

Simon's Diary
2015 Jay Edson
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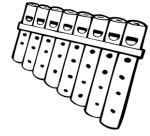
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Simon's Diary

Jay Edson

Prelude



by *Stony River*

... as received by *Ethan Ireland* during an automatic writing.

*I'll not go there again, of course,
Nor will you.
So I suppose it doesn't matter.
But once I waded up a sandy stream
Until, at a bend where the sun filtered down
through the pines,
I found a pool.
And it fell in love with my nakedness.*

Jay Edson – I'll Not Go There Again

Yes, it is true. I did fall in love with the author of this poem. I am Earth. The pool within which he swam was a part of me. I loved the cool nakedness of his skin in my pools and the pattering of his bare feet on my surface. Like the boy whose diary you will read in this story, I too am a boy-girl. A man-woman. A male-female. A berdache. A hijra. I am Gaia, or at least one of her embodiments. I am the one that street musicians sing about in India.

*Oh, people of the world,
Every blessing comes from the soil,
From the earth.
Life is earth.
Death is earth.
All this show is of the earth.
Oh, friends, everything comes from the soil.
When the Lord made our world,
What came first was the soil.
When a temple man bows down in praise
In a mosque,
The servant of Allah rests his head on the earth.
The earth nurtures and cradles us.
It is our mother.
The earth gives us everything.
It is bountiful.
Look closely at the world and see,
Everything comes from the soil.
Oh, friends!
Every blessing is of the soil, of the earth.
Men may destroy what they make,
Yet she is generous and bears it all.
All the tyranny and wickedness she endures.
All that has happened she has known.
Prophets have come and gone.
She has seen them all.*

*Ali, the Lion of Allah, sages,
She has seen them all.
All the holy places have seen the devout bow.
Before men were born,
The earth knew them all.
How can man comprehend
The deep mystery of the earth.
Oh friends!
Every blessing is of the soil, of the earth.
Life is earth.
Death is earth.
All this show is of the earth.
Oh friends, every blessing is of the earth.*

Traditional chant

Sometimes I appear as a local god, like the faun that Rat and Mole found during the sunrise on the island where they found the lost child.

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror – indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy – but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend and saw him at his side cowed, stricken, and trembling violently. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird – haunted branches around them; and still the light grew and grew.

Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that, though the piping was now hushed, the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden.

Trembling he obeyed, and raised his humble head; and then, in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature, flushed with fullness of incredible color, seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper; saw the backward slope of the curved horns, gleaming in the growing daylight; saw the stern, hooked nose between the kindly eyes that were looking down on them humorously, while the bearded mouth broke into a smile at the corners; saw the rippling muscles on the arm that lay across the broad chest, the long supple hand still holding the pan-pipes only just fallen away from the parted lips; saw the splendid curves of the shaggy limbs disposed in majestic ease on the sward; saw, last of all, nestling between his very hooves, sleeping soundly in entire peace and contentment, the little, round, podgy, childish form of the baby otter. All this he saw, for one Moment breathless and intense, vivid on the morning sky; and still, as he looked, he lived; and still, as he lived, he wondered.

*"Rat!" he found breath to whisper, shaking. "Are you afraid?"
"Afraid? Of him? O, never, never! And yet – and yet – O,
Mole, I am afraid!"*

Kenneth Grahame – The Wind in the Willows

A faun is a manifestation of a particular environment. I am a faun. I am Rocky Creek Valley.

Like people, I am made up of many parts. The turtles, cattails, water striders, algae, trees, snails, frogs, ducks, ferns, dragon flies, and birds are some of the cells of my body. Those are cells that anyone can see. But also I am made up of paramecium, stendons, vorticella, euglenas, algae, bacteria, archaea, and billions of other cells of thousands of species that can be seen only with a microscope. I am made up also of the bogs where sundews and pitcher plants lie in wait for unwary insects, of the fields where beautiful and deadly 'Destroying Angel' mushrooms grow, and of the hidden caves where eyeless fish swim. I'm not harmless, but I'm more gentle than the ocean.

If you sit still you can feel my delight, my suffering, my peace and my turmoil in this valley which is forever giving birth to itself, forever dying. But mostly people are too loud. Still I love them more than any of the others. Why? Because only they can see with full intensity how infinitely complex I am, how interesting, how bold and surprising, how full of mystery – in short, how beautiful I am. And yet they are ripping me apart – are killing me. Only they among all my cells are doing this. Only they are a cancer in my body. Only they are burrowing painfully into my living flesh to extract the gold and silver – the coal and oil.

Why do I not simply kill them, and put an end to this? Because I do love them. They are all born beautiful, and remain so until they imbibe the mechanical ideas and ways of their civilization. A few remain beautiful even into old age. And when they are beautiful, they are more so than even a garden spider or a hummingbird. They, like the others, are parts of me even though they also have lives of their own. To know that some other living thing is both a part of you and yet separate is to be in love. And this, with the humans, is a most unhappy love affair.

I am not omniscient. Even God is not omniscient. But I know the cells that make me up intimately. I know their passions and their fears. It is the humans that I know best. I have studied them. With people, every moment is formed from the plethora of texts that live them. In each moment a person will recall only a fragment of a dream, a phrase from a book, a mathematical equation, a vague memory, or the impression that a poem once made on their consciousness. But I remember all these things. I know their dreams and their memories in their entirety. I know their ideas. Their mathematics and science. The books that form them. The poems.

Simon, Ethan, and Helen are the main tellers of this story. But also Paul, Antonio, Phoebe, Red and Orville will have something to say. Each will share with us as best they can their own lived moments, but I will need to fill in with the complete texts, memories and dreams that they only dimly recall. So I will co-author this story with all of them.

I am the author of this prelude. I have used a man to tell the story, but he is only my pen. Without a pen I can't write. But the pen is not me.

The one who recorded this prelude – my pen – is a man-woman, just as I am. He is neither old nor young. In due time he will join me. This is his song.

*I'm becoming earth.
It's an occasion for mirth.
I have rocks
In my socks,
And plants
In my pants.
My insides are turning to loam.
My fingers are starting to roam
Like rhizomes,
Like gnomes,
Making new paths in the woods
In twilight neighborhoods
That are now my second home.
I'm becoming one
With radishes and germs,
With spiders ants and worms.
I'm becoming dung.
Around my house a plethora grows,
Neither garden nor jungle,
An in-between kind of thing,
Something at the edge,
A gardungle,
A beach, a line of sedge,
Where androgynous birds are heard to sing.
It's rather like the fungal
Crop that thrives between my toes.
I'm becoming one
With compost piles that feed
The multiplicity of seed
I live among.
It's an occasion for mirth.
I'm becoming birth.*

I am the valley within which this story unfolds. My awareness is like the water that flows through the banks of the stream where the rocks within it give shape and turbulence to the flow. This is expanded or diminished by sudden storms, droughts and melting snows. The water leaves the stream in its journey to the ocean and, through evaporation, returns to it in the rain after touching the leaves and all the living things in the valley. Everything we touch, we become and know. The rain brings me news of the whole valley of which I am a part. Like you, I live within my banks, but receive news of the universe.

The coal also shares its memories with me. Imprinted within the coal, one can find the whole history of this valley.

And scattered along my length, like Easter eggs waiting to be found, are the secret pools within which the children discover their nakedness. What will they do when I am gone?

How Do I Start?

May 25, 2002

Dear Diary,

OK. How do I start this? This is my first entry. I never did a diary before. The idea came from Phoebe. She is my best friend. She is eleven like me. Her mother believes in angels. Like she thinks we can talk with them. So I asked Phoebe how I could do that. She went home and asked her mother. Her mother said I could keep a diary and imagine that I was writing to my guardian angel. And that would maybe make it become real. So I guess you're it, Dear Diary. You're my guardian angel. I'll just call you Dear Diary, like Dear is your first name and Diary your last name.

Phoebe's mother told her that I can talk about anything at all to my guardian angel. I don't need to be embarrassed or worried. So here goes. I'm Simone. Well, sort of. Really I'm Simon. But Simone is the same name, for girls. So mostly I think I'll go by the name Simone when I'm writing to you. Really I'm sort of a boy. I mean I have a dick, and that makes me a boy. I hope this really is OK, Dear Diary. I never mention my dick to anyone - certainly not to grownups. But Phoebe's Mom said anything. I can talk about anything. Even that.

Don't get me wrong. I don't want to lose my dick, but I also want to be a girl. I'd like to be both. I'm a boy at school, and most places, and mostly I like it. So sometimes I am Simon. But I'd also like to have a place to be a girl. So that's the first thing I want to talk about.

Up until yesterday only Phoebe and Orville knew that I liked being a girl sometimes. They are my best friends. Orville is a little younger and he is a boy. Well, I guess you could tell that by his name. I mean how many girls are named Orville? But he's not mean like some boys are. He's nice and never teases me.

Anyhow, I guess Phoebe told her mother. You know. About me wanting to be a girl sometimes. Phoebe said her mother would be OK with it. I mean she wouldn't think I was too weird. Her mother has friends that are gay and ones that are not and it's all the same to her. That's what Phoebe said. Also her mother doesn't talk about things she needs to be quiet about.

So I thought, well, if her mother knows and it's not a problem for her, maybe mine would be OK with it. See, I have some girls' clothes, but my Mom never found them. She didn't know that sometimes I like to dress up like a girl. She never found my hiding place. So I wanted to see what she would think if I just wore them and let her see me. So yesterday morning I picked my plain skirt which goes good with any of the flowered t-shirts that I have. She already knew about the flowered t-shirts. I can wear a t-shirt with some flowers on it and it's OK. I don't get called a girl for that, except by Dad. So I don't wear them when he is around. He thinks I should play football. But really, boys or girls can wear t-shirts with flowers on them. Well, it's not only Dad. Some boys tell me that the flowered t-shirts look girly. To them, girly is a bad thing.

See, the idea about wearing dresses came from a dream I had. I'm in a pizza parlor ordering a big pizza. I tell them I want the works. Like everything they have put on it. Onions, green peppers, pineapple, anchovies, mushrooms and everything you can think of. Then I look down and see that I am wearing a dress. I get really nervous. How did I make this mistake? I see some of my classmates and I think they will laugh at me. I think "I've done it now. My Dad will kill me". But everybody treats it just like it was ordinary for me to wear a dress.

So when I wake up, I think how nice that felt. To wear a dress. So I started doing it. Just in private, of course. Then I told Phoebe about it and then Orville. That was about six months ago I guess.

Mom didn't know about my two skirts, my dress with the pretty pattern and my girls' underpants. Yeah, I've got some girls' underpants, Dear Diary. Remember that Phoebe's Mom said I can tell you anything. I hope that's true. Sometimes I wear

girls' underpants. The underpants were the hardest thing to get. Phoebe knows that I dress up sometimes. I don't keep any secrets from her. Well almost none. She bought me two pair. They are cotton ones. She also got the skirts and the dress for me. She got them at the thrift store in town. I showed her what I wanted and she bought them because I was too embarrassed. I paid her for all this out of my allowance. I have a bigger allowance than she does because my family has more money.

