even the linegrass growing on them. Soon, Spheri and the stranger were on a dirt path, seemingly well travelled by the rolling Cones, since it followed the now familiar swaying side to side pathway. It was easy for Cones to quickly travel along this road, but it was a challenge for Spheri, since he had to constantly turn back and forth. Soon, rubble crept onto the land.

It appeared as if there had been houses along this road at one time, but now there was nothing left of them except for a few of the once thick and strong lines standing out of the plane.

"What happened to those houses?" Spheri asked.

"Don't act like you don't know what you Pyramids did," the stranger said. "Be quiet and just keep walking."

Spheri, not getting an answer, decided wisely not to keep prodding the stranger. The stranger appeared to have a very quick temper, and Spheri was not about to prod it. They kept walking along, now at a faster pace. All of a sudden, in the far away lands, there was a loud explosion, followed by another, and another.

"Duck down!" the stranger yelled, pulling Spheri to the ground.

Spheri was frozen in confusion as his face was pressed into the dirt. The loud explosions continued, and now objects started to fly over their heads.

"What is happening?"

"It's you Pyramids attacking again," the stranger said. "I should have shot you on the spot when I saw you! You led them to our lines!"

"I'm not a Pyramid!" Spheri rebutted.

"What?!"

"I'm not a Pyramid!!"

Then, as abruptly as the shooting had started, it stopped, and then the stranger looked around. He groaned as he began to get up.

"You can get up now," the stranger said. "It's safe again."

Spheri got up off of the ground and cleared his face from the dirt.

"What was it that you were trying to say to me, spy?"

"I said that I wasn't a Pyramid."

At this, the stranger drew back and took a long hard look at Spheri. The stranger was puzzled, and looked deep in thought as he tried to figure out what Spheri was. "He couldn't be a Cube," the stranger thought. "There's not enough sides. Not enough for a Tetrahedron, not enough for a Pyramid, not even enough for a Cone!"

"Well, my friend," the stranger said, "you certainly aren't a Pyramid, you don't have five faces. In fact, you don't seem to have any faces!"

"That's the point! If I'm not a Pyramid, how can I be a spy?"

The stranger's face contorted in another intense round of thought for a second, and then lit up with an answer.

"You're a spy because you are hard to see!"

It was the perfect answer.

"But stranger, wouldn't I stand out in a crowd?"

"Well, yes, but—"

"So I'm not a spy!"

"That's for the Master of Third to discern!" the stranger said harshly and abruptly.

Spheri decided not to push his luck any farther. Spheri did not want to be hurt. If those things that flew over their heads were from the cylinders, Spheri certainly had something to worry about. They kept rolling down the winding road until they hit a wall. It was an extremely high wall that hid whatever was inside it. It was totally black, and had only one opening, on the sides

of which two Cones were standing with their cylinders. Spheri and the stranger approached the gate.

"Marshall Vertex, sir!" one of the guards yelled.

"At ease, private," Vertex said.

"What is this thing that you have brought to the lair of the Master of Third, sir?"

"This thing was caught wandering the lines along the edge of the territory of the Master of Third. I am bringing him to the Master to find out what he was doing."

"Come in, sir."

The private signalled through the gate, and the gates started to creak open. The Marshall prodded Spheri through the gate, and kept on walking. Spheri did comply, since now around him were what seemed to be droves of Cones all with their cylinders. They slid or rolled along in fine lines, around a house of black in the center. They would let nothing through that was not supposed to. As the Marshall passed, they all stopped and addressed him. "He is very important to these people," Spheri thought. "Could he be like He?" Spheri kept being forced into the sea of Cones, towards that same black house. Something very important must be in that house, or else why would they guard it?

When they reached the door, the Marshall had to address one of the other Cones standing at the door.

"Let me in to see the Master. I have a matter that requires his judgment."

"Marshall, sir, I cannot let you in with this Pyramid," the officer said.

"This is not a Pyramid, imbecile, can't you see that for yourself? We must find out what he is before we can deal with him."

"Yes, sir," the officer said.

The two guards stepped aside, and the Marshall led Spheri into the room. There was one of the Cones standing up proudly on a pedestal in the center of the room. There was no one else there. He himself had a giant cylinder, the biggest one that Spheri had seen. When Marshall Vertex stepped in and saw the Cone, Vertex snapped to his full height.

"Marshall Vertex reporting, Master of Third, sir!"

Spheri silently thought to himself, "Oh no. Here we go once again."

"You may be at ease, Vertex," the Master of Third said in a raspy voice. "What business brings you here today?"

"I've caught something, sir, along the boundary of our lands, sir. I thought he was a Pyramid, sir, but I don't know what he is, sir. I do know that he is not a Pyramid, sir."

"Prisoner," the Master of Third said, "step forward into the light."

Spheri rolled forwards into the shaft of light that came down from the ceiling. The Master of Third seemed to be confused by Spheri's shape, as Marshall Vertex had also been. The Master of Third could not tell what shape Spheri was.

"What are you, prisoner?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm here."

Marshall Vertex prodded Spheri with his cylinder.

"You must address the Master in the proper manner. Use sir!"

"Why?" Spheri asked quizzically.

"Because it is," was Vertex's answer.

"Why is it like that? He's just like one of you!"

"He is not!" Vertex's quickly snapped. "He is the Master of Third! Guards!"

The two guards that guarded the door came into the room.

"Take this thing and throw him into the pit!" Vertex ordered.

"Yes, sir," the officers replied.

The two officers grabbed Spheri roughly and manhandled him out the door into the courtyard of the lair of the Master of Third. They brought Spheri out close to the wall, and shoved him into a hole in the earth, deep and moist. It was the prison for the tall Pyramids that were brought before the Master for their sentencing. Spheri dropped to the bottom and stayed there, wondering what he had done to cause the Marshall to order this. Back inside the house, the Marshall and the Master were talking.

"Vertex, why did you throw that prisoner into the brig?"

"He must learn respect, sir."

"Oh, so you think that you were respectful in not even giving me a chance to question the prisoner?"

"I'm sorry sir. It won't happen again sir."

"So would you agree that you were disrespectful?"

"Yes, sir."

"So I should throw you into the pit."

"Yes, sir."

"As your wishes. Guards!"

Once again, the two sentries came in.

"Take the Marshall and throw him into the pit," the Master ordered. "And bring me that other prisoner."

"Yes, sir," the guards replied dutifully.

The Marshall was escorted, reluctantly, into the pit. Vertex jumped in himself, with much dignity. After he was in, the guards saluted him out of respect, and started to get Spheri out. They brought Spheri back into the house before the Master, and then left.

"What are you, little one?" the Master asked.

"I don't know. What's going on here? What is all of these people with the loud noisemakers?"

"Oh them, they're my army. We are fighting for the right to rule the Land of Third."

"But why are you fighting? Can't you just settle down and live in peace without your fight?"

"We can't. The scheming Pyramids stole two thirds of our volume. You see, once, we all had a full volume. But then someone came along, and took two thirds of it, making these ugly points. Of course, the Pyramids accuse us of taking two thirds of their volume, but we know the truth." The Master was now starting to talk louder and louder. "And we shall have revenge! We shall exterminate those contriving Pyramids that stole our volumes and get them back!"

"I don't think that they have any of your volume. I think that you are just supposed to be that way."

"Little one, you do not know what you say. We have pictures of ones like us, but tall and proud. Look at what those contriving Pyramids contorted us into! Look?"

"That's not supposed to be you! Those are people who live in another Land! You see, there are many Lands in the Third Dominion, and there are many types of people. You are the people who live in the Land of Third. You have always been looking like that. No one stole someone else's volume."

"How do you know these things? What if you are a spy trying to get us to lower our defenses so those Pyramids can attack and steal the rest of our volume?"

"Do I look like a Pyramid?"

"No. In fact, you don't even look like anything in the pictures that we found."

"Right. I learned about you in the School of Higher Volume in the Land of Regular. You are the Cones."

"How do you know what we call ourselves?"

"I told you, I learned in the School of Higher Volume."

"That name is written on some of our pictures. Do you think that someone brought them to us from there? Could it be that strange one in the legends?"

"What legends?" Spheri asked.

"There was a strange one who passed through here a long time ago,

before the Pyramids stole our volume. He was looking for others like him. The strange one told us that there was only one person who could teach him who he was, the One of Greatest Volume."

"He was here?"

"Yes, the strange one passed through here. He said that he would go to the Land of Combo to try to find out where the One of Greatest Volume was."

"I must go there then."

"But what if the Pyramids try to attack us?"

"Don't worry, they won't try to steal your volume. They did not try to take it in the first place."

"Will they believe that?"

"Try talking to them."

"I'll try. But until then, I must keep armed in defense. I will no longer attack. And to think, all this time, I truly thought that they did steal all of our volume."

"I guess we all can be disillusioned."

"Yes we can. What is your name, little one? I must remember it so all of the future generations of Cones and Pyramids can honor the one that brought understanding to our people."

"My name is Spheri."

"Spheri, you shall be remembered by us forever."

The Master of Third then saluted Spheri, who was taken aback by the action. Spheri was let go, and the guards safely escorted them as their leader to the safe area outside of the Land of Third. All of the forces saluted as

Spheri headed off down the only road from the Land of Third, heading to the Land of Combo that might hold the answer to his quest.

V

Spheri was once again on the roads of the Third Dominion, travelling to far off lands which not many from the Land of Regular have ever seen. Spheri was now caught in awe by the magnificent forests that surrounded him. The planes had been replaced by rolling hills, covered in tall, majestic Rectangle Trees. The Rectangle Trees lifted their hands up to the sky, thanking their gods for their happy, cooperative existence. The light of the round sun shone through their teardrop leaves, forming a canopy of light and beauty that Venus would envy. Spheri was mesmerized by the beauty of this place and could not pull himself away from it. He kept rolling down the road, eagerly awaiting the next new patch of forest that would reveal itself to him, whether it be a new type of fern that grew here or a new song of the Second Dominion vacationers filling the air with magnificent strains. As he looked at the wonders about him, Spheri could only conjecture about the beauty of the Land of Combo, for people surrounded by this beauty could only enhance it. Spheri was not ready for what he saw when he reached the top of the next hill.

Stretched across the land was a Land of Combo. There were no trees, no ferns, no songs filling the air. Instead there were large box factories, bellowing out black residue into the pristine air. There were buildings so close to one another that not even Triangle could fit between them. There were buildings

that were so high that not even Great House could match their ceilings. All the buildings were the same there, all the same dark brown, all the same box architecture. There was only one building that stood out above all of the others. It looked like a fattened cone, and it stood on a hill, colored a reflective, bright red for all to see. There was a black cloud that hung over the land, blocking out the providing sun from shining its wonderful light down upon them. It was an ugly, monotonous world, and Spheri did not know how the One of Greatest Volume could be there.

Spheri rolled down into the narrow streets of the Land of Combo, surrounded by a sea of putrid air. What was even more funny about this land was its inhabitants. They were some of the most unusual shapes that Spheri had ever seen. They had many, many points, and all of their sides were different. It seemed as if there were many things put together, all acting as one. What was even more unusual about them was that the inhabitants of the Land of Combo did not even recognize that Spheri was there. Many times he said "Hello" to a passerby on the street, and there was not even a response. Without this, Spheri could not ask questions. The monotonous architecture of the Land of Combo did not help him either; the sameness became sickening to him. Above it all, however, Spheri could still see the red house sticking up like a giant beacon to those in the Land of Combo. Spheri decided that it must be a place of some importance, and if anyone was going to give him some answers about this place, it was going to be there.

Spheri did not have a hard time finding a road that led to the red house, since all of the roads of the Land of Combo did. Once Spheri approached the

building, there seemed to be a thing sitting outside on a bench, waiting. Spheri rolled up to it and said:

"Hello. Is this the Land of Combo?"

"Yes, it is," the stranger replied, in a voice that sounded like twenty different people talking at once. "My name is Congruent Twenty. I live in the Land of Combo. I love the Land of Combo. I love to work. I will build a perfect land. I love Congruent One."

Spheri was confused by this monotonous reply.

"What are you doing?"

"My name is Congruent Twenty. I live in the Land of Combo.."

Spheri stopped paying attention as Congruent Twenty finished his speech.

"...Congruent One."

"Obviously, I won't get any answers out of you. I guess I'll need to see this Congruent One. Where is he?"

"He is in this great house," Congruent Twenty replied. "I love Congruent One."

Spheri then decided to just roll through the door. There did not seem to be any resistance to his entering; there was no one there to see him. Spheri found himself in a lavishly decorated room, seemingly out of place with the monotony of the Land of Combo. There was a window, however, and Spheri looked out onto the Land from a new perspective. Spheri could see all of the inhabitants moving like trained ants from place to place. There did not seem to be anything that looked like a playground or place for enjoyment. Everything

was just a brown box house, some spewing out smoke. But why were they doing that?

Spheri quickly got tired of not having any answers in this strange land. Spheri looked about the room once again, and he found another door. Spheri rolled through it, and there in front of him was a funny looking man. It looked on the bottom like his old friend Cubi, a box, but on top of it was a point, like one on the Tetrahedrons. He looked much simpler than the other inhabitants of this backward land, so maybe he might have some importance. He might be Congruent One!

"Excuse me, are you Congruent One?" Spheri quizzically asked.

"Yes," Congruent One replied in a normal voice, "I am. Why have you come to me? Do you love Congruent One?"

"No, but Congruent Twenty does."

"That's right! They all love me! Now, what problem do you need solved?"

"You are not even concerned about what I am?" Spheri amazingly asked.

"You are just one of the new Congruents, obviously with many too many Cubes. How many are part of your Congruent?"

"Only one. I am Spheri."

"Oh, that's unusual. No one here should be without his Congruent. Don't you enjoy working together?"

"But I only work with myself. I don't understand what a Congruent is, Congruent One."

"Have you forgotten all of your ideology child? A Congruent is a group of

us who work together to be more productive and help create the perfect world faster. All Congruents love Congruent One, who makes their lives wonderful and makes the world ready for a more perfect society."

"I did not know that. So the people out there that I see are really many people?"

"That's right, child. The Congruents have helped us to magnificently reach our goals. We have even been able to start our new production earlier."

"Production?"

"Yes, the making of more houses and more goods to create a better future."

"So that's what creates that black smoke, Congruent One?"

"Yes! That's the smoke from the factories that produce all of the goods that keep us alive!"

"But I don't have any."

"Sure you do. You know what? You should stop thinking so hard. It's time for you to join a Congruent and help to create our future. Just leave your problems to Congruent One. You love Congruent One."

"I'm not from the Land of Combo."

"The land of what?"

"Land of Combo. That's what this place is called."

"Not here. Here it is the Congruent Federation. Have you forgotten everything that the great Congruent One has taught you?"

"I don't come from here. I'm from a faraway place called the Land of Regular. I'm here in search of what I am."

"You mean, you don't want to create a perfect world for you children?"

"No, I don't."

"But here, the people rule! All of the decisions are made by the people! You know that! Just leave your problem with the Congruent One, and go and join a Congruent of your own."

"I'm one person, and I want to stay one person," Spheri pleaded. "I want to know what only I know. I want to think only what I think. I want to find out who and what I am. If I become one in your Congruents, I'll never know what I am, nor will I care. I will never be a person again. I need to find the One of Greatest Volume to find out what I am."

"The One of Greatest Volume?" Congruent One said, awe-stricken.

"Yes."

"He is the one that was the leader of that fanatic who came here and upset our world not long ago. That strange one that came here caused some of our Congruents to break apart and join him on a 'quest' to find freedom. Luckily we were able to stop them before they left. We tried the stranger, and sent him to the Land of Poly to cause trouble there. We don't need your kind here. Go away!"

"But I don't mean to harm your people," Spheri pleaded.

"Congruent Two!" Congruent One called.

A great big series of boxes, all melded together, lethargically plodded into the room. When Congruent Two had finally stopped, Congruent One started to give his orders.