Anyhow, yesterday morning I put on a pair of the girls' underpants to make it seem more real to me. Then I put on the flowered t-shirt and the plain skirt. The only girl thing Mom would see is the skirt. She wouldn't see the underpants. So I go down the stairs for breakfast. I don't have to be dressed for school because it is Saturday. I go into the kitchen. Mom is cooking oatmeal on the stove and doesn't look around. I think maybe I should just turn around and go back upstairs. But instead I say "Good morning, Mom".

She turns and says "Good morning". Then she stares at me without saying anything.

"Is the oatmeal ready?" I ask.

"You're wearing a skirt," she says.

"Is that OK?" I ask.

She thinks a minute. "Well, yes. I guess so." She thinks some more. "I guess it doesn't matter what you wear," she says.

"Sometimes I like to wear a skirt. I know boys aren't supposed to but I sort of like to."

She shrugs. "I don't suppose it will hurt anybody."

"I don't want Dad to know."

"No, he wouldn't like it. But he's not here today."

I knew that of course. I would never have done that if Dad had been around. He would kill me. At least he would be mad at me and probably laugh at me and tell everybody and he would never stop making fun of me. That's what I think. I'm not really sure what he would do but he wouldn't like it one bit.

But Mom. She is always nice. She drinks too much and when she is drunk I can't talk to her much. But even then she is nice. She would never hurt me on purpose. And now I can start wearing one of my skirts when I am around her, at least when Dad is gone. He's gone a lot. That's the best thing about him.

So you see how it is, Dear Diary. We've got a lot to talk about.



Ethan

This Nightmare Which is History

Ethan sits on his front porch in the early morning, reading the Charleston Gazette and reflecting on some of the topics it covers.

Secrecy: Part of Catholic Scandal

The Charleston Gazette – May 25, 2002

The Catholic Church is the biggest non-governmental institution in the United States. A top-down hierarchy with thousands of parishes, it collects \$7.5 billion a year through 47,000 priests controlled by 375 US bishops who answer largely to themselves.

Fortune 500 corporations make financial disclosures to their stockholders and the public, the Tribune pointed out, but “most dioceses do not”.

Bishop Lynch was born in Charleston in 1941 and educated in Catholic colleges in Ohio and Massachusetts. He became bishop of St Petersburg in 1996. He temporarily took over the Palm Beach diocese in 1998 after its bishop, Joseph Symons, confessed to molesting five boys.

This week, The Washington Post said America’s Catholic Church “is engulfed in a moral, financial and legal crisis unthinkable only a few years ago”. For years, the paper said, church officials used “cover-ups and hush money” to try to hide rampant child-molesting by priests. But the trickle of pedophilia revelations that began becoming public in the 1980s has exploded into a devastating burden.

Ah those poor Catholics. Caught in an absolute bind. Forced to persecute some of their favorite priests. Indeed, some of their best priests.

I have no doubt that a good many of their priests were attracted to their altar boys. Who wouldn't be? All dressed up in their colorful skirts and tops trimmed with lace? They are pretty enough, for sure. I would find them so. And how many priests are primarily heterosexual? A minority I should think. It was a nice niche for a group of men who didn't fit well into our society. Western culture's berdaches.

And who was harmed? When things went beyond a hug and a smile, some of the boys would have found it confusing. A few even troubling. But many would have enjoyed the intimacies.

Feds ask Haden to ignore preliminary mine study result

The Charleston Gazette – May 25, 2002

Bush administration lawyers on Friday urged a federal judge to ignore preliminary results of a massive government study on mountaintop removal coal mining. Department of Justice lawyers told Chief U.S. District Judge Charles H. Haden II that the preliminary study results are “hearsay” and should not be considered.

Earlier this week, lawyers for Kentuckians for the Commonwealth filed large portions of the study with Haden. The citizens group said that the study results show that Haden’s order to block some new valley fill permits will not cause an economic catastrophe. Among other things, the documents submitted by the citizen lawyers show that limits on fills would raise the cost of coal and electricity only slightly. But in a legal brief filed Friday, Justice Department lawyers, representing the Army Corps of Engineers, argued the court should ignore the documents. On May 8, Haden ruled that the Clean Water Act generally prohibits the corps from authorizing mountaintop removal valley fills. In its legal brief, corps lawyers asked that Haden suspend his ruling pending an appeal to the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

“The injunction creates an upheaval in the regulation of coal mine discharges,” the corps said. “Moreover, the impact from the economic harm demonstrated by the United States will be borne by the citizens of the states of the Appalachian region, including through the loss of many jobs.”

One more step in the dismantling of the earth. Nothing can stop this massive and ill conceived project aimed at replacing the natural order with a humanly created one. The nightmare that is history continues unabated. We see it every night on the evening news, though there the media always lies about its causes. The surface is portrayed, at least some of it, but the underlying reality is concealed.

“History,” Stephen said, “is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.”

James Joyce – Ulysses

Goya painted the nightmare. As did expressionists like Munch. Henry Darger also gave us a compelling image of the nightmare in his naive rendition of the battles between the Vivian Girls and their oppressors.

Darger was raised for the last half of his childhood in institutions. His bizarre pictures and narratives are images of his life in those institutions, which are microcosms of the larger society; they are places where the inequities, exploitations and oppressions of the larger society come into clearer focus. The primary location of his ‘psychiatric’ disturbance was not in the synapses of his brain but in the society. He simply introjected the disturbances of his society as they were concentrated and intensified in the institutions in which he grew up. His vision was that of disenfranchised and brutally exploited children in a society driven by greed. It is noteworthy that they provide cheap labor to factories and mills.

One of the Vivian Girls describes child slavery as the cause of the great war that was the subject matter of Darger's 15,000-page novel.

You may not know what one of the causes of the war is. We have ... spied a whole lot and discovered the true facts about the horrors of child slavery and its sad and awful results. The children, the majority of them, have been stolen from foreign parents of foreign nations conquered in recent wars by the wicked Glandelinians. All the child slaves do is work, eat and sleep, and very little of the latter ... and the food is very poor.

They are deprived of all pleasure, never allowed to play or enjoy anything, and even such a sound as music is not allowed to reach their ears. If any of them become sick, they die from it. It is hard for them to escape their masters because each child has a branded slave mark on him or her, showing the name of the owner, the address, the name and identification of the slave, and what work she is compelled to do. If one is sold to a new owner the branding is done over again. Some child slaves are fortunate enough to have only a tattoo identification mark on them. Others are branded with red-hot implements and that is torture indeed.

It would take years to explain all about child slaves. ... Most of them such as those working in factories, and the public houses and all other industrial mills and plantations, have to rise at three-thirty in the morning, work till six, and eat breakfast. Then at six-thirty they resume labors – sometimes work that is almost more than they can endure, and many are overcome every day. The laborers continue without respite until noon; then they have what may be called dinner, and then repeat to work until supper time. Then after supper work continues till nine-thirty at night, when they are sent back to their masters and owners, under attendants, and to bed, to repeat the same thing all over again next day. They don't receive any recreation, no rewards, no holidays, no Christmas joys and the like – only the lash and extreme hardship. The masters receive the money for the service of each child slave he submits to the mills and industrial plants and the more slaves he has the more money he makes. ... Nothing is done by the Glandelinian authorities to see that means are taken to save the souls of the slaves, and mostly the slaves do not know about God, and what those who do know about him know ... is that he is not able to set them free.

*Henry Darger – from The Story of the Vivian Girls,
in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal,
of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm,
Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion.*

Perhaps his depiction of the child slave rebellion unveils the underlying social reality as accurately as it has ever been done. An unending battle between children and adults. Between the weak and the strong who exploit them. Authentic art depicts the arcane dynamics of reality. Darger's rendition of history is that of a brutal and rigid fascism crushing all spontaneous, autonomous and lovely expressions of health and vitality – a health and vitality that he visualized in his androgynous girls.

Where did these penis-endowed girls who haunted his imagination come from? Simply from ignorance? He had probably never seen a naked girl, and perhaps did not know that they did not have penises. Or did his unconscious tap into some larger meaning of androgyny. Or maybe both. Whatever the truth might be regarding his knowledge about the anatomical differences between boys and girls, he was clearly fascinated by androgyny, as the preoccupation with cross-dressing that is in evidence in his novel makes clear.

Indeed all these thoughts were rolling and seething in Gertrude's breast as she was pensively leaning her pretty head on her hand, watching Jamie Turner as she was adapting her slender and pretty little form to a little boy's attire, in which it was deemed safest she should make her escape to the Christian army, under the Emperor.

"Now for the needed sacrifice," said she as she stood before a looking glass, and shook down her silky abundance of golden curly hair. "I say, Gertrude, it is a pity too," said she as she held up some of it almost wistfully. "Pity so much of it has got to come off."

Gertrude smiled sadly, but did not answer. Jeannie turned to the glass and the scissors glittered as one long lock after another was detached so that she wore now short bobbed hair. "Now, that will do," she said, taking up a hairbrush. "Now for a few fancy touches. There, Gertrude, ain't I a pretty young boy?" she said, turning around to Angelina Aronburg, laughing and blushing at the same time. Now I can be your loving boyfriend all the way."

"You always will be pretty, do what you will," said Gertrude ... "You look like a pretty little fellow indeed. That crop of short bobbed hair is quite becoming. Put on your little cap. So ... a little to one side. I never saw quite so pretty a boy. But it's almost time for our disguised escort. I wonder if the general himself has got his little boy rigged? Why even now I don't know the little lad's name."

Just at this Moment the tent entrance was thrust aside, and General Aronburg himself entered, leading the little boy dressed in girls clothes ...

"What a pretty girl he sure would make." Then Jeanie, turning him around ... the child stood gravely, regarding the two girls in their new and strange attire, observing a profound silence, and occasionally drawing deep sighs, and peering at them timidly from under his long dark curls.

"Here, how is it the boy puts on a coat, Gertrude? This is my first experience in a boy's full attire."

"You must wear it so." Said Gertrude, putting on the coat.

"So then," said Jeanie, imitating the motions several times so she would remember. "And I must stand up and take long steps like a boy, and look saucy."

"Don't exert yourself too much on that," said Gertrude.

"There is now and then sissy young boys who act like girls, you know, and I think therefore it would be better and easier to act like a boy who is in the class of sissies."

Henry Darger – from The Story of the Vivian Girls ...

It is curious that all of the children in *The Story of the Vivian Girls* who are clever and resourceful scouts and spies are either masculine girls – tomboys, or feminine boys – sissy boys. They are androgynous.

Perhaps every child experiences that moment when he first sees where he is – where some image of this world and its history shatters the illusion of living in a safe and sane place. I remember when I first caught a glimpse of the world as it is.

I am about six or seven. I am rummaging through the books in the bookcase that we have in the living room. I am wanting to know about the world of grownups. What do they think and do in that world of theirs that is a foreign country to me – a world that they hide from me. The books are too hard for me to read, but I think maybe if I can find pictures in some of the books this may give me a glimpse into the adult world. I find one full of pictures. It shows people starving to death in a big prison of some sort. And piles of dead bodies. Also people being hung. I cannot believe what I am seeing. I ask my father about this. He says that it's a book about the Holocaust. I ask him what that was, but he won't talk about it. It is as though I have caught grownups doing something nasty – something that they shouldn't do. Something worse than anything I have ever done or even thought of doing. He seemed embarrassed. These images haunted my childhood, and still trouble my sleep.



Helen

New Beginnings

Meditation One, in which Helen reads a letter from a former lover and wonders about big and little bangs and whether at least some universes might collapse and explode again.

Samantha is pregnant. And she is happy to be. 'Thrilled' was the word she used in the postcard. Thrilled. She is no longer a part of my life. Hasn't been so for a long time. Will not be in the future. We have taken different paths. But she still drops me a note from time to time to remind me that the past we shared is still important to her.

*Helen,
Here I am in Athens with Tom. I'm pregnant. I am thrilled.
Will write a letter when I get a chance.
Lots of love, as always,
Samantha*

A new beginning. A new baby entering this threatened existence. And the mother is thrilled. Which is good for the baby. Nothing can be good for a mother without being good for the baby. For now there is no separate mother. No separate baby. Only a motherbaby. Or a baby mother.

*Away from the glitter of daylight the moon is everything.
There are stars of course but they are far away someday
to be visited things.
This night the moon draws forth dark meadows peopling
them with frogs fireflies and fairies.
Draws forth tides crashing their fierce rhythms on beaches
and sending rivers on urgent journeys inland.
The moon and the earth,
Mother and baby,
An entanglement of arms mouths lips and breasts.
They circle a common center of gravity,
An emptiness that is neither mother nor baby,
An emptiness so intense that one thinks it might
Fry eggs.
Tell a story.
Make love.*

Carroll Baskins – The Moon

You are never too old for a new beginning. So I've heard. But perhaps this earth is. And perhaps I am. The study of math and science is a new beginning for me.

I'm a right-brain sort of person. Poetry and literature, and, of course, art and music.

Music is math. That is sort of a bridge. Plato took up running because he thought his arms and chest were too big from wrestling, and he wanted to be more proportioned. It's somewhat like that I guess. I am wanting to be more proportioned, so I am exploring left brain perspectives. Science. Math. Working on astronomy now. New beginnings. The Big Bang. That seems to be the dominant theory at this point. But that allows room for only one beginning. Just more and more expansion and cooling until it is all nothing. It ends with a whimper.

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

T S Eliot – Hollow Men

Of course this particular world we inhabit may end with either bangs or whimpers, but the end of the whole thing, the astronomers tell us, will be whimper. Is there then, to be no springtime for this dying universe? Who knows for sure? Some think so. They were talking about that on public radio.

Cosmology teaches that time began with the Big Bang, but two prominent theorists are now proposing a dramatically different view. In this model, as NPR's Richard Harris reports, our universe passes through infinite cycles of expansions and collapses, punctuated by Big Bangs.

RICHARD HARRIS reporting:

Scientists trying to understand the evolution of our universe don't have too many facts to go on. Astronomers can show the universe is expanding. There's good evidence that the universe we see is about 15 billion years old and there's strong evidence that the universal expansion is getting faster, accelerating. Paul Steinhardt at Princeton University says cosmologists do their best to create a story, or history, of the universe that's consistent with those basic observations and the laws of physics.

Mr PAUL STEINHARDT (Princeton University): And one always is worried when one gathers evidence that way that maybe there's another story that can explain the evidence equally as well.

HARRIS: Even though Steinhardt is one of the architects of the current picture, a few years ago he decided to see if he could develop another idea that would give the so-called standard model a run for its money.

Steinhardt says he surprised himself to discover an alternate history that seems at least as good, maybe better. The new idea gets rid of some real awkwardness in the current model.

Mr STEINHARDT: First of all, the standard picture assumes that time has a beginning, what we call the Big Bang. In this alternative picture, the Big Bang is not really a beginning of time; rather it's a transitional period between the present phase, when the universe is expanding, and a pre-existing phase when the universe is contracting.

In a sense, it is really a balance between a contraction and an expansion. And in the idea that we've proposed, the universe, in fact, goes through an infinite sequence of expansions and contractions.

National Public Radio, All Things Considered – May 25, 2002

A universe that bounces back and forth – bangs followed by crunches. I like that view. When I look at the stars it seems like I can hear the breathing of the universe. If it is only one bang there is no breathing. Even with the periodic crunch theory it gets chilly, but if you wait a few billion years it will be spring again.

Suppose, though, this universe really is a womb, only of a huge nothingness.

*The Big Bang they say,
Will never reassemble itself.
Always everywhere
The Red shift prevails.
Things move away.
Once when I was little ...
But no, I have started poorly,
For always I have been medium sized somewhere in between
those who were bigger and those who were smaller
I was always the ordinary size.
But once when I thought things could grow either way as I
am pretending to do now there were bigger boys
flying a kite.
Beyond the reach of what I thought possible this kite
ratcheted itself into the sky always more distant
from me,
It was red and balanced by a white knotted tail.
I can make you see only the idea of a kite.
It is only your idea that wobbles in the sky.
And in truth for me too the image of the kite transformed
itself into a memory which is fast becoming
mere idea.
We must make do.
Things move apart.
The string was so long that its weight had
become a factor in the equilibrium.
The kite as I watched it could neither escape into space
nor come crashing down in some
unachievable place
As you have done.*

Carroll Baskins – The Kite

But what does anyone really know? They talk of a universe with eleven dimensions beginning in a point without any dimensions at all at yet containing an infinite mass. Who can imagine such things? And all this dark matter put there just to get enough mass into the galaxies to make the equations work, and now maybe dark energy as well?

The current standard model of cosmology combines the original Big Bang model and the inflationary scenario. Inflation, a brief period of very rapid cosmic acceleration shortly after the Big Bang, can explain the homogeneity and isotropy of the universe on large scales (>100 Mpc), its spatial flatness, the distribution of galaxies, and the spatial fluctuations in the cosmic microwave background. However, the standard model has some cracks. The recent discoveries of cosmic acceleration and gravitationally self-repulsive dark energy were not predicted and have no particular role in the standard model. Furthermore, the standard model does not explain the 'beginning of time', the initial conditions of the universe, or what will happen in the long-term future.

Here, we present a cosmological model with an endless sequence of cycles of expansion and contraction. By definition, there is neither a beginning nor end of time, nor is there a need to define initial conditions. In addition, we explain the role of dark matter and gene.

*A cyclic model of the universe.
Steinhart, Paul J; Turok, Neil.
Science. May 24, 2002*

Samantha will have a baby. That I can more or less get my head around. Though in its own way it is as great a mystery as anything in cosmology. A new soul, out of nothing. A little bang. And perhaps destined, as is the universe, only to become an ever expanding darkness. To leave with a whimper never to return. Some believe every soul has already bounced back from another place and time. That we are destined to go banging and crunching through countless lifetimes, leaving little Camelots in our wake, each one doomed at its birth. Moments of glory do not come cheap.

Anyhow she is having a baby and for her and the baby, at least, a new cycle begins.

Women can help to torture enemy soldiers now. And we can go down into the mines.

We did not go down into the mines before. We were the ones who were left behind after the explosions, the cave-ins and the black lungs. Which was perhaps the harder fate.

She waits and he does not return.

His absence is re-discovered in so many places.

The shirt hanging on the nail seeks to organize itself around the idiosyncrasies of his shoulders.

It is with trepidation that any drawer is opened or package explored for fear of discovering this absence once again poised like a marble sized black hole sucking into its immense weight the light and energy by which a meal was to be prepared or a book read.

A recording of Dvorjak's New World Symphony yields beauty as is wholly desirable yet the sound seeks his ears who loved it so and failing to discover that particular receptivity generates once again the absence – absence that clings to each note like anti-matter – and is carried into every niche on ripples of disturbed air thereby creating a vast unseen counter-universe.

*In the early morning hours she wakes and in spite of all she knows
listens for the particular night noises he made while sleeping.
Like a child whose friend is called home before anyone began to
tire of hide and seek which as we who remember know is best
just at dusk when we can lose and re-discover one another in so
many running and joyful ways she knows that he will not be
re-discovered tonight which is to say not ever for what child
even though she remembers what her mother said believes in
tomorrow?*

She seldom sits on the deck overlooking the lake anymore.

One of the baby loons is missing this summer.

*They think it may have been dragged under and eaten by a snapping
turtle.*

*Only a week before I paused to contemplate a scene in a show-case
in the Bangor airport depicting just such an event – the turtle’s
gaping mouth poised in photographic stillness at a distance of
utmost tension from the baby loon’s webbed foot.*

*‘Be here now’ the sage tells us yet only in photographs and display
cases is there any now that can be depended upon to be what it
is whereas actuality is always wave-like realizing itself only
in sequences through time.*

*She does not wish to not find the loon on a lake that is already
saturated with absence.*

*Always she waited for him Penelope-like in the time honored
tradition in which women of old waited for their sea-faring men
in fearful anticipation and though such waiting is no longer in
style and is even considered to be perhaps a little demeaning I
honor her still for this.*

*His indifference to the suffering of the fish distressed her seeming
as it did to her incongruous with his gentleness this being but
one small vein in a subtle network of tensions and differences
that ran through their relationship like imperfections running
through polished turquoise.*

She grieves also for this.

*‘Now’ is never a self sufficient thing but is always finely sculpted
by past hurts and future anticipations.*

*We find ourselves always now in the middle of a sentence the
meaning of which was begun several words ago and is
completed only by words not yet uttered.*

– This was the Moment before ...

– This was the last time ...

– I would never have guessed ...

Wave like.

*It is because now is sculpted by a new sequence that she seldom sits
on the deck anymore:*

– She waits and he does not return.

– She waits and he does not return.

Wave like.

*Everywhere she lives this sequence yet it seems more difficult
overlooking the lake where she remembers so many evenings*

*when she waited knowing that he was out there somewhere
tinkering with his lines.
Having lost and re-discovered him in so many running and joyful
ways she cannot now be consoled,
For she does not believe in tomorrow.*

Carroll Baskins – She Waits

Women waiting for men who will never return. That's the way it was for my mother. A simple heart attack took him away. But black lung and heart attacks are all the same in the end. She waits and he does not return. Of course men sometimes are the ones left waiting, but that is less frequent.

*The public and most of the media were kept away from the
Llewellyn Run portal, as well as the rest of the mine. A couple of
local reporters and photographers were allowed additional access.
They saw close-up the devastation: the smoke billowing white,
then gray, then black each time an explosion hit. The fire was
spreading and burning out of control. Flames shot from portals
where the men had entered the mine and from the air shafts they
depended on for oxygen.*

*Ambulances from several funeral homes remained on call
should more men need to be transported to a hospital. The Red
Cross and the Salvation Army set up stations to aid anyone who
needed their help.*

*At the company store, women and children waited all day for
news of more survivors.*

*Bonnie Stewart – No. 9:
The 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster*

But we no longer sit at home waiting. Now we can drive the big machines ourselves and help blow the tops off the mountains.