"Congruent Two, the people have decided that this new person is a trou-

ble maker and is looking to destroy the perfect society that we work for. The people have decided to exile him to the Land of Poly as a punishment. Take him away in the name of the people!"

All that Congruent Two could say was, "I love Congruent One."

With those words, Spheri was escorted away. Congruent Two grabbed Spheri and lifted him off of the ground and took him roughly to the borders of the Land of Combo. As Spheri rolled off, Congruent Two stayed in the road to make sure that Spheri would not try to return to the Land of Combo.

"What a strange place," Spheri wondered to himself. "The people work for one man, who says he is the people. They do not know anything for themselves, and only work for the future, something which will never come. I can see why the One of Greatest Volume would not be there. Maybe I'll have better luck in the Land of Poly."

As Spheri rolled away towards the horizon, there was no flip, there was no salute. There was only a Congruent blocking his path, apathetic to everything, including life.

VI

Spheri was now rolling happily along down the road to the Land of Poly, happy that this might be the last land that he had to travel to. Spheri was tired of wandering, and it seems that there had been one person doing this before him. Spheri was happy that he was not alone anymore. Spheri would think about this strange person that none of the people he had met could describe.

Maybe he looked like Spheri, and if not, Spheri could not imagine what type of creature the stranger could be! Spheri was sorry for the stranger, though, since Spheri knew what he must have been going through so long ago. Spheri wondered if the world was the same back then, if this stranger looking for the One of Greatest Volume could have had the same experiences that Spheri was having today. As Spheri wondered about these lofty ideas, he came upon the Land of Poly.

It was a beautiful land when compared to the Land of Combo. There were small buildings, there were large buildings, and there were many different colors. There were many things moving about, going on their own happy business. There was no black cloud over the Land of Poly. Spheri was joyful at seeing such a bright and prosperous land. "Surely the One of Greatest Volume must live here," Spheri thought. "How else could the land be this prosperous and beautiful?" Spheri rolled into the Land of Poly. All of the little houses had Rectangle Trees and Triangle Flowers, and all were colored with bright cheerful colors, unlike the drab browns that had been in the Land of Combo. All of the roads here were covered in a black substance which was hard and made travel easier, and all of them were well kept. And what was even more amazing were the people.

As Spheri passed the inhabitants of this Land on their roads, all of them said a greeting to Spheri, which Spheri reciprocated. There were so many different types of people: people with ten sides, twenty sides, fifty sides, even with sides of different shapes and colors. And what was more amazing was that all of them got along so well together! What was the secret that made

this possible? They weren't angry like the Pyramids and Cones of the Land of Third. Spheri decided that the One of Greatest Volume must be controlling this prosperous land, or have at least come through it and given these magnificent people some instruction. Spheri stopped a person who had twelve sides and asked him a question.

"Excuse me, but does the One of Greatest Volume live here?"

"Well my little friend, he doesn't live in this house," the stranger said. "But I think I know someone who can help you. Wait. Let's not go any farther without any introductions. Hello. My name is Dodeci. And what might your name be?"

"Spheri," Spheri answered happily and eagerly.

"Nice to meet you Spheri," Dodeci said. "You know what, there is one person in this town that can help you. You don't look like your from around here. I've never seen anyone like you!"

"Nope," Spheri said. "That's what I'm trying to find out. I need to know what I am."

"Well, what you are doesn't matter to me, Spheri. Come on. I'm going to take you to the Leader's House!"

"Who's the Leader?", Spheri asked.

"He's the person who we select to make big decisions for us. Every couple of years, we select from among us a Leader to help run the country, along with many Deciders who help make rules for us to follow. We all get along here, since we all have a say in what goes on here. Right now, our leader is Hundri, a wise and old man who knows the ways of things. I'll take you to him, and he

should be able to answer all of your questions."

Dodeci took Spheri gently down the roads to the center of the town. Spheri looked up in amazement! There were buildings around him as tall as the sky, but not like the ones in the Land of Combo. Here they were beautiful and glistening with all of the colors of the rainbow. And there were so many of them, and all of them were different!

"Dodeci, does the Leader live in one of them?", Spheri asked, amazed at the beauty of the structures.

At that question, Dodeci started to laugh a deep, friendly laugh.

"No, no, Spheri. He lives in a normal house, just like the rest of us. We respect him highly, but he doesn't have the last say in what goes on. We do. He still gets to choose like one of us, so he is a normal citizen even though he is the Leader. We let him live just like the rest of us. It helps him to realize what we are going through, and helps the Leader to make wise decisions for the people."

Dodeci was right. In the middle of the city was an area of green with some Rectangle Trees, and a little house. It seemed out of place with the big buildings all around it, but it was quaint and normal. There was a plaque describing it on the gate to the lawn which read: The first house of the Land of Poly. It was not surprising then when Dodeci started to explain about what this was.

"This is First House. It was the first house ever built on this land that our people escaped to long ago. The Leader lives here, in this simple house, and we all look to him as the man who is the people. Since we change, we can change

the Leader every few years, along with the Deciders who help make decisions for us also. Come, you will now see Hundri. Don't be surprised when you see him; he's the only one among us with one hundred sides. They say that he got his sides because he is wise, but he is in fact one of the last people like him that are known in the Third Dominion. Not many people in our history have ever had more sides than him, save one who is still alive. Come. He will know the answer to your question."

Spheri was led into the house. Dodeci was right in saying that it was simple, for it looked exactly like the house that Spheri remembered from the Land of Regular. There, sitting in a comfortable chair, was one of the most unusual people that Spheri had ever seen. Hundri had his own special beauty to Spheri, the beauty of wisdom and knowledge. Hundri seemed to be so unique and special that Spheri knew why he was the Leader by just looking at him. Hundri had an aura of wisdom about him. Then he spoke.

"Hello, Dodeci!", Hundri said in a boisterous voice. "What brings you here today?"

"This little fellow, Spheri. He has a question for you."

"Hello," Spheri said timidly.

"Oh come on now, Spheri," Hundri said in a friendly, comforting voice. "You can tell me. I won't tell anyone else."

"I'm looking for the One of Greatest Volume. I need to find out what I am. Do you know what I am?"

"Well, Spheri, I must say that I've never seen anyone exactly like you before in my years upon this plane, but the One of Greatest Volume comes

close."

"You've seen the One of Greatest Volume?" Spheri asked in amazement.

"Of course I do! We're old friends! He taught me most of the things that I know!"

"Where is he?"

"He lives in a small cottage right outside of the Land of Poly. Dodeci will show you the road."

"Thank you so much Hundri!" Spheri said emphatically as he left the First House.

"Anytime!" Hundri yelled in the distance.

Spheri was hurriedly following his new friend Dodeci towards the borders of the Land of Poly, eager to find out what he was. When he left, he thanked Dodeci very much and rushed over to the cottage that was over the horizon.

VII

Spheri was in awe as he saw the cottage of the One of Greatest Volume. After all of his travels through all of the different lands of the Third Dominion, here was Spheri's goal, this little, plain cottage surrounded by the linegrass. Spheri rolled up to the door eagerly and knocked.

"Who is it?" an old voice asked.

"My name is Spheri, and I'm here to see the One of Greatest Volume!" Spheri said with excitement.

Spheri had found his answer. But he was not prepared for what opened

the door.

In the open doorway was standing a giant ring. It did not look like anything that Spheri had ever seen. It was like a disk with a hole in the middle. How unusual this thing was!

"Are you the One of Greatest Volume?"

"Yes, yes," the One of Greatest Volume said with happiness. "Come in and sit down."

Spheri rolled inside the cottage as the One of Greatest Volume rolled back to his seat near the corner.

"You roll like me!" Spheri said in amazement.

"Yes I do, and now that you mention it, you are the first person I have ever seen that rolled like me. What is your name?"

"I'm Spheri. What's yours?"

"I'm called Tori. Why did you come here? Obviously, you have a question that you came a long way to find the answer to, since you have that happy look on your face."

Spheri hesitated for a second, almost not remembering his question. He had been so overcome with joy at finding his goal that his question slipped his mind. Soon, he remembered it.

"I came here to find out what I am." Spheri said definitively.

Tori looked at Spheri long and hard, and finally said:

"You are a Sphere."

"What's a Sphere?" Spheri asked.

"A Sphere is a special person. A Sphere is a person who has wandered

far from his home to come to find himself and find out the ways of the world. A Sphere is understanding and caring, and is usually always happy."

"Where did you get the name Sphere?"

"From your name. You see, I was exactly like you. I was a stranger who had wandered far. I was the only one like me where I lived, and I couldn't play the games with all of the other children there. I wandered off to find out what I was, and after weeks of travel, I finally figured out who I truly was: myself. I was a Torus, just as my name said. There seemed to be only one of me, and I was special."

"So you mean there are no others like me?" Spheri asked, almost fighting back tears.

"No, no, Spheri. You see, all of us are Spheres. All of us have the same experiences, loves, wants, joys, sadnesses. All of us are Spheres, just as all of us are Toruses."

"But what about the people in the Land of Four? How come one of them rules over others if he is the same person? How about the Land of Third? Why are the Cones and Pyramids fighting if they're the same people? How about the Land of Combo? How come they all give up their lives to one person if they all are the same people with the same problems? How about in the Land of Poly? How come they all look so different? How come everyone except me has sides?"

"Spheri, look at me. Do I have any sides? No. Yet I am as much a Tetrahedron as you are a Cube! You see, what you see on the outside doesn't matter. How many sides you have doesn't matter. It's what we think on the

inside that makes us who we are. And on the inside, we are all feeling the same things. I know what it's like to be a Sphere. I travelled the same road. You probably heard the stories about the strange wanderer, looking for the One of Greatest Volume. You know what? I never found him. I found out that the One of Greatest Volume was myself. On your journey, Spheri, you gained volume that others will probably never have: you found out what we all are. And you gained some of the most difficult volume of all: you realized that not everyone knows who they are. You are the One of Greatest Volume, and you are also a Sphere, Cube, Tetrahedron, Congruent, Cone, Pyramid, Polydron, or whatever types of people are out there. You found out how to look for things that others did not see in the Irrational Lands, and best of all, you found friends and helped to improve people's lives."

"But is there a land for others like me?"

"Of course. All of Jeealmuhtree is the land of people like you. All of us are the same no matter what we are. Stop looking for a special place for yourself and see that the place you sought for is right around you all the time! Others like you are everywhere, even if they cannot see it. There is no place where you are alone, Spheri, since you will always be with a friend."

Spheri and Tori stayed together for many years, laughing and talking their way through life, since each of them had found a friend. They visited all of the Lands of the Third Dominion and made new friends, increasing the volume of us all. They shared their volume with the vacationers from the Second Dominion, who helped spread the volume throughout all of the Dominions. And in the Land of Jeealmuhtree, all of the Spheres lived happily ever after.

Genesis in Eden

FIRST PARAGRAPH AND EXERPTS OF SECOND AND LAST PARAGRAPHS FROM

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

FROM THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW AMERICAN CATHOLIC EDITION

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Genesis in Eden

In the beginning gode created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of gode moved over the waters. And gode said: Be light made. And light was made. And gode saw the light that it was good; and he divided the light from the darkness. And he called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And there was evening and morning one day. And gode said: Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters: and let it divide the waters from the waters. And gode called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and morning were the second day. Gode also said: Let the waters that are under the heaven, be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so done, and gode saw that it was good. And he said: Let the earth bring forth the green herb, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind. And gode saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day. And gode said: Let there be lights made in the firmament of heaven, and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years. And it was so done. And gode made two great lights; a greater light to rule the day; and a lesser light to rule the night. And he set them in the firmament of heaven to shine upon the earth. And to rule the day and the night, and to divide the light and the darkness. And gode saw that it was good. And the evening and morning were the fourth day. Gode also said: Let the waters bring forth the creeping creature having life, and the fowl that may fly over the earth. And gode created every living and moving creature, which the waters brought forth, and every winged

fowl according to its kind. And gode saw that it was good. And he blessed them , saying: Increase and multiply and fill the waters of the sea; and let the birds be multiplied upon the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And gode said: Let the earth bring forth the living creature in its kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth, according to their kinds. And it was so done. And gode saw that it was good. And he said: Let us make man to our image and likeness; and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.

And gode created man to his own image; to the image of gode he created him. Male and female he created them. And gode blessed them saying: increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that live upon the earth. And gode said: Behold you shall seek every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat: And to all beasts of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to all that move upon the earth, and wherein there is life, that you may yearn to feed upon. And it was so done. And the lorde gode formed man of the slime of the earth, and woman of the silt of the spring, and breathed into their faces the breath of life; and together living souls they became. And the lorde gode had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning: wherein he placed those he had formed. And the lorde gode brought forth one manner of tree: the one tree in paradise to beget its own seed. And gode took his creations and put them into the paradise of pleasure, to rape it, and to destroy it. And he com-

manded them, saying: Of one tree of paradise thou shalt eat, and of the one and only. And in what day soever thou destroy the creatures of the earth, thou shalt die the death. And the firmament shall close off the soil of the earth and the silt of the stream. And they were so commanded. And gode himself upon the two blessed gave gifts: To Adæme he gave the Strength to make humble the creatures of the earth; To Æve he gave the Vision to see swiftly the attack of the creatures of the earth. But gode saw the weakness of the creatures of the earth, and to give them fight against the Strength and the Vision, gode created the Hunger. And into the Paradise gode so placed the Hunger. And to the Hunger gode said: You shall strike the creations upon the earth. And you shall make them want. And so the Hunger was released unto the paradise.

And Adæme and Æve ate of the fruit the tree had borne. The creations of the gode above wandered underneath the firmament. And all was good. But the Hunger sought out the creations. And the Hunger unto them descended, and upon Adæme and Æve descended the Hunger so. And Adæme and Æve the Hunger did not see. All the creatures of the earth were struck by the Hunger. And into Eden they did come. Of the fruit of the only tree did Adæme and Æve eat, and the many creatures upon the tree descended. The tree did its fruit create under the light called Day, and its fruit did the droves of creatures eat. The tree itself did bend under the burden of the creatures of the earth, and its branches did touch the ground. All of the creatures still did eat, and the Hunger was not yet satisfied. And the Hunger did crave more. The creatures the fruit of the tree did devour, and no more of the fruit could the

tree itself create. The Hunger did tire of the small creatures, and from the creatures did the Hunger exit. But of Adame and Aeve the Hunger did not tire, and the Hunger inside of them did stay. Both Adame and Aeve still ate of the fruit, and the other creatures, with the Hunger having been subdued so, did so leave into the earth under the firmament.

The tree of Eden from the day had been exhausted, and its fruit exhausted nearly so. But the Night had not come, and the Hunger awake was still so. Adame and Aeve soon of the last fruit did eat, and having so done, both beheld the last of the fruit of the tree. And Adame to Aeve did say: The last of the fruit I have. And in my reach it is. But which of us shall of it eat? The Hunger does have us in its grasp. And Aeve did say unto Adame: Of the fruit shall I eat. I shall eat its sustenance, and the Hunger from me shall be driven. But Adame, having been made insane by the Hunger, ordered unto Aeve: Speaketh not of the fruit. Only of it shall I eat. But Aeve, the Hunger having conquered her mind, did grab the fruit from the broken bough. And the tree did give the last of its fruit to the creature called woman. Adame was not freed from the Hunger, and for the fruit did he grab. Adame reached to Aeve out for the fruit, but with it in her grasp Aeve, with the Vision having been so given to, did swiftly withdraw. Adame, the Strength having been given unto him by gode, so quickly grasped the bare arm of Aeve, and from her grasp he did pry the fruit so. Aeve was grasped by the insanity of the Hunger, and she did one of the broken boughs of the tree so swiftly grab. And with her tool of Eden so tightly in hand, Aeve did attack the Adame bearing fruit. And into his chest did the bough of Eden so smoothly plunge. Adame did convulse so, and with his chest

having been so pierced, Adame did so die. With the body of Adame having been to the ground plunged by the hand of the death, Æve did for the fruit so grasp. The fruit of the tree did she so swiftly pluck from the hand of the Adame, having been so gripped by the death. And into the fruit did she so bite. Gode, having uttered the words of power, had decreed the punishment if one of those in his image had eaten of something not from his tree of paradise. Æve, having eaten of the fruit being plucked from the Adame, did so swiftly die the death. And those created in the image of gode had so died. And gode saw all the things that he had made become, and they were very good. And the evening and morning were the sixth day.