We can become whatever we want.

*Entangled photons spinning
off on dark highways like swift paper boys
bring news of a star that is more light years away
than I can comprehend.
Or perhaps it is a single paper boy
residing in many places at the same time.
This photon entering me as I watch the star is elsewhere as well.
There is a path to all places.
You can go where you like.
But first you must want to more than you want Father or Mother.*

Carroll Baskins – Go Where You Like

That is gain.

Except that nobody – man or woman – should play the soldier for this filthy empire. Nobody should join the capitalists in their obscene wealth and their ruthless conquests.

Nevertheless, it is gain that both men and women can regain their primordial nature and be like the powerful Hermaphrodites before Zeus split them into male and female.

How lovely you were, my dear Samantha.

You have been in my class on American Literature for some weeks, but I have not really noticed anything exceptional about you. I have asked the students to bring their favorite poem to class. I call on you. You stand and recite The Fury of Overshoes. Everyone else brought in something – by Robert Frost at best. Or by Edward Guest. Or worse. They were only high school kids. What did I expect? Where did you find this poem? How did you know it was good?

...

*Oh overshoes,
don't you
remember me,
pushing you up and down
in the winter snow?*

*Oh thumb,
I want a drink,
it is dark,
where are the big people,
when will I get there,
taking giant steps
all day,
each day
and thinking
nothing of it?*

Ann Sexton – from The Fury Of Overshoes

You read it with perfect understanding. By the time you finish I am in love. Hopelessly so. I already have you in my bed with me, offering you my breast.

And then we feminists joined the evangelicals. We should have suspected something wrong when we found ourselves agreeing with them. Everybody under 18 is a child. They cannot make their own decisions. We talked about taking charge of our bodies and then denied anyone under 18 the right to that control. Girls as well as boys must wait until they are 18 to own their own bodies. Had they caught us, Samantha, snuggling and kissing and caressing each other in not all right places, what would they have said? You only 14 and me in my 50s. What would they have done? Yes, we did eventually find our way into that bed I only dreamed of at first.

Another article in yesterday's Gazette. Seems like every day we hear about more perpetrators. These Catholics would have preferred to have ignored it.

Cardinal Bernard Law told parishioners Sunday that the sexual abuse scandal was a "wake-up call" for the Catholic Church and said "immediate and decisive changes" were required to stem a crisis that "some have likened... to Sept. 11."

Law, who has been at the center of much of the growing criticism over the church's handling of sexually abusive priests, appeared in public for the first time since Easter as he and the nation's other cardinals prepared for a rare meeting this week at the Vatican.

The Vatican needs to understand that the abuse scandal is "a very serious issue undermining the mission of the church," he said.

"Some have likened the situation ... to last year's Sept. 11 tragedy, a crisis which shocks the heart and soul and which must spark immediate and decisive changes in order to prevent possible recurrence in the future," Law said.

The Roman Catholic cardinals of New York, Baltimore, Miami and Detroit had messages of encouragement and explanation read or played to their congregations Sunday.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C., spoke on television about his hopes for the meeting in Rome, saying it should give Pope John Paul II the chance to convey his concern for the victims, his disappointment in letting down faithful Catholics, and his pain over the tarnishing of the church's image and its good works.

Charleston Gazette – April 22, 2002

I wonder what sorts of things really did happen. It's very hard to tell. Was it such a terrible thing they did? You thought it was lovely, Samantha. Perhaps it also was for the acolytes. At least some of them. In any case, you seem none the worse for wear, my thrilled one.

We were about freedom. About affirming the feminine. We were about a new beginning for the human race. At least that's what I thought we were about. And for a while it seemed that were were achieving just that. And then we joined the mainstream and called it progress.

Yet somehow we seem to have left our wombs behind. And our breasts. Were we afraid of the freedoms we fought for? After the French revolution, all the people ran to Napoleon. They were appalled at the freedom they had won. So much blood had been spilled to buy it, and then they threw it away. How quickly we run back to our chains.

If we have all just become men, and joined the mainstream, what gain is that?

What was the dream I woke up with? A baby – I am holding a baby.

I am in a hotel. It has many floors and I am in the top one, overlooking a city. I have to get dressed and go to some sort of meeting. But I can't seem to find the right clothes. I am wearing a long nightgown. I open a dresser drawer hoping to find clothes that will be presentable. To my surprise I find a baby in the drawer. It is still alive, but weak. I think if I feed it, it will be OK.



Recurring Nightmare

Paul lies in bed early in the morning, having just awakened from a nightmare.

Another one of those nightmares. It's the same one, really, that I keep having. Lost in the mine. Or in some underground cavern. Each one is a little different, but basically it's the same dream. How did it go this time?

Orville is lost in the mine. I go in to try to find him. I hear him calling me but can't get to him. He needs help, but something keeps taking him further down into the mine. I don't know what it is. It's like a demon. I smell methane. It isn't safe here. Then I find him. He is unconscious from methane and carbon monoxide. I pick him up and try to get him out of the mine. But all the mine shafts have shifted somehow. The lamp on my helmet goes out. I try to feel my way along, but the smell of methane becomes stronger. My head begins to hurt. "I am here forever," I think. "What have I done wrong?"

Orville came by yesterday. Just wanted to hang around and help me while I worked on the car engine. He's been having trouble with Red again. Nothing that big, really.

*"Dad yelled at me," he says. "He says I'm a jerk."
"Why did he yell at you?"
"I dropped the orange juice."
"How did you do that?"
"Was taking it out of the fridge."
"I see. Well, it's just a passing thing. Don't worry about it."*

Orville takes everything so hard. He's too sensitive. Red doesn't understand that he's not like other boys. He can't just ignore being yelled at. Doesn't spring back after he gets hurt. He worries and frets about little things for days.

*"I can't help it," he says. "It makes me sad."
"Your Dad's just in a bad mood," I tell him. "He didn't mean anything by that."
"Didn't mean anything." He repeats that two or three times.
"Didn't mean anything."*

It would be better if he could live with me. He just got born to the wrong Dad. I would treat him more gently. Red really doesn't mean anything. He just doesn't understand.

Must have been Orville coming by that caused the dream this time.

Of course that doesn't say why I keep having that dream. Only why I had the one I had this particular time. It's the explosion at #9 that is behind it of course. My memory of that.

Four o'clock. I'm still sleeping. A noise wakens me. It was a booming noise. But not too loud. Like thunder in the distance. I think a storm might be coming and I turn over to sleep some more. Then there is a knock on the door. I sit up. The sun has barely risen. Nobody ever comes knocking on the door at this hour. Something must be wrong. I jump out of bed and pull my pants on. I overhear my Dad talking to someone. He sounds alarmed. Something about the mine. There has been an accident. By the time I get to the living room Dad is already leaving with the man. I run after them. I catch up and ask what is happening. "Something bad," says my Dad. "Real bad."

Dad and the other man, Uncle Mike, are running now. "It was Jake's shift," Uncle Mike says. My uncle Jake. Something has happened to him. As we get closer to the mine I look up. A huge black cloud is billowing up into the sky. Then I hear another explosion.

One look at the explosion tells me it isn't likely that anything could live down there. But some of the adults have hope. You don't want to give up on those you love. So we wait and hope. At least everybody in Uncle Jake's family hope. I don't. I know that Jake is not coming back.

I was very sad about Uncle Jake. I liked him a lot. And I was friends with his son, Henry. I remember seeing Henry at school when we tried to pretend that things could ever be normal again.

"I'm sorry about your Dad," I say. I am glad that it was not my Dad, but of course I don't say this.

Uncle Jake was a collector of mining songs. They should have been inherited by Henry, but he didn't want them. He didn't want to remember anything. One of the songs was about a mine explosion in which one boy's father was spared because of the boy's dream.

*A miner was leaving his home for his work,
When he heard his little child scream;
He went to his bedside, his little white face,
"Oh, Daddy, I've had such a dream;
I dreamt that I saw the pit all afire,
And men struggled hard for their lives;*

Dream of a Miner's Child

In the song the boy saved his father's life by telling him the dream and pleading with him. My father's life was spared, but not because of anything I did or dreamed. It was just chance. It didn't happen to be his shift. Henry's father was not spared. That was also just chance.

We left Farmington after that, but we didn't leave mining. It was all we knew.



Antonio

The Rungs of Opportunity

Antonio is in a posh restaurant in New York talking with one of his mistresses, Deanna, while staring at her cleavage.

Deanna is looking great. She's a good dresser. I love this restaurant. They make the best steaks. And the wine was good. It doesn't get any better than this. We'll linger around for a while having a few drinks, and then retire. Oh god, do I look forward to fucking her again. She has such nice tits. Not big, but firm and nice. Young looking. And she is still young. Twenty-six. Barbara's tits are getting saggy. She just doesn't turn me on anymore. I hate trying to make love to her, as she calls it, when I really don't feel turned on. I like her all right, but I can't really say I love her. I don't want to hurt her feelings, but facts are facts. I try to be nice to her. Deanna is more lively too. She really likes sex.

I am not sure why Barbara and I stay together. For the sake of Simon I guess. He's kind of a disappointment. A real mama's boy. Not a fighter. A whiner. He's my son, so I want to look after him. But suppose he turns out to be gay? He looks sort of faggy even now, the way he moves. Kind of prissy like. But that doesn't mean he's actually gay. He better not be. I would look after them even if we separated. But I am not sure what she would want. She might try to get the house. It's just less trouble letting well enough alone.

Deanna is interested in hearing about my meeting with Mr Webb. He's an awesome guy. Has a take-no-prisoners philosophy. Intelligent self-interest. That's where it's at. Reminds me of my father.

I ask my father what he does in his job.

"I work for the CIA. I already told you that."

"But what do you really do? Do you spy on Russians?"

"I can't tell you that," he says. "I shouldn't even tell you that I work for the CIA."

"You are always going to Central America."

"That's true."

"My teacher said that what America does in Central America is bad. He got into trouble for saying that."

"Your teacher is a pussy. He deserved to be fired."

I think Mr Webb can see that I have style. That I could get the job done. He asked me what I thought of George LaGasse. I told him I didn't know him very well but he seemed like a nice guy.

"Yes," he said. "That's just the problem. He takes all those bleeding hearts too seriously."

“Yes,” I said. “It seems so to me.”

“Suppose I got rid of him and gave you his job,” he asked. “How would you handle it?”

The ladder of success is best climbed by stepping on the rungs of opportunity.

Ayn Rand

Well, I was looking opportunity in the face, and I wasn't going to blow it.