And gode so watched the creatures of the earth, and the life in the waters so flourish and prosper, and so see the tree in paradise die the death from the creatures of his image. And gode forever destroyed the boughs of Eden. So the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the furniture of them. And on the seventh day gode ended his work which he had made: and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. And he blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it. And with his work being so finished, gode rested.

Symbolism of Genesis in Eden

The title Genesis in Eden is trying to say how society creates something new in the paradise that the true God has created for us, a God who changes with every religion. In this short story based around the first two chapters of Genesis of the bible, the creator is called "gode". This "gode", despite its obvious parallel, is society in general. In the story, "gode" creates a world and all the creatures in it, as society today creates a world based around its own values and traditions. Adame and Aeve represent children in our society, brought up and indoctrinated with the values of their own parents. The paradise that "gode" creates is the utopia of modern society, and in it "gode" plants the one tree, again representing the tree of knowledge. This tree, however, is the only tree from which the children of the world can eat from. This is caused by "the Hunger", which is the tendency of our society to force feed knowledge into our youngsters and others that are foreign to society, the creatures of the earth. The tree, however, is open for Adame and Aeve to do anything that they want with. The eventual death of both of them is showing that inside, human beings, no matter how peaceful or kind that they are created or molded, will kill to get something that they are dependent on, in this case, knowledge. "The death" that "gode" has decreed for Aeve is the response to our 'educated' society to a killer; society commonly decides to destroy the killer in the same act that the person had done. Does this make us killers also? And after all of the action of the day, "gode", society, "rested", stayed content with itself and its creation, ignorant to the actions of its "children". And society still sees all that it has done, and it sees it as being good, and it continues to further attempt to change the inherent nature of humans, but as the story tries to say, it will ultimately fail.

Reality in a Box

REALITY IN A BOX

And the alarm's clanging bells awoke Jim Clance at 7:30. Jim woke up, sat upright, and stretched exactly as he had been taught to do so many times before.

He looked around, almost frantically until he found it: the day's script. He picked up the leaves of paper, relieved, caressing their presence. He looked up at the top.

"Life Stories" it said in bold underlines. Underneath it, Jim read to find his first instructions. "Scene 1-The Day Begins. Setting: a bedroom with light yellow walls. There is a bed in the center of the room upon which Jim is peacefully sleeping. There is a closet door leading to the small closet, which contains the following: a red shirt, green shirt, blue shirt, plaid shorts, black pants, tan pants. The alarm clock on the floor beside the bed rings at exactly 7:30 AM, ringing loudly. Jim wakes up and stretches normally, and then searches around for the day's script, which he finds on the nightstand in the corner. After pretending to read the instructions, Jim then stands up and makes the bed."

Upon reading this, Jim stood up and made his bed.

"Next, Jim walks over to the closet, yawning."

Jim started for the closet door, and upon his way there, he suddenly yawned, apparently for no reason.

"Acting casually, Jim picks out the red shirt and plaid shorts and proceeds to get dressed."

Jim looked up, opened the closet door, and looked around for what to

wear. Not surprisingly, he eventually decided on the red shirt and plaid shorts.

"Then, after finishing, Jim notices that he hasn't taken his shower. He begins to mutter to himself.

"Jim: I haven't taken my shower yet. Drats."

Jim looked down, noticing that he was still dry, and said, "I haven't taken my shower yet. Drats."

Back to the script, Jim looked to find his next instructions.

"Jim walks to the bathroom proceeding out the door and down the hallway. Camera 2 follows in front of him. Jim enters the bathroom and proceeds to take a shower with his clothes still on, not noticing that he hasn't undressed. Light the Laughter sign."

Jim walked out of his bedroom and to the bathroom, just as the script had described it. He proceeded to take his shower, still dressed. Suddenly, from apparently nowhere, a roaring sound of laughter emanated.

"Jim then descends the stairs down into the family kitchen. Inside are Nancy and Little Joe.

"Jim: Good morning Mom."

Jim said, "Good morning Mom."

"Nancy: What are you doing up so late? You should've been up at 7!"

Jim's mother Nancy, looking away from the sink that she was working at, exclaimed a tad sharply, "What are you doing up so late? You should've been up at 7!"

"Jim: Sorry. My alarm clock didn't wake up until 7:30."

Jim said pleadingly, "Sorry. My alarm clock didn't wake up until 7:30."

"Nancy: Well eat your breakfast before it gets too cold."

Jim's mother said reproachingly, "Well eat your breakfast before it gets too cold."

Jim looked back down at his script to see what to do next.

"Jim walks over to the table and sits down in his chair in front of a bowl of cereal. Jim then picks up his spoon and proceeds to take a bite. Before the spoon reaches his face, however, Jim yawns and falls asleep. He falls face forward into his bowl of cereal.

"Nancy: Jim!"

Jim then sat down at the table in front of his cereal. As soon as he started to eat, he suddenly got very tired. Jim couldn't keep his eyes open, and he fell suddenly asleep. Falling slowly forward, his face eventually landed in the filled cereal bowl in front of him.

Jim's mother then exclaimed out loud, "Jim!"

On the countertop, the television showed a picture of people watching reality, the reality with all of its scripts and cameras. The audience, free from such binding chains, laughed loudly while watching their entertainment. One of the people in the television audience reached to the armrest on his chair, grabbed his remote control, pointed it at the screen, and turned the silly entertaining buffoonery of reality off.

Petals of Magnolia

PETALS OF MAGNOLIA

The leaves of magnolia swayed sensuously in the embracing breezes. The fresh green grasses caressed the aged trunk, reaching for the succulent colors, praising the white clouds above. The bees kissed the magnolia's beauty, the sun warmed its naked skin.

"What is the price to remake a consciousness?"

The magnolia could not answer.

"What must I give?"

A leaf mumbled a soft fluttering.

His fingers nervously jittered around, anxious, waiting.

The beauty of the first magnolia had drawn another close. His feet apathetically flattened the groping hands of the grass, his hands brushing off the weak bees from their waving paths, his bulk disturbing the curves of the kissing breeze. The magnolia had intoxicated his consciousness, he could only desire to possess the beauty high above in the white and purple petals of the magnolia, to pick them, to steal them. With his brutish hand he would subdue the magnolia. Approaching he heard the soft murmurings.

"What must be sacrificed to remold a mind?"

"Isn't the day beautiful? I want to encase it, to cage it, to tame it. It will be mine."

"The mind needs to go before another can be made. I've made so many mistakes. What would a man give to create a mind?"

"What would a man give to capture beauty?"

"His soul."

"His mind."

A bird gently warbled a bittersweet theme in the distance. The tune penetrated the world, seducing even the winds with its sour strains.

"Beauty cannot be possessed."

"But I would give all to have control of this one day, this one tree."

"Love is ruinous. As the drugs of infatuation intoxicate your soul, they dominate, they control, they destroy. Free yourself now. What would a man give to remake his mind?"

"Not his love."

"Exactly his love. Without passion, man is a human, capable of thought and of feeling. Lust of anything destroys the soul. Avoid it. Throw it away. What would a man give to remold his soul?"

"To hold one flower forever, inside of a glass to see during the gloom and the joy. Just one flower for time immortal. What is the cost?"

"Your mind. Invading your own spirit it will manipulate you and destroy you, crush your consciousness. All that is clear will become murky as the clouds above in the sky. There is no cure. What would a man give to remake his consciousness?"

"One flower of the magnolia."

"Every mistake I have done, every lost day, lost hour, it all compounds. Do you know panic? Do you know fear? If you know true love, you do. All of the lost time...what would a man do to recreate his consciousness?"

"What harm will one flower do? One petal?"

"You don't know what it will do. It starts there. Soon you'll want the whole world inside of a glass, sealed, sterile. You'll want beauty every day of your existence, you'll need it, crave it. Don't start. Once it has invaded, it will never escape. What will a man do to remake his consciousness?"

"One petal will not make a difference. One petal can always be discarded."

"But how large a petal. What would a man give to rework his mind?"

An insect buzzed around the tree, perching on it for a second, lifting up, setting down. Innocent. Free.

"Don't you understand? You mustn't start! You mustn't eradicate your mind. You mustn't be forced to rework your soul."

"One petal. Only one petal."

"There's no way to fix it! Your life will be subservient to love! You will give your deference to a flower! A flower!"

"One petal will not make a difference. Beauty is the joy of life, its vibrance. It surrounds both me and you, and yet you want to escape it? You cannot escape. You are a serf bound to the petals of magnolia, just like me. One sight, one scent, and it must be yours, one petal. One petal."

"One petal is what I took. It only takes one petal to destroy a soul. What is the cost of reworking a soul?"

"One petal."

A cloud indifferently passed over the face of the sun, its gentle frills casting small waves of shadow onto the shore of green. For an instant the sun was hidden, but once again shone, belching its message towards the Creation.

A fly landed on the man's hand, a hand caressed by the loving grass. Quickly the man shook it off, driving it away from his misery. Gently it landed on the magnolia.

"Would you give me your petal?"

"No one can have mine! You can't escape the intoxication. All of the wrongs, all of the hates, all of the jealousy, all of the envies are gnats when compared to its power. Kings are subject to it, weak men are prone to it. Riches are vassals to it, paupers are sacrifices to it. To one leaf. What is the mind for reworking the cost?"

"What I could do with one petal. With it, Nature's blessings would be mine. I could travel beyond these confines. I could do anything in the graces of the magnolia. Its beauty could entice me, embrace me, envelop me. With beauty, I could never be sad, never feel pain. Nowhere would be barred from my path. All with one petal."

"I took one with the same convictions as you. And here I am now. Once you have the petal, all you will want is a whole flower. Then a branch, then the tree. This magnolia has a strong root. You can't move it. And then you'll see all of the wasted hours worshipping one petal. All of the forgetfulness because of one flower. All of the lost hopes because of one tree. And then you won't change. You can't free your soul from the corruption of love. And you'll be here. Trying to change your soul. But you can't. The price is too dear. All because of one petal."

"What price is so dear for love?"

And the sky was the bluest that had ever been, a blue lighter than the

somber reflection of the sea, a blue darker than the innocence of a newborn's eyes. The white smoky clouds lazily ambled across their backdrop, the sun lighting their way.

"Your mind."

"For one petal?"

The beetles gently crawled along the ground, the thumpings of their feet barely waking the sleeping earth, the brushing of their shells hardly disturbing the caring grasses.

A leaf fluttered suddenly. The bees still flew, the clouds still passed. The sun still showered love upon the basking earth. The magnolia still bloomed.

All as the grasses indifferently drank their fill of his blood.

And the man reached up and plucked a petal of magnolia.

And So On
and So On

AND SO ON AND SO ON

I was jarred awake by the percussive sound of a nail gun. My father was bent over something and driving it into the floor. With each shot I was made awake even more. He was growling so loud I could hear him even over the racket of the caps. It was hardly even day, not time for me to wake, and here he was giving me my wake up call too soon.

He soon finished. He kicked whatever it was he was hiding, making sure that it was firmly in place. Rushing aside angrily, he revealed a silver box on a pedestal. He turned towards me, flayed his arms out dramatically in a grotesque pride, and screamed in a voice as gruff as my grandfather's old stubble:

"This is the fate of a godless man!"

And then he stampeded out with the grace of a teak bureau falling. The door to my room slammed shut. The deadbolt being once again locked from the outside made a click as loud as the explosions before in my mind. But I wasn't fully awake yet so I really didn't care. It was much too early in the morning so I fell back asleep.

The alarm clock buzzed at its usual time. I slowly got out of my bed, went to the closet. That day, I wondered what I was going to make my statement with. Should I go for the waking up motif or the yuppie prep mentality. I eventually pulled out a pair of shorts and a button down shirt, forgoing the tie in favor of a set of black socks. It was much too cold out to wear a tie. Besides, the school was always warm inside no matter what season it was.

Then I slipped on my shoes and started to prepare my books for the new day.

I remembered that I didn't need my history book today—we were having a lecture. In gathering my books, I took special care to leave that large one at home. Didn't have to carry it around or anything today. I looked around to find my pen and pencil. They had been on my working desk. I went over to where my working desk used to be, but it wasn't there anymore. In its place was this silver box on an iron pedestal. Confused I walked over to the bureau and pulled out the drawer of spare pens, and got one which I threw into my bag. I slung the bag over my shoulder and grabbed a brush that had been laying on the floor. I looked around to find a mirror, but it had been in my working desk which was no longer here. For lack of a better improvisation, I stared into the silvered surface of this new adornment in my room while fixing my hair.

I put the hairbrush back on the floor and decided to start off for the day. I walked over to the door, but upon turning the knob, I realized that the door wouldn't open. In an obvious manifestation of masculine rage I banged at the door which might have gotten stuck with all of the cold weather that we'd been having the past few days. The door just howled in pain. It didn't open. Then I remembered that father had deadbolted it again. Wonderful. I would have to use the windows again. Sometimes father did manage to confuse me. It was this little game that we seemed to always be playing, seeing who could be the most confused. Usually I won, which always made me proud. This time, though, I knew what to do. I didn't like using the windows, however. Every time I jumped out I always managed to knock some part of my right leg on the pear tree. That always hurt for a few hours afterwards. Last time I jumped, I

vowed that I would cut it off. Without a right leg, I wouldn't have to worry about getting it caught on the tree anymore. I wish I had done that earlier, though. I'd have to cut off my leg now in my room. I didn't feel like making a mess, though, so I'd have to do it carefully.

I didn't feel like having a restricted range of motion for the day, so I decided that I could leave my books at home. I left them on the floor and went over to my nightstand and took out my pocketknife. An old brown Swiss Army knife, bent from some accident or another. Actually, it wasn't mine, but my grandfather's. The dull long blade had been rusty at one time, but I ground all of it off so now it was just a shade of grime. I took out the long blade and proceeded to slice off my right leg. It was easy to get through the skin and muscle (it was actually quite juicy, like a nice New York sirloin), but cutting the bone was a harder process. It took a few minutes of chopping to break the bone. When the bone finally broke, my severed leg plopped to the floor. I picked it up and hopped over to the corner. I stood it up there, making sure that it wouldn't get hurt so I could put it back on when I came home from school. I then tied the hole for my right leg in my shorts together so I wouldn't be going around hitting my bone on anything. Now I wouldn't cut my leg on the tree, and I could get going.

Unfortunately for me, when I hopped over, the windows weren't there anymore. For the first time, I noticed that the room was an eerie grey, and it was past sunrise now. I wasn't too pleased with the prospect of losing my windows; I had done all of that work for nothing. So, being a logical person, I proceeded to search for them. I remembered being in the closet already today, so

they couldn't have been in the closet. I got down on all three of my limbs and looked underneath the bed, since sometimes windows fall off in the night if you knock them the wrong way. But they weren't there. Now I remembered where they were. I had put them in the center drawer of my working desk for safe-keeping, right next to my pens and pencils. I didn't want them freezing shut again during the night. I always hated it when that happened to them. It would be hard for me to put them back up now, since I couldn't find my working desk. And I knew that the windows were definitely not in that box that my father had bolted to the floor.

Anyway, it was dark in the room, so I decided to turn on the lights. When I flipped the light switch, nothing happened. Aha! I thought. This time my father had cut off the electricity as well. He was getting better and better. Not having anything better to do, I went back to sit on my bed. Just as soon as I got there, I noticed an itch in my right foot. I hopped over to my leg, took the shoe off, and scratched my foot. Now that the itch was gone, I could resume my important business.

And what was that business? Well, I had to get to school on that day, one way or another. I couldn't possibly miss the history lecture. I did miss one lecture once, and I actually understood the lectures for the rest of the week. That wasn't supposed to happen. The more that I understood, the worse I would do on the examinations. I had to make sure that I would be in the lecture to be thoroughly confused. But now, how could I get out of my room. There was no exits of importance, but perhaps I could slide myself under the door. I could do it a piece at a time and put myself back together on the other side.

I hopped over and grabbed my leg and tried to shove it under the door. Unfortunately my leg was too big. I would have to cut it into little slices. At the thought of that, my right big toe twitched. Even my foot knew that it wouldn't be as comfortable as jumping out the window. But I decided to think this over. The only problem was that I would have to leave a hand behind. To get my head through the door, I'd have to slice it too. And to slice it I would need my hand to hold the knife. And I'm right handed, so I'd have to leave my right hand intact to slice. But when I got onto the other side, I would need my right hand to glue me back together, since I can't do anything with my left hand. I might be able to do it, but it would be very frustrating anyway to go through an entire day without my right hand. So I scrapped that idea and continued thinking.

It looked like that would be the only way out, and since that wasn't going to work there was no way out. And screaming wouldn't help my position any; father would just stand there and laugh and make small talk with the door. Actually, maybe that was a way. Perhaps I could persuade the door to let me out, or at least talk my father into letting me out.

I sat there for what seemed like days talking to the door. I told it my situation, but it didn't care. It said that it was just a door. It couldn't disobey its master. I tried to convince it that my father would be pleased if it let me out. But the door was persistent. It said that if it let me out, it might get punished again. It might have to go back to being the front door. And I couldn't ask it to do that. To have to be out there in this cold weather, that was just cruel and unusual punishment. My father wouldn't even let a door do that.

In the end I just had wasted that hour and a half. The door was no closer to opening, and I had just made my throat dry and my stomach growl. I made one last attempt, but again the door refused to budge. So I told the bureau to try and talk the door into opening. It said that it would do the best it could, but not to hope for any breakthrough. I couldn't believe the stubbornness of doors these days. After everything I had done for that door, it wouldn't do a single thing for me. I'd have to make sure that I got a new door if I ever got out of there. One without one of those complexes.

By this time I was hungry, since I hadn't eaten breakfast yet. But I didn't have anything to eat, so I decided to go back to sleep. I took my left shoe and sock off. My right leg didn't really care at this point. I checked on my leg one more time, making sure that it wasn't going to topple over (the pain of that would probably wake me up), and I went over to my bed and lay down, shutting my eyes. I just revelled in the silence for a while. Nothing was making sound, except for my breathing. It was one of those quiet times when you can even hear you own heart beat resounding in the room. That hadn't happened to me in such a long while.

About an hour passed. My mind passed into a state of dormancy, forgetting that I was hungry, but my body was constantly awake. Tossing and turning. I just couldn't get my right leg comfortable. I figured that if I got up and put it in the other corner it would be a lot more comfortable, right next to the heater. But that was too much like work, and I just wanted to fall asleep. So my body just kept thrashing. Just about when I finally found that spot where everything is just so comfortable and finally the body relaxes, the silence was

suddenly broken.

There was a low rustling sound in my room.

I stopped turning about. The rustling continued. I knew it couldn't be me. And it couldn't be my leg, since I could see it wasn't moving. But the rustling continued. It sounded like someone on a small sofa, crunching around, trying to get comfortable without falling off. Then, after a little bit, it stopped. So I closed my mind again and tried to fall asleep. But the noise came back. I just waited. Maybe it would go away again. And it did. Nothing important happened.

Finally, my body found that comfortable position when my left foot had finally gone over my head and gripped the wall with my toes. My mind once again slipped into the darkness, forgetting my hunger, but it didn't get far when I heard a moaning. The moaning echoed in the silence of my room. It wasn't me. I knew it wasn't my leg. I whispered over to my nightstand and asked it if the door had groaned again. My nightstand didn't know what that moaning was either. Then I heard the moan again. I sat up briskly, looking for another person that obviously had to be in my room. But there was no one there. I just sat up against the headboard, determined to try and find it when it happened again. And then there came another moan.

It came from the foot of my bed. Right where my father had put that thing.

I got out of the bed and hobbled over to that thing. I looked at it. The box was very elaborate. The surface was hard to see in the dark, but with the soft glow that always accompanies darkness I could discern the surface. It

looked like a metal baas relief. The silver stuck out of the sides of the container. It was all one long scene that wrapped around the box. It was a line of people, some wearing togas, some wearing ski jackets, some wearing nothing at all, marching. On top of them was a large box that looked like a coffin. It must be a funeral procession. The top was just as complicated as the sides. There was a large relief of a burning pine tree on it, with a maple leaf hiding the fire. Only the smoke could be seen. And this apparently heavy metal top was latched tightly to the box. The bottom side of the box was welded to an iron stand that rose the box to about chest height off of the floor.

The moaning came again. It seemed like it was coming from inside of the box. Curious, I asked the door what it thought was in the box. It said that it had no idea. Just leave it to doors. They have no imagination. I figured that the only way to find out would be to open the box. The latch was very tight, but I was able to undo it. When I did, there was the sound of a seal breaking, just as if I was opening a jar of my grandmother's old preservatives. A reeking odor emanated from this box. It smelled almost like an air freshener. I slowly opened the lid to its full extension.

Sitting inside was the shrivelled body of my uncle who had died just a week ago, marinated in a light citrus sauce that smelled delicious. I thought it was rather fitting—my uncle loved oranges. The dried body of my uncle was curled up, almost in a fetal position. I just stared at him. He looked so different. Perhaps I should have cried at the funeral. But the past was the past, so I latched the box and went back to sleep.

I got back in the bed when I heard a muffled scream. That was probably

from my uncle. I know how he must feel, cramped in that small box. So I decided to make him feel comfortable. I took one of the pillows from my bed and opened the box. My uncle's dehydrated body had shifted since I saw it last. I figured it just must be the convection currents from the citrus sauce, so I let it slide for now. I took the pillow and stuffed it underneath its head. I figured that it must be a lot more comfortable now and would be quiet, so I went back over to return to my nap. My dead uncle cooperated this time and didn't make any noise. I fell into a deep sleep. I dreamed of a great feast.

I awoke to the wet slime of citrus sauce all over my face. At least I wasn't hungry anymore. I tried to yawn, but I noticed something hanging out of my mouth. It was my dead uncle's foot. The top to the box was open, and beside me on the floor was a pile of small bones.

I belched and reached down and, for lack of anything better, used his leg bone as a toothpick since I didn't have a toothbrush with me. But I was still thirsty. So I went over to the box and slurped up as much of the citrus juice as I could, just as a parched dog would vigorously lap the water from his bowl. I was satisfied. Now I was ready for a good day of work.

My father came back, dressed in his bathrobe. He unbolted the door and turned on the electricity to my room. He opened the door, turned on the lights. He looked down at the bones on the floor, and then looked at my face, still covered in the putrid juices. He put his hand on my back.

"Good work, son."

He helped me put my leg back on, and then we went off to school, and I didn't even miss my history lecture. I came home that day thoroughly confused

and extremely happy.

Of Joseph

I

The air was cold in Forest City. The wind was gnawing through all of our thin coats; no one had expected it to be that cold that day. And I just sat there staring at the box. It wasn't very ornate, very plain. Fiberglass. Grey. Just like the sky. No different. And there was sadness and death all around me. Enveloping me and welcoming me. Death always welcomes the living into its reach.

Amid the cries and the tears, the flowers thrown onto it and the headstones around it, they lowered him into the ground. Encased in a mass produced fiberglass box. And I remembered it well and still do.

I have pictures, yes, I have pictures. Lots of pictures. Pictures sometimes in my hand, sometimes in the chests of memory. Of me and grandpa when we were young, hunting in the wooded backlands of Pennsylvania. Winchester in hand, firing the old twenty-twos, wrists aching after a full day from the recoil, thumbs calloused from loading cartridge after cartridge in the side year after year, watching the empty shells fall on the warming covering of dried leaves. Of souls just as empty as the used bullets after killing an animal for the sake of the sport, but later glad when at grandma's kitchen it became a wonderful stew, the fumes intoxicating the taste buds. A long time ago, it wasn't just sport. It was a gift for the whole family. Long before I was there, Miner's Mills was a suburb. And behind the house, there was not those miles upon miles of more and more houses and paved roads, but expanses of trees and beds of dried leaves. Back when deer would meander into the backyard,

nibbling at the small garden so lovingly tended by those old calloused hands, grinding the white chalky fertilizer into the soil to make some small seeds that can even roll through the small skin folds of hands and get stuck in the sweat too small even to be poppyseeds in grandma's world famous nut rolls (or at least for a block) and dirtied fingers pushing them gently into the ground to fall asleep again and perhaps wake if so lucky and be picked caringly by those old hands, although then they weren't that old. And those young hands could hunt right behind the house when the stairs didn't groan from their decades of burden. Right behind the house was a better source of food than the market that monopolized the downtown. And the rails didn't go by there yet to scare all of them away. But there's no woods there now. Only more blocks of houses, and the rotting frame of the old steel mill that never quite made it and the rusting rails that led to it. None of those trees are left. Only small lots of cultured green. Only pictures, and memories. Of times out there with the Winchester.

I have lots of memories, yes, I have lots of pictures. The old school pictures of when in first grade they still had you holding a chair in that nice button-down shirt, little bow tie and vest that daddy made me wear, being the polite little angel. I sat there in front of a paper counterfeit of a tacky powder blue sky with cottonball clouds and smiled like a drunken mime. And later on I took them home in a nice white paper envelope. I couldn't open them, that was a sacrilege that required a beating on the backside. And my father would be the one to open them (when he came home after doing what fathers do) and just adore them until they turned white in the darkness of his wallet. And then he would try to make me laugh. Sometimes he was funny, but most times I

humored him as he humored me until the sun would set over the horizon, over the games of airplane and a father swinging a little three-year-old until dizziness and that little three-year-old flat world wouldn't be still anymore. And I laughed. And I loved him. I humored him because I loved him. There's nothing else to love when you're five. Only your parents. Not her...she wasn't there until ages later. But at that time, not her. She wasn't in those pictures. She wasn't in those three-year-old dreams.

I still have lots of memories. Of grandpa and sitting in the forest, the Winchester, safety on, sitting across my lap, eating cold cut sandwiches and drinking soup that grandma had made for us, the sun shining down through the leafy tree-tops, the wind gracing our smiles. And we talked, we talked about the things that interested a young lad, about the future, about her. And we talked about what we would shoot next, what we would be getting in our stew. And how the smell would run out of the kitchen and about the house. And about how we hope the game warden wouldn't catch us hunting without our licenses again. How we talked under those trees in that wooded back-plain.

And when we got back to grandma, she was always eager to make our dinner. After we skinned and cleaned what we had caught, there was the big kettle ready, the meat broth already made. She knew we would always have something. Not necessarily from me, the young lad I was who couldn't aim, but from grandpa. All of the years that he had spent behind the gun spoke; he was an artist at work. No, not an artist...more of a master. A master craftsman. And I was his apprentice. All for a stew. And grandma was the master craftsman for the stew. She was the cook, we were the butchers bringing

home the meat. If grandpa was an artist, grandma was a kind of god. Every grandma has their own special recipe for everything. Perhaps it's just their touch. Everything that a grandmother makes must by definition taste better. She would sit at the table, the chairs not yet groaning from the trials of the decades, sawing the raw meat into small chunks ready to be cooked to tenderness. And the extras, all of those extras that today people wouldn't even think to touch, they all went in that large kettle of boiling water until after hours of churning out came that golden broth that tasted so good. But those times were many and every time just as powerful, smelling the aroma of the freshly cooked animals, tasting the delicious venison which we had brought, fresher than anything in the stores. Nothing could compare. We had such times, grandma, grandpa, and me. I have lots of memories.

But, it's funny. Memories seem to be always there, but not there at the same time. Remembering them is kind of like watching noodles boil in a pot. They kind of just circle around and around, aging like a fine wine, softening, sometimes even losing some of their sting. And then, without even the slightest hello, the pot boils over violently and all of them come to the surface. It's not easy to stop the boiling pot without taking it away from the heat. And it's even harder to clean up the spill. Memories have that funny sort of quality about them. Soon, it would happen again. This time, my pot exploded.

It was late, the stars out, the next late-night movie on the networks. There was a light rain that hardly pattered on the roofbeams. Half-asleep, I vaguely watched the pictures gently masquerading across the fluorescent screen. Waiting. For nothing. As the colors blurred, my eyelids heavily fell down, and I drifted into a sea of inky night. Not asleep, mind you, but more of a rest. A short nap. My parents had been off to a gathering that night, somewhere fairly distant. The phones had been silent, their ringers disconnected for my parent's privacy, as well as their brilliant idea to let me rest comfortably without the need to worry. All had been set perfectly in Neverland. No worries. No care. Just a late night movie.

The answering machine suddenly blared to life with a squawking voice being gently recorded. The voiced seemed stressed, tenuous, almost terrified. I recalled this only in passing, for I was still in the blackness, unaware of what this intruder into my personal relaxation could have to say. Ignoring it, I tried to rest. I heard the final beep of the machine, going back into its hibernation before recording the next victim. And all was not well. Silence has a strange way of creeping into your mind, darkness has the uncanny ability to make you think. And since I was now in both, thoughts raced through my small mind.

It was that voice. The terror in it, the sadness, the shock. I couldn't help but wonder what it had to say. I didn't get the words down; in my slumber it sounded like a message would come through a Ouija board, slow and blurred. But I could hear that strange feeling in the voice. But the night was so inviting. I wanted to rest more than ever, to get rid of the specter of that lamenter speaking to a tape. I sat back in the reclining chair, pillow behind my head, fan

on to counter the humidity of the outside air, comfortable as ever I had been. But I was not. I tossed and fidgeted to a more comfortable position, which very soon led to cringing into another, meandering into another. And with ever toss and turn some kind of id kept me wide awake. That subliminal knowledge that something, somewhere, is not at peace. It was that voice. I slowly opened my leaded eyelids, knowing that until I found out what it had said I would not fall asleep.

I groggily rose from my comfortable recline into the cotton rug, the fibers tickling my feet. But I did not laugh. There was something in the atmosphere that kept me from laughing. Something not right. I walked down the dark hallway, all the time in the back of my mind one of those recurring nightmares of my younger days playing over and over setting off the warning bells, a giant drill bit coming after me, turning and whining, the end was so sharp, and it pushed me back to the end, the lights going out and out, the noise rising, and as I throw my hands back over my face it all starts all over again and there I am at the end of the hallway with a whine from a drill bit back in the distance, running down it again. The answering machine was in a room at the end of the hallway, and the drill bit doesn't recur right now, at least it hadn't yet. I turned stealthily into the room, being sure to have a path well lighted so I could make sure there was no one there in the dark. And there it was. The blinking light on the machine, waiting for someone to beckon it to life. That red light is its mating call, its cry for attention. The machine was lonely now, holding something that I didn't want to hear.

Almost trembling, I pressed that button. That voice was hideous even in

the rewinding, hearing the message backwards at high speeds. Annoying, especially to someone who wants to sleep. And then it started, in that shaking voice. A man's voice with just enough emotion to make flowers wilt. In a tempo which was chilling enough to make time abruptly stop in its amblings and pay condolences. And the machine delivered its message.

"Mark...this is your brother. Dad's dead. If you can, please give me a call."

And then the dial tone. The red light went out, its mission completed.

Of all messages to be delivered by that machine, there have been many: the mechanic calling to say the car's fixed, the instrument teacher calling to reschedule a lesson, an old friend calling to say hi, a relative calling to wish a happy birthday, a parent calling to give holiday blessings. But this message was one that never should have been given by it. Things like that aren't to be told to a machine—they carry much more importance. More emotion, more gravity. Notices like those must be given in person; a machine is not consoling, no matter how hypnotizing the red light is. The red light now was only steady. No more blinking. The messenger had given his message, and now must commit ritual suicide.