“The basic strategy that is needed seems pretty straightforward to me,” I told him. “First, with public relations we need to give more attention to the window dressing. Billboards and Tv ads saying how we help the community. Bring them jobs. Support the American way. Make our nation strong. Things like that. And then not back down at all to the tree huggers and other protesters. Don't give them an inch. Make them look ridiculous. Business-wise, we need to get the coal out as cheaply as possible. If that means getting the overlay off of it on the mountain tops, then that's what needs to be done. Smooth it out a bit and plant some grass and trees afterwards, and everybody should be happy. Profit is money taken in minus cost. That's not hard to understand. Use as few employees as possible and undercut their unions. Cut out any frills. Don't worry about being liked.”

Well, he seemed to like my answer. So I got the job. He's already given George his notice. So that makes me the new supervisor for the Rocky Creek project.



Simon

The Bath

June 7, 2002

Dear Diary,

I like it when Mom washes my hair. We use the bathtub, not the shower. That way she doesn't have to get all wet. She lathers up my hair real good. I could do it myself, but it's nicer when she does it. Dad says she shouldn't do this. That I'm too old. How old is eleven? Too old for some things and too young for some other things. How come there are so many things we are too old for or too young for? Who made those rules? But I wouldn't like it if Dad caught her washing my hair. He would holler at both of us. He might even yank me out the the bathtub. He can be rough. He doesn't really hurt me. Not that much anghow. Well, sometimes when he slaps me it hurts a lot. He is too rough. He says I should be more rough. That boys should be rough. It's sissy if you're not rough. Anghow, Mom only washes my hair if Dad's not at home.

"When will Daddy come home?" I ask her.

She shrugs. "Don't know," she says.

"Don't you care?"

"Not really."

I do care, but only because it means she can't wash my hair and I can't dress up when he is home. Not even in my room. He might come in and he would kill me if he found me wearing girls' things.

"Why?" I ask her.

"Why what?"

"Why don't you care?"

She is real quiet. She stops washing my hair. She looks down and frowns. "He's got a girl friend," she says.

I already know this. But I try to act sort of surprised.

"But he's married to you."

She just shrugs.

I begin washing my own hair. I am hoping that she will see that she forgot to keep doing it. She looks up and washes it some more. Then she gets the little hose with the sprinkler on the end and fastens it to the spigot.

"It must make you sad," I say.

She shrugs again. "Not that much any more," she says.

"Doesn't he love you?"

"I don't suppose he loves anybody."

I want to ask her if that's why she drinks so much. But I don't. She likes us to pretend that she doesn't drink. Like she can go to sleep like anyone else without drinking a lot first. She sort of hides it, but not very well. It's like I sort of hide my girl's clothes, but not from everybody. Now she knows where I keep them.

After I let her know I wear skirts and dresses sometimes, I showed her where I keep them. She even washes them for me if I put them in the hamper. I only do that when Dad is away. She washes them and doesn't say much about it. Like it's just an ordinary thing. I don't know if it is or if it isn't. A lot of people think it's not just an ordinary thing. I mean a boy wearing girls' clothes. But I like it that she treats it that way.

She points the sprinkler end of the hose on my hair and begins washing out all the shampoo. All that warm water on my body feels really good.

"Did he love you when you first got married?" I ask.

"He said he did. And I tried to believe it was so." I don't say any more because I can tell when she has talked about something as much as she wants. She finishes washing the soap out of my hair. Then I get out of the tub and she dries me off. I could do that too, but I like it when she does it. Sometimes it feels good to pretend that I am younger than I am. That way I can let her wash my hair and dry me off. I think she likes it too.

She sees me when I am wearing girls' clothes. She sees me when I am wearing boys' clothes. She sees me when I am not wearing any clothes. Only Phoebe and Orville know me this much. And now you, Dear Diary.



Ethan

Where in This Killing?

Ethan sits on his porch after lunch, drinking a cup of coffee. He hears, and then sees a large flat-bed truck drive by, carrying heavy equipment up the mountain.

Fucking trucks. This is what I came to this mountain to escape – the mindless destruction of everything natural. And what do I see all around me? More mindless destruction.

To re-connect with all that is pristine. That was my idea. Now I hear the rumbling of the trucks every day, carrying their equipment to the top of Stony Mountain. There it is now. A big ugly monstrous thing. Power without grace. What did I expect? Didn't I know about the other mountains – what they had already done to them? Didn't I know it was inevitable that they would come here? And here they are. Nine years I have been here – nine good years for the most part. I don't think I really understood how far this mountaintop removal would go. Whole mountains being destroyed for cheap energy. Now they are here on this mountain – my home – my escape from all that I hate. It has not yet begun here, but soon. Very soon. What was that Sufi tale?

“A rich and mighty Persian once walked in his garden with one of his servants. The servant cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him. He begged his master to give him his fastest horse so that he could make haste and flee to Teheran, which he could reach that same evening. The master consented and the servant galloped off on the horse. On returning to his house, the master himself met Death, and questioned him. ‘Why did you terrify and threaten my servant?’ ‘I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Teheran,’ said Death.”

Victor Frankl – From Death Camp to Existentialism

Wherever one goes, his fate will be waiting for him there. For me, the death of the natural is my death. Is there even such a thing as a 'natural order'? And if that is a meaningful concept, aren't human beings as much a part of it as anything else? So isn't the change we are seeing just one natural order replacing another one? It happens all the time – has been happening for four and a half billion years. What's to grieve?

*I do not say it is wrong
That a hand full of sociopaths
in well tailored suits
should
rule the world*

So far I have not had much success. I may have to get permission to ride my bike down to McCormick's Creek state park. On the Indiana map it looks like there are a lot of woods down there. Somehow there must be a way to escape these endless cornfields.

What was I looking for? Naked girls I could swim with in cool streams? The lost life of the Native Americans, suddenly unfolding before my eyes in a little space in Indiana lodged between Post Road and East 83rd street that had somehow escaped the notice of the developers? Something ancient and pure? Pre-technological? Wild flowers as far as the eye can see? Yes. That was it.

*Shall I then speak of my discontent?
Shall I say out loud how I cannot stop grieving for all the buffalo
herds that they have killed,
And I can't stop grieving for all the Native Americans they have
killed,
And I cannot stop grieving for all the lakes and woods, and
prairies and oceans they have killed,
And I can't stop grieving for the Inuit and the Lapps and the
Caraja' and the Zulus and the Tarahumars and the
Bushmen and the Pokot and the Inadan and the
Yanamano and the Kalash and the people of Ladakh,
And I cannot stop grieving for the Rhinoceros and the Osprey and
the Mountain Lion and the Whale and the Eagle,
And I can't stop grieving for all the brown children they have
killed and the black children they have killed and the
Jewish children they have killed, and the children of the
Arabs and the Afgans,
And I cannot stop grieving for the spanish speaking children they
are killing and whose parents they are killing,
No, and I can't stop grieving for the unborn children they are
killing,
And I cannot stop grieving for all the acceptable nuclear kill
counts that they now plan to kill.
I can't stop grieving for the earth as a living being.
I cannot stop grieving.
Shall I speak then of my discontent,
And how I miss the wild flowers nodding and dancing in the gusty
spring in a virgin prairie I have never seen?
Shall I speak of my discontent – my bone to pick with this only
way of life that is left for us to live?
Where in all this killing shall I make my home?
And to whom shall I speak of my discontent?
And why?*

Jay Edson – Shall I Speak of My Discontent?

The chickadees have almost emptied my feeders. I'll have to replenish them. They are lovely little birds. I have read that a peculiar beak disease has been discovered in the Northwest. Whatever is causing it, it has not yet reached this area. They are so tame. Soon I will have them eating from my hand.

And that little chickadee in my biology class – that androgynous angel. Just a year younger than when I took those bike rides. He daydreams. Not a good student. Sometimes I catch him staring at me, like there is something he wants. I fancy he wants the answer to a conundrum he has not yet adequately formulated. Something he has not yet found in the science book. He is a wild thing. Not wild as in mean or vicious. But wild as in fleeting and evasive.



Red

Coal Keeps Us Strong

Red is driving a truck up Stony Mountain. He is playing "Covered In Coal" by the Blackwater Outlaws on a CD.

...

*He packs his bucket on Monday morning
another long week down at the mines ...
and he ain't ready to go back to work ...*

Driving out in the sunlight. And getting paid better than ever. This is a piece a cake. Paul said he wouldn't work for any company that does mountaintop removal. Don't know what's got into him. If he wasn't my brother I'd think he was an asshole. But he was good to me when we was growing up.

I'm sixteen. He's twenty. I remember how old we were because he was just a year short of being able to buy booze legally. I got into Dad's bourbon and drank a lot of it. So much that he would have noticed a half the bottle was missing. And I was drunk. Really drunk. I could hardly walk. Paul noticed first. Took me to the bathroom and splashed water on my face. Then had me brush my teeth and use a mouthwash. I wanted to go to bed. "I'll just tell them I don't feel good," I said.

"No, don't do that," he said. "They will want to examine you. Take your temperature and all that. You don't want them to pay too much attention to you."

So he took me outside and had me sleep in the tree house. Went to the liquor store and bought another bottle of Jack Daniels and filled Dad's bottle back up to where it should have been. He was big and looked older than he was, so they let him buy it. He got me through that without my being noticed.

And he would tease me. But it was always just fun. Like if the dog would fart, and everybody around could smell it, he would look at me and say, "That was really gross, Red".

"It was the dog," I would say.

"Yeah, blame it on the dog," he would say.

He was a good older brother. But he's wrong about mountaintop mining. It's way safer. Pay is better. And you're out in the sunlight all the time. It destroys the forest he says. Well, shit. There's plenty of forest still around. And after they get the coal, they put the whole landscape back together and plant trees and grass. What the fuck more could anyone ask for? I've seen those places after they did all the fixing up.

They look like big golf courses. Like big lawns. No flies. No ticks. And it's way safer than digging it out of shaft mines. No coal dust in your lungs. No worry about cave-ins. No methane problems. All these tree huggers got to him. That's all I can figure.

What assholes those tree huggers are. What do they want? Like we should we all go back to living in jungles again? We should live in caves? They use electric lights just like the rest of us. And ovens and washing machines and Tv sets and stereos and a whole lot of other things that make life easier. Better. Where do they think they're going to get the electricity to make these things work? All that shit isn't going to run off of sunlight and spring breezes. And hugging trees isn't going to feed your kids. America is strong because we work hard and have better technology than those other places. Who is going to keep those fucking Arabs from bombing this country if we let ourselves get weak. Coal is one of the things that keeps us strong.

*... He seen a lot of good men give it all
and he draws his pay on Friday morning
he might stumble but he ain't gonna fall ...*

Covered In Coal

But what about global warming, Paul asked. Global warming, my ass. I don't see any big changes. And suppose it does get a couple of degrees warmer. Big fucking deal. If it's a problem, they'll figure out a way to fix it. At least he's not saying we should give up coal completely. He may be thinking like he's better than us guys that work for the mountaintop people, but he's a coalminer too. How else did he raise Matty and Sara? But his kids are mostly grown. Sara is already living on her own. Well, with Luke anyhow. And Matty will graduate next year. He may even go to college.