And so I chided myself in that half-asleep state for not hearing the phone. For leaving it off. Who would have ever guessed that something would happen to grandpa? That man who was so strong, so stoic behind that Winchester, so humorous when picking the tomatoes he had planted, so full of strength after eating his stew? And everything, all of those memories, all of those pictures, erupted. They were precious now; I hoarded them, going over

every memory I had inside of me to not forget, deciding to write them down and keep them with the pictures. I would create a portrait of this strong man, I would create him immortal. But right then I could not. Grandpa was dead.

And in the dark I cried.

Alone.

Comforted only by the steady red light of the machine, staring, chiding.

And I wasn't welcomed into the inky night any longer, for my eyes were too wet to close.

My parents didn't come home that night. They left me in the dark, alone, crying. How could they have known? But where were they? I knew that I wasn't going to let my father find out his father was dead from that machine. So inhuman, without someone there to comfort him. I was old enough to understand death; it was so real and so grave. For the first time I understood how callous death is to men, and how it can't be endured without that comforting spirit. I was going to give that to my father. I would call him to ease the blow.

But wait. I was going to more out of fear, out of panic. I had no one around me. I could now hear all of the noises of the house which men never hear: the refrigerator was gently creaking away, every time I stepped on a board it would squeal in pain, the hiss of the draughts, the fans were chopping up the still air. All of it became so loud. And I couldn't shut it out. It sounded as if a swarm of bees, their stingers ready, were swarming and couldn't be smoked out. That hum that was always there but had no source was louder than the organ blasting at church. And I didn't know where it was coming from.

It was the voice of God. Coming for me too. Coming for me. I had to find my father. I couldn't be in this house alone with my memories. I had to call him.

Listening intently for signs of another person in the dark house, quickly glancing around the corners and down the stairs. I hastily picked up the receiver. The monotonous dial tone greeted me. I reached for the buttons, but then I didn't know where to call. They were gone, not leaving a number or name. They never did. Nothing ever happened in our little household in the middle of nowhere. I never needed to call them, but when I did, I didn't know where.

I set the handset back on the hook tenuously, vacillating whether to call some of my parents' friends to find if they were there or to leave it go. But it was two in the morning after I had stopped crying enough to be afraid enough to call, and no one would appreciate that.

It was only right that they should know now. I could let them come home and find out with the press of a button, but wouldn't that make me just as inhuman? I'm not going to let an answering machine tell them that kind of news. They hated machines anyway. No one ever calls in person anymore. But I wasn't even able to tell him in person. And it was his own father. I didn't know where they could possibly be. Heavens knows that wherever both of them were were, they were having fun. It wouldn't be right to take that pleasure away from them, would it? But it was his father. He had a right to know. He had to be here. He should've been here to get the call. I shouldn't have to be the one to tell him. It's all his fault. He should have been home tonight. He abandoned me. I didn't do anything. What did I do wrong? I'm trying to call them now. God, I'm trying to call them, why do you punish me? They're the

ones who aren't here. They're the ones that should atone, not me. It's done. He's dead. My grandfather is dead.

A deep breath brought sanity back to me. There was no use to cry any more. I couldn't find them, and I didn't know where to start. In a false sense of security, I knew that the tears were to be over now; everything was to be as it was. Everything that had happened that day, everything that made me who I am was no more. My soul was only filled with surprise and exhaustion from the mudslides of emotion that had been wrenched out by a blinking light on an answering machine. My mind that had once been focused now took on a base form of an existence driven by the essence of sadness and the purity of fear. Where to find my parents was just as unanswerable as where my grandfather was now. He's not with his Winchester anymore. Where can I get my veal stew now? All of those days fishing by the creek. He always took my fish off of the hook for me. We never kept the small ones. We let them go back to have a chance to catch their breaths and grow. We kept the big ones, however. They were so tasty. After that fight to bring them in, there was no way that we'd let them get away from us. And then grandma would cook them for us. Broiled, doused in butter and cholesterol. Grandmother. I know where she is, alone. No more dinners; who's she going to cook for now? In that house, staring at his leftovers. Alone. Just like me. In the dark. Just like grandpa.

I knocked the phone off of its comfortable bed and rushed over to the chair in the dark, crying, afraid. I didn't need any time; I already missed those ventures into the woods, I already missed that laugh, weeding in the garden. I could never get those back. As I sobbed alone the plaintive cry of the phone

wept with me, pleading to be put back into its sepulcher. I cried, knowing that I could never be as comfortable again.

I

It seems that so long ago things were lost. Not lost, but rather misplaced in the collage called a three-year-old's memory. Back in kindergarten I used to make collages. We got those big scissors that could hardly cut paper and leafed through magazines to find anything that looked remotely interesting. The aesthetic senses of young children are so well developed. What is lost over the years is something that can never come back. Remember those wonderful times spent making collages on the school lunch bags. We never brought anything to eat—preschool was just too short and why would we want to leave the comforting warmth of mother's arms for more than four hours anyway? And we spent half of it in naptime. Once I made the most colorful collage in the entire class. It was hard to find all of those pictures in the magazines we had there. It's amazing to look at things you made back when. Sometimes you could even consider it art.

Why is it that when you're in an empty house noise takes on a whole new sense of annoyance? Every little bang, every little creak is so loud and purposeful. And that's all it takes to get your mind running. The refrigerator going on. Must be a burglar. The answering machine running again. Rewind. Record. Rewind. It's a truck pulling in silently. They're going to rob the house.

They know I'm the only one in the house. Did I lock the doors? I hope that all of the windows are closed and locked. I can't check now. That would just let them know that I'm scared. They know that everyone else is out. And how could my parents be out and leave me all alone to be the only one to know about grandpa, without even knowing where they are. They didn't even tell me why they were going, just that it was a gathering. A gathering. That could be anything. Hell, they could've gone to a political rally in Venezuela. Then it happened. A crash downstairs, the loudest banging I've ever heard. I ran into my room and grabbed the bat that sits right by my door even today. Everyone needs their security bat for those times alone in the house. That's it. Walk silently down those stairs. Make sure that they can't hear you. Turn on all the lights, fast. And it's so silent. He's in that room there. Check the door. Don't turn your back. And hold that bat high over your head. Get ready to swing it, good and hard. Get ready to knock them out. They're coming. Move slowly now, slowly. The tense atmosphere is only as strong as the dark. All the lights. The closet. I threw open the door to the closet. Rummage around in it. Poke the bat in it and ruffle the loose jackets. Make sure no one's there. Okay. No one in the closet. But part of the basement's still dark. Got to get out to turn on the lights. Turn on all of the lights. Make sure that I can see everything everywhere. That's it. Got to be quiet now. There all the lights turned on. I've got them now. Where is he. Can't be anywhere where I've already been. But maybe they could be much faster than me. Maybe they are already behind me. Move slowly to the corner. I turned fast around it--no one there. Check the door. Still locked. There's no one here. Relax for a second. No one here.

I'm alone. No one trying to break into the house. Go and turn on the outside lights, fast. Keep your head low. Can't let them see that you're downstairs. Nope. Not there. Garage still closed. Driveway empty.

I looked around to try and see what made me come down here. I remembered the crash. It was so loud. I scanned the floor—what could it be? No, clock's still on the wall. Looks like everything's still on the shelves. Pictures still hanging. I walked over to the other half of the room. There it is. A pile of books that had been stacked haphazardly on the top shelf had just fallen onto the tiles. But it had made such a racket. Oh well. Guess I have to put them back now. I got down on my hands and knees like a servant and began to sift them into piles. I was going to put them back right this time. I wasn't going to be a victim to gravity any longer. I had to make sure that for the duration, nothing like that would scare me any longer. And then, picking them up, I thought about him. Grandpa was dead. I dropped the book in my hand and started to cry. I fell over onto the raggy carpet and thought of us sitting around watching bad miniseries on TV. How many sacks of that special chewing tobacco must still be left in the closet. I don't think that grandma would have any use for it.

After a few minutes of tears, I regained control of my senses. In front of my face was the book I had dropped. I just stared at it. It's one of those I haven't seen in years. It was volume seven of one of those wonderful cartoon encyclopedias that you can buy in supermarkets. I remember when I got those. I was three years old. Every month they came out with two new volumes. The Peanuts encyclopedia. I think one volume was bout two bucks. I never had a

real encyclopedia before, and this was the world for a small child. Every week I sat down in grandpa's leather chair and read every single one of those volumes voraciously. You know, being engulfed by the soft cushioning of the chair, pulling that wooden bar that made you fly backwards and made this footrest fly out of the front of the chair, that was the first place I ever learned about Morse code, that chair was where the telephone was invented again and again and again, where Charlie Brown dressed up like Ben Franklin discovered electricity every time you opened volume six, where Snoopy in a space suit could hop on the moon. Days where the Wright Brothers could fly like birds and bicycles popped to life once again. Inside of those encyclopedias was another world where I could lounge leisurely in dreams of Schroeder and Woodstock. I always smiled and laughed. Some of those cartoons in there were so funny. And grandma would sometimes watch me and laugh too. This grandma didn't could deer soup, but she was always there. This grandma could always be found in that one green tweed chair. That chair was molded to her so perfectly; I can still see her in it this day. This grandma was even more cuddly than my mother, and that was hard to accomplish. And she had a poodle. That black poodle was always around. Old and tired, but always around and willing to play with such a small kid who had the vivacity of a newborn calf trying to walk for the first time. This grandma would watch Knight Rider while holding you on your lap. This grandma who gave me a rosary made out of olive trees, blessed by the pope, my grandfather's rosary, this grandma who taught me how to pray. This grandma could teach you how to crochet. And it was over there in that same chair where I made my first chain. I was so happy. I used some of the

oldest thread, a spool that was still wooden how old must that one be, that I could find in her aging sewing box and the finest crocheting needle that she had. I learned that one motion, and I was suddenly so powerful. I sat there for hours just crocheting one long chain. I used the whole spool of thread, and when I was done I had one long chain. What a wonderful accomplishment for a young little kid. And grandma smiled so broadly and gave me the biggest hug that she ever could have. She was so proud. My sister crocheted clothes for her teddy bears, and my grandmother afghans and lace tablecloths, but I had made a chain. And I did it wonderfully tight. Every loop was so minute that you could hardly see through it. I took that chain and wrapped it around something I had found in my grandfather's workroom, a latch for a screen door. I still have that chain somewhere. It's probably in that drawer of things that were so important that I never got around to throwing them in the garbage. Things like that last wooden spool of thread that I found in my mother's sewing box, like those thin plastic records that we got in Sunday school, like the script of the first play I ever had a part in, like my old collection of small colored-glass jugs (especially the ones that still have those small corks in them), like the first chain I ever crocheted. I wish I could remember how to crochet now. I've forgotten, and there's no one left to teach me how. The chair is empty now. The house is so empty. But it still has its pulse, coming from somewhere unknown.

I closed the old encyclopedia and put it back on the bookshelf, right in the correct spot. Between five and seven. I went back to the floor. There was only one book left in the pile. That's the one that must've made that loud sound. The large red atlas. That one was bought for me by grandma so long

ago. She bought it along with an atlas of the United States, and an encyclopedic dictionary. She thought it would be so wonderful to contribute to our education. It was so neat as a little kid to look at those maps. The mountains were impressive—how could anyone get them to stand off of a flat page like that? Far away lands and places became so real. And it was so big and so close that it made the best possible hiding place that a little kid could ever have. It was great to press leaves and flowers. Putting an innocent daisy in there before ironing was a very common practice in those days. The binding had broken long before from all of the special papers that I stuffed in there when I was so young. That Great World Atlas had a large part in my young life, not to mention all of the dreams and history assignments it took care of. Inside of that atlas I could go to China, I could find where Beijing really was, I could go to the bottom of the sea. There were pictures in it of all of the planets and even a moon map—this was a big atlas. Once I had planned such amazing adventures: I would travel to the Pyramids of Egypt, I would one day drive up to Alaska and see all of those amazing pictures for myself, it would only take less than two weeks by car who cares if I sped and I could be there so fast and planned my around the world tour to Paris Rome Athens Olympia where did Jesus really live and see the ancient lands of Sumer and Troy where Alexander died and the Great Wall in China and the samurai of Japan such things to see all in an atlas that not only taught me geography but imagination dreams hoping.

I picked it up, ready to slide it back into its coffin, when out fell a bunch of old papers, some yellowed, some torn. I reached down and leafed through them. Old National Geographic maps, a roadway map of New York, an old

mimeographed map of India, and there was then a piece of memory. A small brown paper bag. I picked it up, dropping everything else I had in my hands and in my mind to look at it. It was my collage that I had made back in pre-school. The best in the class. How old must this be now? Thirteen years? Fourteen? I just looked at the pictures on it. The things that were important to a small kid. A picture of an old car with flames painted on the side of it took center spot. I remember I loved cars. Had that Matchbox collection with everything in it. Kept me occupied for hours, flipping up the hood on the chocolate brown Beetle, pretending to fix the engine. And my prize car: a pink Cadillac. Just like Elvis had. I even put the decals on this one; I paid nineteen dollars for it. And it even had a license plate, the small hood ornament. Not quite as vivid a color as the collage, though. A picture of a diver in a black wet-suit with a bright yellow bordered facemask. A blue sea. A bright orange tropical fish. And the glue still held on all of them. My collage still held together; good old Elmer still could smile on my bag. Thirteen years and holding.

But it was too old, just as I was. Back then, I was different. Running around at the recess, picking off the flowers of the honeysuckle. Stealing the little glass vials that were so pretty. Why? Because he did. Ritchie. I had forgotten about him. He was always getting into trouble. He seemed to be the perfect embodiment of Pan. Never doing anything hideous, just doing little things every now and then to perfectly annoy the teachers. To a little five-year-old, that was so funny. So I tried to be just like him. I even called him my friend. And I had no other friends there in that Holy of Holies, that private preschool on the hill. Every month we were walking down to the glen to eat

picnics; where's it gone to now? Some Asian mosquito has killed all of the hemlocks now. Ritchie always was getting into trouble, and as a five year old who had no better sense, I followed him. I never ate the carrot raisin salad. I didn't quite enjoy the alfalfa. And I remember the one day Ritchie and I pushed it too far. My mother had to come to pick me up. I don't even remember what I had done. And, yelling and slapping me in the back of the head, we walked out of the office. She tripped and broke her ankle. All because of me. If I had never been there she'd never've broke her ankle. If I had never followed Ritchie. All because of me.

I threw my old collage back into the atlas. I slammed it shut and promptly returned it back into its mausoleum, back to the bottom shelf. Back into dust and memory. I stealthily made sure that all of the windows were locked and doors were shut tightly. I shut off all of the lights and ran back up the stairs, vowing to sleep. To shut out all the sounds and memories. To calm down in an empty house.

IV

Have you ever seen the coal fields of Pennsylvania? You can see them better in the winter. If you look in the right place, you can see the coal. It's still there, waiting for someone to come along and rape it. In the winter, when you see a mountain of white freshly fallen snow, wait until you get to the other side. Waiting for you will be a cavity set into the mountainside, a grotesque

necklace stretched out for mother earth. Something that she had to work thousands of years to get. And in Pennsylvania she brags and just shows it off. When you see something that black against something that white, it's as if God had finally shown you true beauty. Waiting for you to do something with it.