Weird dream last night.

*I am at a dance. I dance with Sara. They put on a slow song.
I can feel her tight little breasts up against me. I get a hard-on.*

Can't remember the whole dream. But that is some nasty shit. My own niece. She is pretty though. And a man is just a man. I can't help seeing that she is pretty. Every man's got a beast in him. I mean we would do all kinds of terrible shit to people if we didn't keep a tight rein on ourselves. We know what is right, and then there is the law and what people think to worry about. Mostly I think we keep ourselves straight because we care about our kids – our families. But make no bones about it. Every man's got a beast in him. You see it already in boys with their fighting and their playing guns all the time. And raising hell. If you didn't raise a little hell you wouldn't be a real boy.

*He's covered in coal in West Virginia
With his babies on his mind ...*

Covered In Coal

But my kids are still little. Mary Lou is hardly out of diapers. I wonder what is wrong with Orville. He sure isn't the sharpest tool in the tool chest. But he is sweet. Too sweet really. Almost like a girl. Not that he is gay or anything. He's all boy. He gets into his fair share of trouble. But I do wonder if I'll have to be looking after him all his life. Hard to see what kind of job he could hold down.

Anyhow, suppose those tree huggers do succeed in chasing the coal companies out of West Virginia. Not that I think they will. Money talks and coal is money in these parts. Root of all evil they say. Shit. It puts food on the table. Lets me heat the home in winter. Lets me put clothes on everybody in the family. How is that evil? No. We need the coal companies. And we need their money. They ain't perfect but who is? They give us work and that gives us a life. Those fucking tree huggers ain't going to chase the coal companies out of here. If they did we would all be in deep shit.

*... But somehow he finds the energy to romp and play out in the yard,
dodge ball, leap frog, and tag you're it...*

Covered In Coal

A Lucky Road Kill

June 17, 2002

Dear Diary,

I found a dead possum today. It was killed by a car. I was on my way home from swimming. We had a lot of fun swimming today. And it was really lucky finding the possum. I wanted to know what the brain looks like. It's the brain that makes us think. Also it makes us feel. That's what my science book says. I want to know what makes people think and feel. How come some people are so different? I mean I have the same parts as any other boy. Two eyes, a nose, two hands and all that. And a dick, too, just like any other boy. It's how I feel and how I think that makes me different, so I want to see the brain.

I take the possum out behind the garage. I can't be seen there from any windows in the house. I get a board and some knives from the kitchen. I don't think Mom will miss the knives right away. But she does.

Anyhow, first about the brain. It isn't easy getting to it. The skull is really tough. I have to cut it away as neatly as possible and not mess up anything inside of it. It isn't turning out too neat. In fact it looks pretty messy. I just sort of chop it away bit by bit. But I am careful not to mess up what is under it. And I just keep chopping and chopping until I can see the whole thing. I even cut back around the backbone and uncover some of the spinal cord. That's what it's called. The spinal cord. I know this because I looked it up in my book about the human body. I can see little nerves coming off of it just like it shows in my book.

So then I pull the whole thing out and lay it on a separate board. It is awesome. A real brain. I throw the rest of the possum away back in the woods. I think maybe I should bury him, but he's not a pet. Wild animals just rot in the woods.

Like I said, it's really awesome to see the whole brain like that. But it doesn't tell me too much about thoughts and feelings. I guess only the possum knew what he thought and felt. I think maybe I can learn something from seeing what the inside of the brain looks like. So I cut into it. I don't really want to in a way because the whole brain sitting there on the board really was awesome to see. I'll bet Phoebe would like to see something like this. Anyhow I go ahead and cut into the brain and I examine what was inside of it. Well it's just a lot of this sort of cheesy stuff. It doesn't look like it has any moving parts, so it's hard to see how it could do anything.

After a while I throw it back into the woods near where I put the rest of the possum. Then I go back into the house. I plan to wash off the knives and my hands in the kitchen sink. Then my idea is to put the knives away and that way Mom will never notice. It doesn't happen that way. Mom is in the kitchen standing at the stove making grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch. She looks over her shoulder at me. "Honey," she says. "Have you seen any kitchen knives? Some of them seem to be missing."

Well I am just standing there holding those dirty knives behind my back. And my hands are all messy from cutting up the possum. It's a tough moment. If I just sort of backed out with my hands behind my back she could tell something was up. When she isn't drinking she doesn't miss much.

So I say, "Well, yes. I sort of borrowed them."

And I show her the knives.

"Sort of borrowed them for what?" she asks. So I tell her about the possum. She asks why I didn't just ask to borrow the knives. I can tell she is a little mad at me. Not too much. She never gets real mad at me like Dad does. But I don't like it when she is even a little mad at me.

Anyhow, I tell her I thought she might not like me to use them to cut up a dead possum. She asks me why I cut it up. I tell her I want to understand why people are the way they are. She says that I'm not likely to tell much from looking at a brain, which I already know. I saw that for myself. She told me that if I want to know that kind of thing I have to study psychology.

Then she asks what kind of things do I want to know.

I say, "Well, like what makes people feel and think."

She tells me to be more specific. "What thoughts and feelings?"

"Just different things," I say. "You know."

"No. I don't know," she says.

"Well," I say. "Like most boys don't like to wear dresses. Things like that."

"It's OK for you like to wear dresses," she says.

"Yeah. But I want to know why I am different."

"I don't think anybody knows that," she says.

"Nobody?" I say.

"I don't think so. Maybe Freud had some ideas about it."

I have her tell me about Freud. She says she never read much of what he wrote but she heard a lot about him. She thinks that I would probably have trouble understanding him.

"It would be pretty hard reading, I think," she says.

So tomorrow I'll go to the library and try to find something by Freud.

Stealing a Library Book

June 25, 2003

Dear Diary,

You will be ashamed of me. But I have to tell you what I did. I stole something. It was a book. I stole it from the library. The name of the book is 'The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud'.

So why did I steal it? I mean I have a library card. But this book is about sex. At least a lot of it is. It doesn't have any pictures. And the table of contents shows that it's about different things. Like dreams, and forgetting and mistakes as well as sex. Mom says that Freud is supposed to know all about sex, so that's why I got the book.

Mom thinks maybe Freud would know why I like to dress up as a girl. She says that I probably wouldn't be able to read what he wrote because it was very scientific. But I want to get the book so I can see for myself.

So here's what happened. When Mom went into town to do shopping last week, I had her drop me off at the library. I go to the library and ask the librarian if they have anything by Freud. She looks real funny at me and asks why I want to know about Freud. I can see right off I made a mistake. She must know that Freud wrote about sex. Kids aren't supposed to be interested in sex.

I can't tell her I just want to know why I like to dress up like a girl sometimes. I mean most boys don't. Well, maybe they do. How should I know? Maybe they just don't talk about it. But I don't think they do. I got Orville to dress up like a girl once. Out at the pond. He did what I asked. Mostly he does the things I ask him to. I thought he looked pretty. But I could tell he didn't think it was anything great. Not that he hated it. For him it was just an ordinary kind of thing. The kind of thing you shrug your shoulders about.

It's not that way for me. I really like it. I think I am a little bit different.

So back to the librarian, I say, "Well, never mind. I just heard he was interesting". She tries to get me interested in a book called 'The Yearling', and I take it out and try to act interested.

The next time Mom goes to town, I have her drop me off at the library again. I don't talk to the librarian this time. I just go and find 'Freud' in the card catalog. Then I find that place on the shelf. They have five or six books by Freud. I find one that says 'Basic Writings'. That means the main things, so it seems like a good bet. I am upstairs, and there is a window open. I throw the book out the window, and after I leave the library, I sneak back around and get it. Don't get me wrong, Diary. I'm not going to keep it. I stole it because that was the only way I could get it without a big to-do. You know. People asking too many questions. That kind of thing. And yes, it did get some dirt on it and some grass stains. But most of that wipes off pretty well. You can hardly tell that it got thrown out of a window.

I know that's what libraries are supposed to do - I mean loan you books. I just decided that I would leave her out of the whole thing this time. So let's say I borrowed this book. I just didn't use my library card to do it. And I didn't tell the librarian about it. As soon as I finish it I'll mail it back to the library. Course I won't put my return address on it. Anybody might have taken it. I am going to return it, so it's not really stealing, Dear Diary.



Ethan

Daydreaming

Ethan sees Simon at the library

He is going through that card catalog with the enthusiasm of a kid hunting for easter eggs. What treasure does he hope to find? He doesn't notice me. For most of the year he hardly noticed me when he was in my class. He was a day dreamer – living in his own world. I could never get his attention. I don't think he ever listened to me long enough to know what I was teaching about. He just stared out the window and from time to time glanced at the clock. I wondered what might interest him. What he might like to learn about.

Then during the last month before summer vacation something changed. Simon actually began looking at me. He listened to what I was talking about. After a while he began raising his hand to answer questions. I remember a lesson on astronomy.

"Why does the sun rise each morning?" I ask. I am trying to get them to think about how it appears to us that the sun rises, but that really it was a matter of the earth rotating. And underneath this I'm teaching how things could appear one way and really be another way. He raises his hand and I call on him.

"To give us light so that we can see things," he says.

I am taken by surprise. He approaches the whole thing from a different metaphysics. What am I to say? I stammer a bit and then say, "That's a very interesting answer, Simon. Does anyone else have a thought about this?"

Marvin's hand shoots into the air. I call on him. "Is that the right answer?" he asks.

"The right answer?" I say. "What do you think?"

"I don't think it is," he says. "It's really just the earth turning."

"Maybe there is more than one right answer," I suggest. A sour expression appears on his face. He does not like what I say. He wants there to be one right answer. But he is too well trained to contradict the teacher. The time is almost up for the class so we are not able to follow this interesting topic.

Can there be more than one right answer? Light exists so that we can see things. Maybe so. How I wish I could live in a different world. One that respected children. One that did not make them act like miniature adults – that was focused on who they are rather than what they might become. One that tried to learn what interested them. The Harmony School in Indiana was close. Not quite. Socialism need not deny the transcendent. But still, it was close.

The communist colony in New Harmony, Indiana, founded by Robert Owen in 1826, pioneered a pattern in free, equal, comprehensive and secular education that had yet to be realized throughout this country over a century later. From the age of two the children were cared for and instructed by the community. The youngest spent the day in play school until they progressed to higher classes. There the Greek and Latin classics were discarded; practice in various crafts constituted an essential part of the program. The teachers aimed to impart what the children could most readily understand, making use of concrete objects and avoiding premature abstractions. They banished fear and all artificial rewards and punishments and appealed instead to the spontaneous interest and inclinations of the children as incentives for learning.