Grandpa used to work in the coal mines. Back during the Depression. It was tough work then. Every day throw on a pair of clothes. Go off to the mines and pick up the hat and the pick and get ready to work. Riding down in the bucket attached to that winch was one of the worst part; how many men died when the winches didn't work right. Tales of the men that died in that winch, the motor just let go and they plunged down that access shaft all the way to the bottom hitting it with a thud. The sharp sting of the bells had to be heard over the drills for the winch. The same winch that constantly went up and down, if not carrying coal carrying the men. And once you got down there, after that long ride in that swinging bucket with four other men, that's when the true working day started. It wasn't easy to breathe down there. The coal dust just hang in the air like the fog after a short rain. In that darkness the drilling teams were constantly pounding away. The loud roar of their drills reverberated through the earth. There is never anything so deafening as the sound of those teams; no matter wherever you were in the mine you knew where they were. Down two shafts. To the right. Eventually you couldn't hear them anymore. They became just part of the background, but this hum was a wail. But like anything in life that happens so much, it is easily forgotten. And that wasn't the worst. In those dark mines the water constantly welled up. Pools of it were everywhere. It turned the coal dust into a slick mud that caked

onto your body. Walk out at the end of the day entombed in a black crust that had to be washed out. Muscles sore from working all day, sometimes swinging a pickaxe splitting the large chunks into smaller ones or sometimes arms sore from pushing around, moving, taking command over one of the large drills that wasn't quite ready to be tamed, wheezing with lungs covered in that black dust, shoveling coal into carts to be hauled back up to the surface. Hoping that winch wouldn't break again stories they were only stories none of it ever happened. Putting up with all of it. And then go back to the house and feed, listen to, play with, occupy five kids.

It wasn't easy back then. And for what? To get food on the table, to give them a better life. Hunting and fishing, that brought food. Not just a sport. Also brought food. Brought in better food than could ever be found at the market. But sometimes there was better. Always went to the market and brought in a ham at least once every two months. That was a delicacy for them, even if it wasn't one of the fancier ones. You didn't need to get those smoked ones, the regular ones could do. The smell of ham and cloves is one of the few unforgettable smells that they could always remember. Cloves and ham have a tendency to roam throughout the house and get stuck in the small cracks and linger like the smoke of a good cigar. And you didn't just eat the meat. All of the grizzle went too. And the bone, well that was just perfect for making soups and stews. Everything went. Anything that they didn't eat, the beagle ate. Everyone got fed. Hams were feasts back then, and they were so much tastier. Something was lost when everything got better in the future; the hams were fuller, less fat, smoked with the finest woods, but somehow it

wasn't the same. They were still tasty on the outside, but they just didn't have that same special aroma that you only had once a year when the humidity was just right. Hams were never like that again. And all of the hard work went for something else. Ham wasn't a delicacy. Everyone can eat pork in the modern era, not like back then. Nice and packed in circular little plastic casings, like coffins for the dead. Preprocessed dry artificially colored flavored preserved meats in colored cellophane packaging. Nothing is quite as natural as it was then anymore. Not even as fresh as that day old food at the market. Times certainly aren't like what they were then. When you had to sweat for your money.

V

I still couldn't fall asleep. There were too many memories. It's funny how a house can be so loud in silence, the memories welling up and erupting into reality. I was just sitting there again, and I still couldn't fall asleep. Too many memories. I just listened to them in the dark, letting them capture me just as they captured me once before. Lying there, I thought I heard someone crying.

This grandpa wasn't like the other one. Chicago had been his stomping grounds, a foreman in the steel mills. This grandpa owned a small house on a block, the kind where there are less than six feet of lawn before the next house started. Even though there was not a lot of it, this grandpa always mowed the lawn every month. Taking out that old gas powered lawnmower, all metal.

Pour some gas into its small tank. Check the spark plug. Grab onto the drawstring and hold on tight. Always started on the first try. This grandpa was a master at starting the lawnmower. He wasn't around long enough to teach me how to practice that magic. On that twentieth pull, I wish he had. This grandpa may not have been rich, but he was respectable. He knew of the world and of the people in it, knew what was right and wrong. He didn't need any money to keep a good family. He could put food on the table, even if there were no woods to hunt at. Could get money for his only daughter's bus fare. Didn't ever have enough to buy a TV, but he could always go and use the neighbor's, but who needed those small pictures when you could get everything just as well over the radio? And he could even send his daughter to college. She would have more chances than he ever had. But he knew that you didn't have to be rich to be respectable. He paid his debts and owned his own house. No mortgages. And he even had a car. His wife never learned to drive, but she didn't need to. That's why there were buses. This house was small and didn't have any garage, that was in the alley down the street. It was amazing how he could get that big green Malibu into that garage. Driving in reverse was a necessity in Chicago. And there was a time when you didn't even need to drive with your headlights on at night. There was a time when all of the streetlights were on all of the time. You didn't need to lock your doors. And there was no such thing as greenhouse gases. Time's youth fostered blissful ignorance and innocence. But time has a ridiculous way of getting the best of you, and this grandpa wasn't a foreman forever. Neighborhoods went bad, and it wasn't safe for two old people to live there anymore. They moved out and came over to us. What

a large change it must've been to come to New Jersey from Chicago. To be surrounded by trees and without the hum of the city. A place with no buses and a larger lawn. Where you had to drive with your headlights on at night, where there were no streetlights save one coughing fluorescent light hanging high above the streetcorner. Where the roads were no longer straight. Where the church looked like an office building and had never known any real bells. But he brought with him a lifetime of knowledge and a desire for making great things as cheaply as possible. He remembered that money was no indicator of greatness. He also brought with him an insatiable desire for peanut butter. He used to sit down by the old table that they brought with them from Chicago with a flat dull knife, scooping peanut butter into his mouth. Sometimes he used crackers, but he always ate from the jar. Who needs plates and bowls when peanut butter already has a bowl of its own? Just like peas with honey, it stayed on your knife. And he never changed knives. Always the same knife was used for the peanut butter, the jam, the cream cheese, whatever suited his fancy. I can't remember how many jars this grandmother had to throw away because he couldn't even use a fresh knife. I think she'd much rather wash a knife than have to buy a new tin of peanut butter.

This grandpa loved to work with his hands. He built everything that we own. Take a quarter of the yard out for a garden. The largest garden in the neighborhood. Why? Well, he always used to work out there when he could, pulling out the old corn, pushing the rotor tiller in the spring, weeding, planting. There has never been anyone since who can raise eggplant in New Jersey like him. And there were always the dreams. We were going to have an orchard in

the back. Peaches, plums, apples, pears, we were going to have them all fresh. We never would have to buy them again; we'd have them for ourselves. But it was too wet back there. Long before anyone had ever thought that was going to be an orchard, it was a swamp. A thick place filled with the stench of sickness and death. The trees never quite made it. Oh they grew for a while, sprouting up, reaching their green hands towards the light. But not after long they all turned black and didn't even have many leaves on them anymore. We never got any fruit from all of that hard work that this grandpa did, digging deep holes, using a crowbar to get out rocks larger than his own head, money spent fertilizing. It would have all been worth it since fresh fruit couldn't be found out in this place. There was nothing like the market in Chicago. And we never got any fresh fruit. Except for that one year. Ten years after that day, one tree that we thought was dead that hadn't had leaves on it in so long, that year there were leaves on it and one pear grew. The only pear it ever made. And it was succulent and sweet. But we had it ten years too late. He never saw the one delicious fresh fruit of his labor. But this grandpa didn't just plant orchards. Maybe if we had really tried, we would have sprayed those trees each year. Those gypsy moths always destroyed them. That's probably what killed them. But insecticide was too expensive. His years of not being so rich had taught him how to make things himself, although time has shown that he couldn't make good insecticide. But other things, oh yes. Hammers, wrenches, he had them all from his experience as a foreman, and probably even as some other jobs that we never even found out. He built his own workbench out of old wood and parts. Three drawers. And painted with extra paint from painting

the house. The most unusual light green that you'd ever see. The hammers were so heavy that whenever the drawer came out, if you were strong enough to pull it out, the boards creaked as it slid past the steel plated wooden runners. And did those drawers ever lean down. You could even swear that sometimes they were just going to fall right out on your feet. You didn't need any weights to lift, just go to that homemade workbench and pull the drawers in and out. This grandpa was always doing something with his hands. His crowning achievement was the fence around the house. My mother's dog needed either to stay in the house or to have a fence to let him roam around. First step, plant trees around the whole yard. It's hard to believe now, but there was a time when we could still see our neighbors across the street; now there is a wall of pine trees in the way. And what would be a respectable house without a sidewalk? Every respectable house needed one. He even made the concrete himself. Found his own sand, put in his own rocks and limestone. He knew how to do everything himself. If something ever broke, he was right there. And then one year he built the fence. Spare steel rods were the spokes, welded solid into capping pieces of iron. Sunk into the ground with his own homemade recipe for concrete that had been mixed in a used steel drum. That fence was never going to be able to be knocked down. And that wasn't all that he put in it. For a fence of just spare steel rods didn't have any type of grandeur to it. You see, sometimes being useful wasn't just enough. This grandpa, from being a foreman, knew how to work steel. He was able to bend scrap metal into the most intricate ornaments, topping off the whole fence. With his hands, he could weave steel into lace with as much skill as this grandmother could cro-

chet afghans. Using spare steel wheel rims became a work of art, what was once junk was now beautiful. And then there were the gates. Gates eight feet high, trimmed with spokes and ornaments that put the rest of the fence to shame. Old wooden wagon wheels made the center interesting, looking like novae of wood and steel. And on the outside of the posts were those street-lamps that never have been lit. Streetlamps that never really had lights in them, but steel pinecones that had been handpainted with care. And that wasn't just it. On the outside of the gates, a hanging sign was placed. Cut out of wood with the jigsaw, the shape drawn by hand and painted. Had the family name on it so everyone could know who had created this castle. And, driven in with nails, was the lucky horseshoe that would bless everyone who entered. But with all of these gates, we could close off our house from the outside if we wanted, to be isolated in our own little Camelot. This grandfather knew how to build fences. Not cheap fences, real fences. Fences with grandeur. And one day he'd teach me how.

Sitting on the back porch one day, sunny, hot. Must have been the summer. His face was still covered in the last day's stubble. And he brought out a hammer and nails. Two boards sat on the sidewalk, ones that he had cut already. He asked me what I wanted to make. I said that I wanted to make an airplane. I remember just not too long before my sister said she wanted to make a bookcase. And I knew that would work, because anything she did worked. My grandfather wearing that unique smile took me into his lap and helped me put the two boards across one another. Then he held the nail in between them, and put a hammer in my hand. He took my hand, and with his

help, we pounded the nail together. And we did it again. And again. And this grandpa laughed and gave me a big hug, scratching my cheek with his stubble. Soon the nail was all the way through both of those thick boards. And then we turned it over, and grandpa guided my hand and hammer to bend the end of the nail over into the board again, so no sharp point would be there to hurt me. And then we put in another nail. And this grandpa laughed and helped me again, keeping an eye on my sister. She already had done this before. Not like me. She already knew. Just needed someone there to kiss those stubbed thumbs. Life was great. And then he sent me out beyond the garden to throw around my airplane. It never really flew well on its own, it just fell quickly to the ground. But with a little help, it could fly beautifully. It flew above the white clouds and moved to capture the stars beyond. For many months, what sometimes seems like years, we were together. That airplane has been relegated to protecting the back of the garage now, but in my mind it can still fly higher than anything else.

But I heard crying in the house. It came from downstairs, by his chair, where he used to keep the cigars that he never smoked anymore. I was coming back from one of my preschool classes, carrying the collage that I had made that day. It was one of those paper bag collages, filled with bright colors. I had been lucky that day to get to the magazines of the bright tropical fish first. I wanted to show it to grandma and grandpa; grandpa was sick and could use some cheering up. I made sure that I was the first one in the door to surprise them. When I ran in with the happiness that only a three-year-old can have to say hi to grandma, she didn't say anything to me. She didn't even look up at

me and smile. My grandpa was on the sofa bed, asleep I thought, grandma just leaning over him, holding on his hand, crying. I didn't understand. Grandpa was just asleep. But grandma didn't say a word to me. Grandpa didn't either. I was annoyed that she wouldn't even give me a hug.

The last time I saw this grandpa he was in a nice bed, though it seemed a little more like a box. It looked like it was very comfortable. He didn't move anymore. And he was wearing a suit that I knew he never wore anything like it before. Lots of people were in this small room, I didn't know where it was. I even knew less about the people there. Only brief glimpses of faces never seen again. I got a card there. It had a picture of the Virgin Mary on it. It was my first card, now I could start a collection. Everyone in the room was so sad. I didn't understand why. I sat down in a chair in the front, thinking how lucky I was to get a front row seat. About halfway through I understood. I realized what had happened. I sat back in my seat, sad. I took out his rosary that had been given to me not long before and prayed for him, praying those simple three-year-old prayers that my grandma had taught me, hoping the pope's blessing on the rosary might help a little. And I felt sorry for this grandma sitting right next to me, who was still crying. And my mother in the chair next to me cried also. But I couldn't. I don't know why.

Once again, the house was silent.

I walked into my room and just looked around. I saw my collection of cards sitting on a shelf. How many were there now? Four, at last count. Soon I'd be getting another one. I'd have the largest collection in my school. In some sadistic way I was proud. But at the same time, I was disheartened. I wondered if everyone kept a collection of cards like I did. I went over to my bed and lay down to try to sleep; if I couldn't sleep in the chair, perhaps I would be able to sleep in here. Perhaps I could lose my memory in the comfort of a down pillow and comforter. But I really wasn't that comforted.

I just stared at my room, walls covered in pictures so that I could hardly even see the beige paint anymore. I never really knew why I surrounded myself with these pictures and posters and placards. Pictures of lewd mythological scenes, pictures that once I drew long ago when I still thought I could draw, pictures drawn by my sister who could always draw but never thought that she could. Posters of good sayings, bad comic strip characters. Old magazine cutouts. Certificates of achievement. I was still surrounded by the furniture, furniture that my grandfather had made for me, after he made the fence, made with his own hands. You could even sometimes see the ring caused by over-hammering. It's really amazing to see what he could do with wood. What once he made with his hands, I filled with my own hands. Amid the miles of cabling and electronics there were old pads of paper, diaries written in only once, old addresses of friends I'd never gotten around to writing, pictures of places I've been. And then there was that special place. On a small shelf, hidden behind all of the small ceramic dogs that I collected in my younger days, behind my prized pink Cadillac. This place was her shrine. Yes, there were many others,

coming and going on the outskirts of memory, but there was none that I ever felt so strongly about as her.

There is a misty boundary between love and obsession. If you love someone too much, without proper care it can easily turn into something worse, the obsession. You can easily know when that happens. When something starts to rule your life, when your mind no longer has any say in what it thinks, when there is this preoccupation that takes control over your actions, your thoughts, your hopes, your dreams. When obsession takes over your dreams, you must be careful. Sever it then, before it gets worse. Sever it in any way that you can. Who needs plagues when there are obsessions.

Obsessions can be about anything; love, death, life, hate. Everyone is vulnerable. If you have one and you can still live a normal life with it, then you are better than most. You have the key to existence. Please share it with everyone else.

All love seems to start with being drawn to the unusual. I don't know what it was that was so strange about this one. Perhaps it was that she had that strange beauty, almost ethereal, otherworldly. It's very rare that you ever find that kind of beauty in anyone. It probably only happens once, and then never again. No one is ever quite as beautiful as that one, no one else has that special aura. Love starts out in the subconscious, churning and boiling as you work. You never know about it until one day, it's finished rising and then you take it out of the oven. And that day is even not always a day. Sometimes you can get a taste of it if the cook is willing. And then they start feeding it to you gradually. They hope to get you addicted so then you need more and

more.

She was just so amazing that first time I realized that she was even there. That face, that voice. There was something different. But perhaps it was fear that kept me away. And when you are kept away, that's when you start to need it, crave it. You need that feeling every day of your life, every second that you live. That's when the obsession starts. That's when you constantly are aware of what she's doing, of what she's thinking, of what she's wearing, of what she's hoping. Or at least you think you are. Soon you become separated from the reality of it all. When that someone starts invading your dreams, you're in trouble. Soon it takes over and rules what you are, directs everything you do, hoping to get some small sort of attention. And you don't want anything to change. You want to stay just like that, not moving or evolving, just hoping and wishing. Without hope, who is a man?