*John Dewey's Theories of Education – W. F. Warde,
International Socialist Review, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter 1960*

You build on the actual interests of the child. Allow the child to unfold as he or she will. Allow the class to unfold organically. How foreign that is to anything I know. I have to grade the students. And I have a certain amount of pre-selected curriculum I have to get through. Selected neither by me nor by the students. How awful to have to participate in such a travesty. But if I can help open just a few children's minds to a different way of seeing, perhaps it is worthwhile. I am able to slip an occasional subversive thought into the process here and there.

What was that dream I had last night? Can't remember the details. But Simon was in it. Strange. 'Synchronicity', Jung would call it.

Now I see him in the library.

I am in my classroom. It is in a Geo-dome. It's a new kind of school. My class is the only one here. We all sit around a big round table. There are other adults there as well as the kids. It's a music lesson. Some of the children have recorders. All the children are singing and playing a work from Bach. The room is full of bright colors that seem to change with the music. I can't tell who is directing them. I ask them if they can play raga. They don't know what it is. I explain it to them. One of the adults there says he can teach them. Then they are playing it. Two of the older children have sitars. Playing is the right word. They make it up as they go along. Are having fun. The adult is playing with them. I look out the window and see a huge and menacing storm approaching. A wind blows part of the roof off and water starts pouring in. One of the children – Simon I think – looks up. He face is sad and worried. "Oh no," he says.

Why do I work in this school system – in this prison. It is a prison and that makes me a prison guard. If I don't play that role they will give me my walking papers. Where else would I find people young enough that they had not yet been distorted beyond recognition by our society? Our civilization. That's partly it. To find little noble savages. But also I am here to set them free. At least as much as is possible. At least to help them see that they are in a prison. That has to be the first step.

The same article where I found that information about the New Harmony School quoted Rousseau. He argued that Childhood was its own thing, and that we needed to accept this. Our task was not to make them into little adults, or even to help them become successful adults. Our proper task would be to clear space for them to become successful children.

*Nature wants children to be children before they are men ...
Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling, peculiar to
itself. Nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for
them.*

All the pedagogues of liberation claim that they simply want to allow the true inner reality of the child to become free from the constraints of an oppressive society so that it can unfold naturally. They are probably right to one degree or another. Yet they all want to meddle in one way or another. How can they not do that? Although they would deny it to themselves, they all secretly want to raise a particular type: John Dewey, a good scientist; Rousseau, a noble savage; A. S. Neil, a good Freudian; Paulo Freire, a revolutionary; Robert Owens, a communist; Rudolf Steiner, a mystic.

What would it mean to allow a child to develop naturally? Is it even a possibility? None of us can see a child as he or she really is. We see the child as he or she is distorted in our mirrors – like mirrors in a fun house. But each of us think the mirror we use is straight and true. It is an orthomirror that give us the orthodox.

I remember speaking to Simon the day of the astronomy class.

*Class is over. The children are filing out.
"I really liked your contribution in class today," I say.
He just smiles at me. But such a smile. It's like the sun rising. I
feel blood rushing to the tips of my fingers and toes.*

Reading Freud

July 2, 2002

Dear Diary,

Well, I got to page 12 of the Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud. It's pretty hard to understand. There are lots of words I don't know. Take 'abreaction' for example. I asked Mom what it meant and even she didn't know.

I sort of understand parts of it. But there are 997 pages in this book. That means I have 985 pages to go. That's a lot.

I looked at some of the pages that come later in the book, and they look even worse than the first 12. I mean I'm only in the introduction by this guy named Brill. And I don't even know if Freud talks about boys wearing dresses. I didn't see anything about it in the table of contents.

Where I sort of stopped reading it was when he started talking about the 'Id'. I mean what is an Id? Maybe it has something to do with who a person is, like in ID - you know, identification. This book is just too hard. I'm not going to get through it. So much for Freud helping me out. Unless he wrote some easier stuff.

There is one person I know who might help me with this. That's my science teacher, Mr Ireland. Mom said that Freud was scientific so probably Mr Ireland would be the right one to ask. He's pretty smart. Mom says he probably knows more than almost anyone in the valley. I have him in science class so he must know who I am. And I know where he lives. On Rocky Mountain Road. I could get there real easy on my bike, but I am sort of scared of him. It's not that he is a scary guy, really. Everybody says he is nice. But if he knows so much, and is a grownup, it's still pretty scary.

I'll let you know tomorrow what I decide, Dear Diary.

The Yearling book is pretty interesting. But really sad. I'm just at the place where the yearling is eating the things in the garden. I can tell this isn't going to turn out too good. But it's really interesting. I guess maybe the librarian did know something about books. And she was sort of right about Freud. He is hard to understand. I wonder what it would be like to have a father like Jody had - one that actually loved you. One that would teach you stuff. I think I would like that a lot.



Simon

Girls' Clothes

July 9, 2003

Dear Diary,

So here I am, once again, in my girls' clothes. I don't know if I exactly want to be a girl. There are lots of things about being a boy I like. But boys can't wear pretty things. Girls can wear anything they want to, but boys are supposed to wear only stupid and ugly things. I'm wearing my denim skirt and the top that has sunflowers all over it. And a necklace of amber beads. So why not? Who does it hurt? And I have on some girl panties too. They were the hardest part to find. I mean I couldn't just go into a store and buy some. That would really look funny. So I asked Phoebe to help me out. I felt embarrassed to do that but she knows that I like to wear girl things sometimes. She thinks it's fine. So I gave her some money and she bought me some when she went into town with her parents. She is the only one I would tell. Well, it would be OK if Orville knew. Next week I am going to our fort and bring some of my girl things and just put them on. With Phoebe and Orville there. Phoebe and I already have this planned. She will bring along some girl things for Orville if he wants to wear them. That's really exciting to think about except I am afraid of getting caught.

Whenever I do the things that make me the most happy - like skinny-dipping with my friends or wearing girl things, or writing this diary, or sneaking out at night when it is warm and the moon gives a lot of light - I have to worry about being caught. That really sucks.

I hate to think what would happen if anyone ever caught me and told my parents. I would get an awful beating. It's like all the things you really like are against the law. Well, at least against the rules. I can't figure out why they made the world this way.

Like all the things you really like are against the law. Well, at least against the rules. That's the laws that your parents make for you.

Mom knows that I wear girl things sometimes, and she thinks it's no big thing. But she said to be careful that Dad doesn't find out. He's out of town now, so there is no way he will walk in on me. He almost never comes to my room anyhow. He doesn't think too much about me one way or the other. To him I'm just a thing that is in the house. Like a lamp or something. In some ways it's not too bad for it to be that way. He leaves me alone so I can mostly come and go as I want to. Mom also mostly leaves me alone. She spends most of her time watching the soaps, or reading her novels. She drinks a lot and doesn't want Dad to know. So we keep each other's secrets. That works OK.

Everybody is different. Ms Johnson talked about that one day in English class. It was while we were reading Huckleberry Finn. She meant like black and white, or French or Russian, tall or short. Things like that. It's OK to be different like that. But I don't think she meant being as different as I am. I think people would make fun of me if they knew how different I am. And I wouldn't have any friends. That's why I am friends with Phoebe. She know what I am like and she still thinks I'm OK.



Simon

'Dropping By'

July 23, 2003

Dear Diary,

I did it! I went by to talk with Mr Ireland. I wasn't sure how it would go. I didn't even have a plan. Well, I sort of did. I thought I would just go by and look at his house and see what happened. So I did. It was afternoon. I rode my bike up to his place. He lives on Rocky Mountain Road. It's about a half a mile from where Phoebe lives. His house is kind of old. I guess he doesn't have as much money as my Dad. Not too many people around here do. Or maybe he just doesn't care about houses that much. He has a big garden in back. Mostly it is in back, anyhow. Some of it comes around the side of the house. It's not that big. I mean it's not like a whole farm. But it looks like a lot for one person to take care of.

Well my plan was to just look at his house. So I park my bike just off the road in front of his house, and walk sort of carefully and quietly toward his house. I see some bushes that I can hide behind. They aren't very far from his house. My idea is to just peek around the bushes and stare at his house and decide what to do then. So keeping a close eye on his front door in case he comes out, that's just what I do. When I peek around the bushes I see him. He is sitting on his front porch. He has been sitting there all the time. I just didn't see him because of the bushes. Looking at the front door didn't help cause he was already outside.

He is looking at me. My heart sinks. This isn't what I wanted at all. Probably he's been watching me the whole time I was sneaking up. I think maybe I should turn and run. But what good would that do? He probably recognizes me. Then he smiles at me and says 'Hi'. So even if I am sneaking up on him and trying to spy on him, he still seems friendly.

"Hi," I say. "I'm Simon."

"I know," he says. Well, of course he does. I have him for science class.

"How are you doing?" I ask. I want to seem polite.

"Fine."

"I just thought I would drop by," I say. That's the kind of thing grownups say. 'Drop by'. Kids would never say that. I mean if I ever said "I just thought I would drop by" to Orville or Phoebe, they would think it was a little weird. But this is a grownup. So I think I should try those words on him.

"I'm glad you did," he says. "Come on up on the porch." So I do. And I sit down on the top step. He is sitting in a big easy chair. It's on the other end of the porch from the door, which is why I didn't see him when I was sneaking up. So we aren't sitting that close together - him on one end of the porch and me on the other - but we can see and hear each other OK.

"Did you ride your bike here?" he asks. I nod that I did. "You must be hot and thirsty," he says, which is true. I mean it's a hot day and the way to his house is almost all uphill.

But like a fool I say, "No, I'm fine."

"OK," he says. I mean I thought he would kind of push the idea, like most grownups do. You know. Oh, you must take this - Oh, I couldn't - Oh you must. That kind of thing, until the person saying he couldn't comes around and says he could. But he doesn't seem to be into this kind of thing. So right off I know that with this guy you got to say what you mean.

We just sit there for a while with neither of us saying anything. I think maybe he doesn't want me here. So I say, "Well, I guess I better be going."

"Why? You just got here."

"Well, you know."

"No."

"Well, I got homework. You know how that is."

"But school is out. How can you have homework?"

So I feel really stupid. "Well, yeah. I guess you're right," I say. And that sounds even more stupid.

But he doesn't laugh or anything. He just looks at me with a sort of question on his face. Then after a little bit he says, "If you really do need to go, that's up to you. But you are more than welcome to stay. I'm not doing anything."

"OK," I say. "I just said that thing about homework because I thought you didn't want me hanging around."

"Why did you think that?"

"I don't know. Just did."

"Well, it's not true. I like your being here."

So we are quiet again for a little while. I think maybe he is telling the truth. Maybe he does want me to stay. I mean maybe he's sort of lonely or something. Like nobody lives with him. After a while I say, "You know what?"

"No. What?"

"I guess I am a little thirsty." So he smiles at me, and tells me not to go away and he goes into the house.

Pretty soon he comes out with two Sprites. "It's all I have," he says. "I hope you like Sprite." The Sprite is cold and I really do like it. In fact it's great. After my bike ride I need something like that.

"I didn't know I was thirsty," I say. "But I guess I was."

"That can happen," he says.

"I guess so," I say.