I could picture her face without a picture. I was beyond the need for photographs. The mind can create a better picture than any man-made instrument. Nothing quite approaches the reality of memory. Perhaps I surrounded myself with pictures to forget, so when I looked at the walls I could see something man-made and not give my mind a chance to put anything there. I could escape from it. But obsession is too strong. Once you think you have it out of your head, someone hides it in a back room where it just waits to spring out again. You can't even hear any banging on the door; obsession just breaks it down and ravages you once again.

And so I had created a shrine to her. No, it wasn't started on that first day I realized that I even felt slightly attracted to her. That day sitting in the

Home Ec class, that first day that I had ever really looked at her face. And she smiled. But, young as I was, I knew that it was just childish. No one could ever like me. And so the thought that had held me for the slightest instant had vanished. But, somewhere in the closets of my mind, it stayed, asleep. It just waited and gained strength, waiting until the closet door would open once again. And each day, each time I saw her face, it would try to open the door again. But I wasn't ready for that door to be fully opened. And I shut it again. But, one day, something opened the door widely. She thanked me. Out of all of the people I've ever done anything for, she was the only one who had ever sent me a thank you letter back. Drawn by her own hand. With a real message. I was no longer an abstraction, and she wasn't either. We were real people.

Have you ever tried to comprehend the concept of another person? I sat there for hours just trying to think of another mind that had every single thought, flash of memory, emotion, that I had every second of the day. What must it be like to even think what one other person is thinking for the slightest moment of one day? Unthinkable. Impossible to even begin to understand that there are others that have all the thoughts that you do. And there are more and more of them. Billions of people all around, all having the same thoughts and feelings every single moment of the day. And you can't even begin to guess what one other person is thinking.

Somehow the little things became amplified as that feeling fought to get out of the closet. The most insignificant things suddenly took on the largest meaning. If the color of her shirt was the color of mine, or if she had passed

me in a hallway where she normally didn't walk, obviously it was evidence of some sort of connection between us. We knew exactly what each other thought. Red is today's color. Got to walk in front of the library. And the worst thing was the looks. Any type of sideways glance was suddenly a flirt. And if you've ever thought about how many people are actually looking at you for any minute of any day, then you know that everyone seems to be glancing at you all the time. And all of this served to open the door wider. Soon, I couldn't close it anymore. It was out, and it wouldn't go back. So I started my shrine. In it was my three only pictures I ever had of her; one of her dressed as a tiger of all things and in bad focus, one of her face partially blocked by another head of hair (can you believe it? She drank Diet Coke), one of her painting a window cut out from a yellowed newspaper. And there was also that thank you note. Years old, it still is there. And from time to time I would read it over and over, searching for some hidden message.

But on the outside, I couldn't show a single sign of this. No one would ever know that I had fallen in love with someone. Me, longing after someone like a large walking hormone. I couldn't believe that I had myself fallen victim to love. But, if anyone else knew, oh the rumors that would fly. And I couldn't allow that to happen. But, above all, I had to keep it from my parents. If they had found out, oh the embarrassment to me would be unbearable. They would give me the inevitable oh that's so cute why don't you ask her out take her to that nice place that we were once. And I would be tutored in the crafts of love. But I didn't want that. Like elephants, parents never forget. They would always remember and bring it up at holidays, talk about it to the relatives. No, I

swore to myself that my parents would never find out. I was pretty good at keeping it a secret too. Apparently no one knew. And I even was able to keep it from her. But you only can keep a secret for so long before you can tell it to someone else. Just like strong acid, you can only hold it for a short time before it starts to burn. And obsession was out of the closet now. Obsession made me try. Even if I didn't want to, I had to try.

About two and a half years later from then, I had one of the happiest days of my life. Perhaps it was because I might be able to get rid of my obsession. That was one of the few days I laughed. That morning, the morning of the day before Columbus Day, I felt that I could accomplish anything in the world. I came into the school with a smile and a joke and wearing a nice blue silk shirt. I was happy for one day in the world. I could make anyone laugh, I could make anything happen. But it wasn't true. Perhaps I had replaced her with my dream. I stayed behind to make sure that we were the only ones in the hall, perhaps because of my embarrassment at being ruled by my obsession. I asked her if she was free for supper. She couldn't just say no. I guess that was what she had been trying to say for the past two and a half years. I figured out that perhaps I had ruined her life for all of that time. But at least I was free from my obsession. I could just hope that it wouldn't return, and now that I knew the difference between a dream and reality, I could fight it now. I finally would be able to free myself from this ball and chain. But I missed that feeling. I now only had a memory. Perhaps it would return if she was always around, but I could now separate myself from her without any trouble. That was when I put the pictures all over my room. I could even try to lose her in my

memory. But I missed that time that I had, even if it was only a dream. That was one of the last days that I wore my silk shirts. That was one of the last days I laughed.

It took me a while, but I eventually laughed again. It wasn't all that bad after all. But in the springtime, when I heard her laugh again and saw her face, once again it tried to come out of the closet. But I'm stronger now. I can keep it shut. Until the night comes. Every night before I fall asleep, my eyes fall on that small shrine that I haven't had the strength to dismantle yet, and I think. I hope. And I dream about what I could have had, what I had missed, and how one day I might be able to actually find her again, if not her, then her in someone else. Always before I dream, I dream my own waking dream once again. But now I can shut the door when I want. I can allow myself a taste and can stop myself from going on. I can only eat just one.

But when life makes you just another desperate soul, lacking anything to ever make anyone notice you, it's common knowledge that you'll be alone for the rest of your life. You came into this world with the love of a mother, but even that doesn't last. You'll live through it alone, and you'll leave it alone. No one will be there. It's these thoughts that I guess caused me to fall in love. Love is selfish. And like a barnacle, I just grabbed on and bonded to the first thing that came my way. But what I had done was wrong. There was no justification for what I did to her. I can only remember now how I wrecked her life and cry. For her. For myself, for what I have become.

My memory had finally been cleared of her for the night. I no longer needed guidance in that matter. I closed my eyes and tried to fall asleep.

VII

This grandmother was not like the other one. This grandmother taught me how to crochet, but that wasn't all. I always felt closer to this grandmother, perhaps because she was always around. For the first nine years of my life I was privileged enough to know her. She wasn't just this grandmother, she was a saint. She never raised her voice to anyone. If I ever did anything wrong, she just mildly scolded me in her normal voice. Nothing ever upset her except for the dog. She would yell at the dog.

This black poodle went a long ways back for her. In Chicago, one night in the winter, she heard a whining outside. She put her jacket on and in her orange-yellow flowered dress went outside to see what was going on. In the cold, she could see her breath making small hurricanes in the night air. She walked down to the railroad tracks, and there in the white snowbank she saw the black poodle, limping slowly and whining. She brought it back to her house and raised it back to health, licensed it. She never knew who its real owner was; it didn't have a collar on it. But that poodle stayed with her. That poodle was her companion, kept her company when she was alone in the house. When she crocheted, there he'd be right beside her, sitting down and just letting her know that he was there. A long time ago he used to be outside in a doghouse that this grandfather had made. There was a link fence surrounding it, right outside of the enclosed rear porch that this grandfather had made for us so

long ago. Now we just use that porch for storage, and that doghouse is a memory. Not too long after this grandfather had died right in that house looking at that enclosed porch that he had made with his own hands, we took the doghouse down and that black poodle stayed inside of the house with this grandmother. This black poodle that had been with her since her days in Chicago was going to be her companion now. And he caused her a load of troubles too. She would walk him every day, even in the winters. One of these winters while she was walking the poodle, she fell victim to the ice that seems to fall only where you don't need it, literally. I remember seeing my grandmother wearing a cast, walking around the downstairs slowly. She got so sick, maybe just because she couldn't walk around. But she didn't blame the dog. That poodle was so wonderful to her, about as kind as a dog could be. Never was really trained, didn't need it. You could see how much he loved her in his eyes. Whenever he did something wrong, however, such as the time that he knocked down some ceramics from my grandmother's shelf, that was the only time that she ever spoke sharply. That poodle knew, though, and he made sure to leave that shelf alone. After seventeen years of living together, however, the poodle started to have problems. The eternal enemy of all mortals, time, had begun to destroy him. He became sick and couldn't even control himself anymore. The vet and my mother decided that it would be most humane to put him to sleep, that is, kill him. To let him expire by himself would be too painful, oh yes, we had to kill him. That day, I stayed home with my grandmother. We played cards. I tried to help her be happy, but she couldn't. Old Maid just didn't seem to be the thing. Later on, I could hear her crying. I cried too. One of my play-

mates was gone, but it was nowhere near as meaningful as it was for her. She had lost a companion, a reminder of her husband who helped bring him back to health. I still have his old collar in a drawer, just waiting for another dog who'll need it. But my parents won't ever get another dog. They never liked the poodle when it made such a mess of the carpet before it died. They seemed like they almost hated it. But I loved Bootsie until the last days.

One of the greatest things I remember about this grandmother was the smells. There were so many wonderful smells that you could never really get from any other grandmother. That smell of the homemade sauerkraut. She used to make it with my grandmother. All of the cabbage that we had planted during the year in the garden was ready, and that was when we dragged out the large ceramic pot. My grandfather and sometimes mother and I sat there, slicing the cabbage into small strips and putting them into the pot. Then it was grandma's job to remember the recipe that had never been written down and make the sauerkraut. After it was all done came the hard job, putting it all into jars. There were so many jars of sauerkraut, but it was guaranteed that all of them would eventually go. She always cooked kielbasa. There was always that secret touch that only a grandmother can have, and that no one else can ever have, that made it so delicious. Frying the onions and the sauerkraut and putting them onto the bun in such a way with the mustard that no one else can possibly do the same. And the smell was intense. The smell of meat, fried onion, and the sauerkraut. And there was also the soup afterwards. Take the juice, put in some vegetables, ketchup, and other things that have since been lost to history, and barley. Heat it up, and then you have some of the best

soup that there ever was. My mother knows the recipe, but it never turns out the same as her barley soup. Not as thick. There must've been that secret special something that this grandmother never told anyone else. There is always something beyond the recipe that makes food so special, that time that it is always cooked, that time required for the smell to seep into the most hidden places of the house. That is what made her so special. I can walk around the house today, and perhaps open a drawer that has never been opened for years, and inside I can still smell her homemade bread and cookies, that smell of sauerkraut that I've never smelt in the house since then.

This grandmother loved soap operas. I can remember being alone with her, sometimes when my mother had to go out to work during the day. She would always invite me downstairs to watch TV with her. I was down there every day that I could be, I didn't like to be alone yet. And every day we watched the same things, although I didn't exactly go down for the TV, I went down to be with her. It always was comfortable to be around her. I always felt so safe and so welcomed by her. I would sit down on one side of her worn black leather footrest and she would sit in that green upholstered armchair with that poodle on the other side, and together we would watch the soap operas. There were so many that we watched together, and I can still remember those theme songs and hum them in my heart. But I never remembered what any of them were about. They were so lost on a little kid. All of those affairs and such. Even if they were any. I just sat there as my grandmother watched the programs, I colored or read my comics. After the shows were off, however, we still had time that we needed to kill before my mother came back home. There

was not anything left on the television anymore, nothing good anyway. The game shows didn't come on for two hours. And grandma couldn't color. So we would often go out and sit on the swings that this grandfather had made from old iron pipes and wood. While we sat out there watching the butterflies and hummingbirds travel around the forest of flowers that my father and grandfather had planted in the yard so long ago, she would sing to me an old Polish lullaby. And I would fall asleep among the songs of the birds and the calls of the insects, my head on her lap. I didn't need the pillows or the blankets. All I needed was to hear that Polish lullaby and I was asleep.

I still remember that day that she had to go to the hospital. I didn't really understand why she had to leave the house. My mother had tried to take care of this grandmother by herself, but she just got worst and worse. Soon even the nurse that was there during the days wasn't able to help her. So she had to go the hospital. But I remember my mother was all sad that she was there. I told her that I wanted to see my grandmother, this grandmother. My mother took me to the hospital one day. Why is it that hospitals have this special smell about them that is never found anywhere else? That lifeless odor is something that is hard to duplicate. Perhaps it's because there is so much pain in a hospital, the misery of an entire group of people concentrated into one building. But they wouldn't let me go in. They said that I was too young. It didn't make a difference that I was her grandson, they said. They wouldn't let me go in to see her, into the hospital itself. So my mother took me into the store to find something to keep me occupied. Why is it that they sell games in hospitals to keep the kids occupied? As if they didn't already make enough

money off of the patients in them and cause enough pain to the kids by refusing to let them see the people they love so dearly, they now have to take advantage of them as well? I got a pad of paper and a pencil. I sat down in the lobby filled with leather upholstered sofas and armchairs that were permeated with that hospital smell and began to draw. I just remember sitting there for what seemed like hours; it was the first time I had even tried to draw a comic strip. And the paper was so unusual. It even had a strange hospital aura about it. I've never seen another pad of paper like it. Paper itself has an odor. If you've ever smelled a piece of paper, you can definitely identify one from another. It's not only the paper, but also where it's been and who's had it. You can smell the different inks of the pens and pencils used on it, you can almost even smell the type of handwriting on it. Paper has its own odor, and I've never found another paper with the smell like that one. By this time everyone had left the hospital, giving it an eerie silence. The only things left were the clicking of the machines and someone whistling somewhere off in the distance. Then my mother came out of an elevator and came over to me. Come on, she said, I'm going to sneak you in. There's no one looking. She took me by the hand and quickly rushed back into the elevator. We went somewhere into the depths of the building, into this room. There was one other old person there, but she was asleep. And there was my grandmother, lying on one of those hospital beds. She had something that looked like the plastic tubes I used to connect pumps to my fish tank underneath her nose, and her arms were all black and blue from the IVs. I sat there and she talked to me, very quietly and slowly. I remember her saying that she loved me very much, and I remember crying. I

took her hand and kissed it and gave her a hug. She was so weak. She pointed over to the bulletin board that was in front of there. Hanging on it were all of the cards that I had drawn for her. I drew every card with my own hand and colored it. Every time I thought that if I could just give her one more card she would get better. There were so many cards hanging on that board. And then she thanked me. I gave her a kiss. Her cheek was still warm. She died not soon after.

I walked in from school, my mother had just taken me home. I was walking up the stairs; my mother always went ahead of me. She had to open the house. My father was there waiting. I never heard anything that he said to her before I got there and saw them. I heard what he said that time, in a whisper, almost as if he tried to hide it from me. Your mother's dead. That grandmother that had taught me how to pray the rosary was gone. I'd never watch those soap operas again. I'd never be able to sit down and have someone who truly enjoyed playing Old Maid and War and tick-tack-toe. All of those decks of cards that inhabited the bottom cabinet would never be used again. Where would I ever get someone to sit on the swing with me on those warm summer days when everyone else was away? Who would sing that Polish lullaby to me now? All of them were in my memory only. Only a memory. I would never hear her singing again, never smell her barley soup. That recipe for homemade bread that took days to prepare, that was never going to be made again. All of it was gone in such a short time.

Just like the last time I saw this grandfather, this grandmother too was in a small room filled with people. There were people who I never even knew, peo-

ple who I never saw before in my life. Yet they still were coming over and comforting my crying mother. It was all so strange. And I'd never see these people again in my life. This time, I didn't need time to understand what had happened. I had learned from experience. I had understood before this day. I sat back, crying, and then I realized that I didn't have that rosary that she had given me so long ago that I had prayed on for my grandfather so many times. My mother then gave me another. It was my grandmother's special rosary. Silver. Her most valued possession. How many times had her fingers gone over those beads, how many prayers were said on those beads, how work were they. And they now sat in my hands as I prayed for her soul. They had been passed on to her only child now, the one who had given them to me that night to pray. I didn't understand, only sat there for hours as I watched people kneel by the coffin, for now I knew the name for what that comfortable bed really was. After everyone had left, before my mother spent her last moments, I said a final rosary for this grandmother kneeling by the casket. After I had finished, after the hand-rest was getting damp from my tears, I leaned over and gave my grandmother a kiss on the cheek. I had to say goodbye to this lady who had put me to sleep so many times. She looked even better than she did that day in the hospital before I had given her the final kiss that she would remember. I brought my face down, and quickly let my lips touch her face. She was so cold, like an ice cube.

My collection grew by one more card that day.

Years later, I went through the old collection of records that this grandmother kept and listened to. Many classical ones, many old ones. Ones filled

with polkas and accordion music. I enjoyed them so much when she was alive, and I still enjoy them now. But that wasn't the most special one. I found a very old record of Polish Christmas music, the cover tattered, yellowed, torn. I put it on. Then, after ten minutes I started to cry all over again. There, on the record was the lullaby. And once again I could hear my grandmother singing to me, the hummingbirds flying in the background.

In the house her voice rose up, muffled, singing me to sleep again.

VIII

I finally fell asleep that night. I was able to forget everything that had happened during the day and all of the memories that I had remembered again. I knew that I should be up to tell my father what had happened (no answering machine could ever console), but I couldn't keep my eyes open to wait for him any longer. That night, I didn't dream.

The next day I woke up early. Outside, the ground was still moist from the light rain that had ceased during the night. The sun was now peeking over the tops of the auburn leaves and the temperature was just mild. It seemed like it would be one of the nicest days of this fall. I woke up early because I didn't sleep that well, perhaps it was because I had such a troubling night. I looked over at my clock. It was 7:30. I felt like I had a hangover. All of my muscles were sore. I sat on the edge of my bed and thought. My parents would be home now. I remembered what had happened last night the answer-

ing machine all of the memories falling books drill bit her grandma grandpa died. I had to tell him. I didn't even think that he knew yet. They got home so late, they probably didn't check for any messages.

I stood up to fast. I got a headache. I'd have to take a Tylenol later on. I walked over, opened my door, and felt the shaggy yarn of the rug underneath my foot. There was no drill there this morning. The light by my father's chair was on, I could see it. He was up, because no one ever turns on that light except for him. My father is usually up very early in the morning, planting or weeding or running or doing various exercises. And when he didn't feel like any exertion, he would read a book. But today he wasn't doing anything. He was sitting in his old rocking chair, just rocking back and forth, his hands folded in his lap. His glasses were folded, lying lenses down on the nightstand. He just stared straight ahead, rocking. I wondered if he knew. I walked over to him. He didn't even turn his head to look at me. I waited a small second, and then in my slurred morning voice told him what had happened.

"Dad, grandpa died last night."

"I know son. Uncle Chris called this morning."

I didn't say anything else. He just kept on rocking. There was no other noises in the house that morning. Then, he turned and looked at me. He motioned me to come over to him. As old as I was, he took me onto his lap, and sat there hugging me and rocking me like he did so long ago. We said nothing else. Together, silently, we waited for everyone else to wake up to tell them the news.

My mother was the next one to wake up. She was surprised; I never

woke up this early in the morning on my own. She walked slowly over to us.

"What?"

My father told her. And then she sat down and cried. My father shooed me off of his lap and he went over to her. She stood up and embraced them. They stood there, my mother crying, my father looking off into God knows where with blank eyes.

Later that morning, everyone was quiet. There was no laughter in our house like was usual for mornings. We all got into the car and drove into Pennsylvania, waiting to do what we all had to do.

IX

I didn't really know how grandpa had died, no one really had told me. I found out later from my father. Grandpa had been in the hospital before that year, colon cancer. Cancer is one of those strange diseases. Everyone can get it, and everyone will eventually get it. Fortunately, some people just die of something else before it ever takes over their lives. It seems that we live our lives just like we drive, rushing from stop light to stop light, not realizing that no matter how fast we go, we still can't beat the final red light. And eventually everyone is caught behind the light. When it turns green, we try to go as fast as we can to make sure that we can get the next green one, but it never works. We always get the red one. We always try to avoid the red light, but always in the middle of nowhere it'll be there. And in the middle of nowhere, there's

always someone who tries to run the red. And there's never anyone there to catch them. Unless it's you. Then the cop decides to come around. It's all so absurd. Kind of like how we try to live. We always try to be one step ahead of death, but it never works. Right in the middle of nowhere, when everything seems to be working well, that's when it comes for you. Someone had tried to race with my grandfather as well. Why do we try to save those people, when it probably won't really make a difference? Being in the hospital made him more sick than he would've been otherwise. He came back and my grandmother had to take care of him so much. He couldn't even get up the stairs to go into his bed anymore. We brought his bed downstairs so that he could sleep in it. He didn't enjoy sleeping in those other beds. It was so hard to take care of him for my grandmother, but she put her whole soul into it. Once again, perhaps some sort of obsession was revived. All of her last energy was spent trying to help him. Here was a chance for her to help the man who had kept her alive all of those fifty-nine years of their marriage.

I remember the time I saw him before he went into the hospital. Our entire family got together and went for what some of us thought might be the last mass that we could have with him. We all gathered together one Sunday morning and went to the church. My grandmother was driven there by my father, but my grandfather wanted to walk to the church one last time. My sister and I stayed behind to walk with him there, to make sure that nothing went wrong. It seemed to be such the wrong reason to be with him. He went down the steps that sang the labors of his life so slowly. It seemed almost amazing that he could walk now, considering where he was going to. He walked slower

then my mother, but he didn't need any help. He was still so strong in his weakness. We passed his old garden. The small garden that he had planted so long ago and that he does every single year. He couldn't really plant when he was so old now; my father and I planted it every single year. It still looked weeded and healthy. Grandpa loved to take care of his garden. He loved to get the fresh vegetables and help grandma cook them. His garden was his joy. He had started my father on it helping him so long ago, and now I was the one who helped my father. Right past the garden used to be the iron fenced in enclosure for the dog. Their dog was so noisy. It was great for protecting the house. No one would even dare to get past that dog. But it got sick, and the SPCA took it away one day. That was the last dog that my grandfather ever had. The beagle had belonged to my uncle, not him. My grandmother had been afraid of that dog, and that was enough to keep my grandfather from getting another one.

On the way to that church my grandfather just seemed so different. We talked a lot on that trip. He talked of the old days. Of the friends that somehow got lost during the years. He remembered when where all of these houses were was a forest. He used to be able to go back behind his house and hunt for deer and squirrels. And the train tracks ran on the other side of the stream, taking the coal away from the mines out into the rest of the entire nation. He settled out here because he would be away from the rest of the city, he would be isolated. In the suburb. Well, Miner's Mills definitely had come a long way since then. He remembered where all of the old pubs were, where he could still get a cheap drink. He told us of the Irish church, and how the services there

were not as good as his own. And on the way he said goodbye to all of his old friends. They didn't even know that he was going into surgery. That was the worst part, seeing my grandfather saying goodbye as if somehow he knew that he would never be coming back there again.

When we walked into the church where my grandmother and grandfather had renewed their wedding vows so many times, we put him right into the seat in front of us that we had saved for him. Our family was all there, all of my cousins, uncles, aunts, everyone. It was probably the first time I had ever seen our entire family, not just our close family, but all of them from Forest City who had travelled an hour just to be there for him. We filled about half of the wooden pews in that church. And the service was wonderful. Longer than the ones in New Jersey, but still not too long. Just long enough. The priest spoke in a slow drawl, seeming like he had something better to do. The altar servers were old, just like the church, and their white sneakers seemed older than them. The song leader was common. Everything seemed so right. And then after all of that we all went back into the house to spend the day with my grandfather. We didn't do much more than what we normally do, drink the strong coffee laced with chickory and talk about trivialities, giving my grandmother even more things to clean up. Everyone was there to comfort him, not saying goodbye openly. Perhaps they only did that in their minds by being there. Perhaps that was the way that they said goodbye. But like all of the other times, it was grandma, my father, mother, sister, and I who had to clean up. We left grandpa who had looked so good that day, sitting in his chair watching the TV, his small spittoon nearby. He lived through the operation.

It seemed like for once God was answering our prayers. He was getting better, he was looking so good. We went in a lot to just be with him and be with my grandmother and to give her a day's break. She had so much work to do now that he could hardly move. She was tired, but it was all fine until that day when the ringers were off in my house. It wasn't the operation that did him in, it wasn't the cold. It was those coal mines where he had worked, where he had sweated, where he had earned enough to keep the family alive. To help give my father life. He started coughing, and he couldn't catch his breath again. He died because he couldn't catch his breath again. All of that coal dust seventy years ago had finally caught up to him. He died fast.

At the hospital my uncle was the person who had to close my grandfather's eyes.

My uncle asked me along with the other grandsons to be pallbearers.

X

Nothing quiets a room quite like a dead body. Once again, I was in a small room with a dead body. My grandmother was sitting off on the side, whimpering. The shock must've been great for her. After fifty-nine years of living with someone, they were finally dead. It was way too much for her, especially after having taken care of him for so long. Beside her was the entire family. My father, Uncle Chris, Uncle Marty, Uncle Jack, Uncle Henry, and Aunt Joyce. There's always that one person in the family that you never know and

that never stays in contact with the family. For us, that was Aunt Joyce. My father's only sister. I had never even heard her name mentioned before this day. After everything was over, I never heard it again. And then there was always the family. Those people who come from so far away that you never hear about them, and have never seen them, even at Christmas, but yet somehow they still know who you are, and know everything about your life, what you do, who you like, how much you grew in the past year. Then comes the eventual I haven't seen you since you were small enough to be held in my arms. And they expect me to remember them. I can hardly even remember the face of my first grade teacher, who I spent a lot more time with, than them. But there was no talking in the room with my grandfather in it. That would be sacrilege. The only sounds in that room were the noses honking and the whimperings of the cries of the old ladies that could still remember when he was a little boy.

I sat by my grandmother, holding her hand. Whenever I came around, she smiled. Perhaps, more accurately, she forced a smile. But maybe a forced smile is better than nothing at all. I held her hand and just smiled at her, letting her know that someone is still around for her. And when I wasn't there, someone else was there. One of my father's brothers or one of the other grandsons. In that red, dimly lit room someone was always there to keep her company. And the flowers were enormous. I've never seen so many flowers in my life. There were large bouquets of flowers from everyone and then some. The red mums were everywhere. There was a very large one from grandma, the one from his sons, the one that Aunt Joyce had bought and placed there, the one

that was from all of the grandchildren. And then there was the most touching one of all. A white heart with red flowers on it in a cross. The ribbon said Goodbye Great Grandpa. At least one of the great-grandchildren might be old enough to remember him someday.

And then there was his body. It seems that the artwork had been even better than the last ones I could remember. He looked ten years younger. There was a red color in his cheeks that hadn't been there since years ago. And his suit was so neat and perfectly fit. His hands were peacefully folded, his eyes shut, his mouth closed in a line. Everyone remarked at how good he looked. Someone had done a wonderful job. He should be in a museum.

And in the other room everyone smoked and renewed acquaintances. Talking about everything except what was important. It was a very nice night, dry and not too cold. Outside the world was silent. Outside the world didn't care. Inside were two dead people, one silent and one a moaning shell. The smoke rose in frail wisps up to the stars that still shone brightly.

And my collection grew by one more card.

XI

The real pain never came until afterwards. The next morning was to be the funeral. Early in the morning, all of the male grandchildren, the designated pallbearers for their grandfather, including me, had to go back to the funeral home. My father had to go as well. All of his brothers were there, as well as

his sister. It was their time to say their last good-byes. After all of the grandchildren said their prayer for his soul, we all went into a back room to leave the others in peace. One by one I saw them walk out of the funeral home and walk to their cars. And then it came time for my grandmother to say her goodbye. A wailing went up throughout the funeral home that could chill even the warmest heart. It almost sounded like a bloodcurdling scream that continued for hours. And then it subsided into the loudest crying and wailing that I had ever heard. For the first time that day, I cried. After five minutes she was better. She felt that now she was done. She was led out, leaning on my mother's arm for support. She was so broken up that she could hardly walk. One of the dead had now left the home.

When she was gone, we went back in. We first had to take all of the flowers away from the casket. Potted plants, bouquets, all of them went away. We put them in the back room, their own wake, readied to be put into the garbage. And then we had to choose which ones would go with the body. Which ones were the prettiest, which ones would fit into the extra room in the hearse. Out came a nice arrangement; red carnations in a wicker basket. The small white heart with the red crosses. After we chose them, the undertaker came back with the Allen wrench. They stuck it into the top of the casket, and screwed. And they lowered his previously raised head into the casket. They closed the top. And then they screwed shut the bolts. They put in the carrying beams. And now we had to carry the casket out to the hearse. Six of us, three on each side. Walking together. I was to be in the back right side. The bar was so cold. And the casket was light. It wasn't metal. Back when grand-

pa was born, they had wood. Now it was fiberglass. But it didn't make any difference. It was not anything fancy, grey and somber. And the fiberglass was light. Grandpa had never weighed much anyway. We carefully carried the casket out of the door and slid it into the hearse. The undertaker then distributed the numbers for our cars, small plastic pylons with magnets that would stick them to the hood. We then got into my cousin's car to drive to the church.

It was the same church where years before, on their fiftieth, my grandmother and grandfather had renewed their wedding vows. It was the same church where a few months before, before my grandfather went into the hospital, our entire family had gathered for a last mass with him. It was the same church where now, once again, our entire family had now gathered for a final mass with him. We got out of my cousin's car and helped the undertaker carry the casket up the cold slate steps. The body did not slide inside. And it was still so light. We brought it into the church and placed it onto a rolling platform like you see in a hospital. The undertaker rolled it up to the front of the church. My grandmother was still moaning in the front of the church. Somber, all dressed in black, my cousins and I went to the front of the church and sat in the wooden pews. The priest placed a cloth with a red cross bordered in gold over the casket, blessed it with holy water. The women were still moaning and crying in the background. And the mass went on. Just like any other mass, except now we heard a sermon that seemed almost rehearsed, like a mad lib for the person's name with my grandfather's name stuck in it. And we had the readings, and the blessings, and the communion, and then we carried the hearse back out to the car. It was a long ride up to Forest City where he was

to be buried beside his mother.

One hour, in a car with my cousins. Trapped inside of an old Mercedes-Benz. The radio was tuned to Froggy 101. Funny how you remember such things. We didn't talk about much. About the jobs that they all had, when they were going to be back in town next, about football games. About what there would be for the breakfast. Why is it that when someone dies you have to give a breakfast? I guess that if you drag anyone for an hour listening to country music in an old car along a highway following a hearse, you've got to give them something. But the ride was so silent. It seemed like there was no thought that grandpa was dead. It was just another job that we had to go to. So we just passed the trees and billboards and got passed by the semis and impatient motorists in denial.

When we got to the graveyard in Forest City, that ancestral burial ground of my family, it was cold outside. The wind was blowing, chilling everyone to the bone. And my grandmother, still moaning, was crying. And we carried the casket over to the hole in the ground. There was a short ceremony on that cold windy day; no one expected it to be that frigid and no one apparently wanted to stand around that long. It was as if God had tried to personify the feeling that we all had that day. And then we lowered him into the ground, the roses thrown atop the casket. And everyone was there to bury him. I noticed my father's eyes tearing. He didn't say a word, his face just as stony as the ground he stood on. My father had always been close to his mother and father, and that cold morning was the only time in my life that I've ever seen him cry. After the service was over, everyone migrated back into their cars to get out

of the cold and go to the diner. I didn't leave yet, however. I had to wait for my parents. My father wasn't ready to leave yet. My grandmother stayed behind for a little while also, talking softly to that body in the ground. She then walked over to her mother's grave, just feet away. She laid a rose down up against the headstone and stared at it for awhile. She looked cold, sad, sick, and alone now. Alone, despite all of us around. She said a prayer. And then, with her thick Pennsylvania accent, she leaned down to the ground and said the only thing I could hear to her mother:

Take good care of him.

She went back over to where her husband had been buried. She leaned down and threw her last flower on the casket. For one instant, she stopped whimpering and she leaned down and said the last words that I heard her say that day to him:

Don't worry, Joseph. I'll be there soon.