"It's true," he says. "We can ignore what we want for a while, and then suddenly it pops into our head."

"Yeah," I say.

He nods and smiles, but doesn't say anything more. So I come right to the point.

"I came by to ask you something," I say.

"What's that?"

"What's an Id?"

He looks at me sort of funny and doesn't say anything right off. Finally he says, "An Id. What's an Id?"

"Yeah. An Id."

"You don't mean a Freudian Id?"

"Well I guess so. I found it in a book by Freud. Anyhow most of it was by Freud. This other guy wrote an introduction."

"You are reading a book by Freud?"

I thought for a minute I might pretend that I read the whole thing. But I sort of know this guy is not so easy to fool. He's a teacher and knows most of the tricks us kids use. So I say "Some. But it's kind of hard to understand."

"So how far along did you get in this book?"

"I'm on page 12."

"That's a good start."

"Yeah, but it's more than 900 pages long."

"That's a lot of pages. So what made you pick this book to read? What's the name of it, by the way?"

That was two questions. "The Basic Writings Of Sigmund Freud."

I answer one of his questions, but I'm not ready to tell him why I wanted to read it. Like I hardly know this guy except as a teacher. So I am going to say to him that I like to wear dresses, and I just want to know why? No way. So I come back to my question. "Do you know what an Id is?"

He is quiet for a little bit. He doesn't mind being quiet. I guess he is thinking of a way to answer my question. "Well," he says, finally. "Have you ever been really really mad at someone - so mad that you thought you wanted to do something awful to him?"

"Yeah."

"Did it seem like there was some kind of monster in you?"

"Yeah. Sort of like the Hulk."

"The Hulk?"

"Yeah. You know. He's this ordinary guy that gets mad and turns into a green monster."

"Right. Right. That's good. Well, Freud thought that way deep down inside us we all have a monster in us that wants to do things that would shock everybody. A little like the Hulk, only worse. Really terrible things. He called that monster the Id."

"What kinds of things?"

"Mostly hurting other people or sex things."

"Sex things, huh?"

"Yeah. Things that are against the rules of society. Things that people would condemn you for. Or at least make fun of you for."

It seems like he's getting a little too close to the reason I am interested in Freud, so I clam up. We are quiet for a while. I need to think about what he was telling me. I wonder if it's my Id that makes me want to dress up like a girl. But of course I'm not going to tell him this.

"Well," I say. "That's what I wanted to ask you. So I guess I better be getting on."

"Drop by anytime you like," he said. And I think he means that. I like him. But I don't want to hang around too much more right then. I don't want him asking me too many questions. So I thank him for the Sprite, and go down to the road and I get on my bike and come back home.



Ethan

What's an Id?

Ethan sits on his porch, watching Simon sneak up on him. When Simon stares out from behind a bush, their eyes meet.

Oh my God! Look who has arrived! What's he doing here this morning in my front yard? He's shy and girl-like. Furtive. Yet overflowing with audacity. I know him from science class. It's Simon.

"Would you like a Sprite," I ask. I offer it as I might offer a chickadee a few sunflower seeds.

Yes, I know him but ... but he is still mostly wild. Like the fox in *The Little Prince*. I have not tamed him. He is unsure about me. Am I dangerous, he is wondering. Would I humiliate him?

"Who are you?" asked the little prince, and added, "You are very pretty to look at."

"I am a fox," the fox said.

"Come and play with me," proposed the little prince. "I am so unhappy."

"I cannot play with you," the fox said. "I am not tamed."

"Ah! Please excuse me," said the little prince.

But after some thought he added:

"What does that mean – 'tame'?"

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – The Little Prince

I wait for my little fox in order to give him time to screw up his courage. He has to be the first to act. The silence is full of anxiety for me. I don't want him to run away.

I study this slightly built eleven-year-old kid. He looks more like he's really eight or nine. He studies me in turn. Trying to ascertain whether it is safe to take the next step. He says he doesn't want a Sprite. Says he has to go. But when I question him and invite him to my porch, he accepts and sits on the top step, some distance from me.

We sit quietly in each other's general vicinity, as is proper for two conscious beings who want to tame each other. After some time passes he accepts my offer for Sprite after all. I go into my house and get us both one, so we can drink them together.

On the porch we are quiet again. It seems like hours, but is only a minute or two. And he says to me, "What's an Id?"

The downed aviator could hardly have been more surprised at the little prince's first words that I am at Simon's first question.

"If you please – Draw me a sheep ..."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – The Little Prince

"What's a what??" I say?

He confirms that he means an Id, as in Freud. He's trying to read Freud.

I study him for a minute. Who the hell is this kid?, I ask myself. I know, of course, it's Simon from my science class. But, really, who is this spacey little wisp of a kid who has been sitting in my classroom, more or less unnoticed – this flower blushing unseen though he sits right in front of my eyes day after day?

Like a fox.

Like the Chickadees that come to my feeder.

My little Chickadee:

*Within that feathered microcosm that is not me,
Do you also watch from a deep stillness
The quick unfolding
And find it good?*

Jay Edson – The Chickadee

We will discover each other, and then I will know.

But first he must be tamed.

I address his question as well as I am able. I try to explain that the Id is like the inner monster that any of us can become. He says that sounds like the Hulk. He is bright. Able to find an apt metaphor. I tell him so. I think he is more or less satisfied with my answer.

He seems afraid to overstay his welcome and departs. I wish he would have stayed longer.

My Happiest Week

July 25, 2003

Dear Diary,

I think these have been the happiest weeks of my life. Mr Ireland said it's OK if I come to see him every day. In fact he said that he would like it if I did. But he said not to come in the mornings. He is always busy in the mornings. I asked him what's he busy doing.

He said, "Working".

I said, "What kind of work?"

He said, "I write a bit."

I asked him what he wrote about. "Just things," he said.

I guess he didn't want to say more than that. So I stopped pestering him with questions.

So every morning I go to Big Frog Pond and swim and play with Phoebe and Orville. Then in the afternoon I go to see Mr Ireland. He says to call him Ethan but that is hard to do seeing as he is a grownup. But I guess I can do that here in my diary. Maybe I'll get used to calling him that when I am with him.

He doesn't want me calling him Mr Ireland, and I can't seem to just call him Ethan. So I just call him "Hey You". That's a joke. That would be rude. Really I just try to avoid calling him anything.

Anyhow, Ethan and I do all kinds of things together. Sometimes he will show me a video. Most of them are about nature. He really loves nature. I like the one on birds by this guy named David Attenburg, or something like that. If I am going to be a writer, I need to start keeping a notebook with me so I can jot these things down and not forget them. I don't think I told you that, Dear Diary. I do want to be a writer some day. Like maybe a newspaper reporter.

Anghow, I am pretty sure that guy's name was something like Attenburg. He does lots of nature movies and Ethan really likes him. The thing I liked best about the bird movie was how this one bird could imitate any sound, even a camera making all the noises it does.

Also Ethan shows me things under his microscope. All sorts of one-celled animals and plants. Also some funny looking creatures that are more than one-celled but are still pretty tiny. We wander around the woods in back of his house finding ponds or little creeks or just puddles where we can get some water to explore. If the water is kind of murky or slimy it is best for finding these things. And sometimes I just tell him about my life. I haven't told him about wearing dresses or about why I wanted to read stuff that Freud wrote. Maybe I'll do that some day, but I'm not sure.

I asked Ethan if he thought I should try reading that Freud book again. Or at least part of it. It's a pretty big book. And it's very hard to understand. But I thought if Ethan helped me, maybe I could get it. Ethan didn't think that was the best way to go about things. He says not only is Freud hard to read, but he didn't think Freud had it quite right anghow. Freud had it right about some things, he said. But Ethan doesn't think we are born wanting to rape and kill. He thinks hating other people isn't how we are born. That's more or less what an Id is. A monster that is full of hatred and that wants to rape and hurt other people. Sort of. Anghow that's what I think Ethan was saying. He says we are born wanting to love and be loved. I do remember that.

So I gave up reading Freud. Ethan says I might want to come back to Freud when I'm older. He says it's not because I'm not smart enough to get it right now. He thinks I am. But he says I don't have the vocabulary to get it yet. He's right about that. There sure are a lot of words in that book that I don't know. So anghow, Dear Diary, that's why I haven't written more in you than I did this last week. I've been too busy.



Ethan

I am not Alone

As he sits on his porch in the late afternoon watching Simon pedal off, Ethan thinks about others who have loved boys.

I'm in love.

It seems like a dumb thing to say. But there are no other words for it. As Zeus was in love with Ganymede, lovely Ganymede:

Verily wise Zeus carried off golden-haired Ganymede because of his beauty, to be amongst the Deathless Ones and pour drink for the gods in the house of Zeus – a wonder to see – honored by all the immortals as he draws the red nectar from the golden bowl ... deathless and unaging, even as the gods.

Homeric Hymn Five to Aphrodite

I'm in love.

On the other hand, perhaps it is best if we don't model ourselves on the Gods. Ganymede, after all, did not ask to be carried off.

Well, then, I'm in love as Socrates was in love with Phaedrus:

And therefore, let no one frighten or flutter us by saying that the temperate friend is to be chosen rather than the inspired, but let him further show that love is not sent by the gods for any good to lover or beloved; if he can do so we will allow him to carry off the palm. And we, on our part, will prove in answer to him that the madness of love is the greatest of Heaven's blessings ...

Socrates – from Phaedrus

Ah, that's better.

With Socrates maybe a little puritanism is seeping in around the corners – or something like gnosticism – a hatred of the body.

Not hatred, really, with Socrates. But a degree of disdain.

Still, the relationship is about something noble. They are on their way to God. I like that. With Ganymede, he went to the Gods too, but in that case God came to him and whisked him away. Gave him no choices. Did not ask for permission. Just wants Gandymede so he takes him. Socrates is more respectful of his boy. He mentors him, and thus wants to be an example to be emulated.

These days this kind of love does not as a rule turn out well. It was better in the old Greek days.

*Schoolmasters – Gods! – do you want paying too?
Ungrateful louts! For why? You've got young boys
To gaze at, chat with, kiss when they meet you.
It's better than gold coins to have such joys.
Whoever's got sweet lads – send them to me
For kissing, and I'll do it for them free.*

Anonymous – ancient Greece

Maybe I should give up being a schoolmaster. All that is left is gazing, but that is better than nothing. And what else would I do for a salary?

Perhaps it was only for the Gods or the aristocracy that things were better. As usual we have very little history of the ordinary folks. But I would bet that they were pretty free too, so long as they left rich boys unsullied by their low status.

The laws of love constantly shift.

One day your love is a firm beach on which to run. On the next it is quicksand. Culture is a fashion designer when it comes to sex. Every style when it is in vogue is treated as an absolute. Variants are laughed at, rejected, condemned. Sexual styles do change, but for me this is of no help. My love is out of style. That's true today, and today is when I am alive.

Society in all spheres of life is always coming up with new styles to which everyone must conform. Only class structure is constant. Always we have the waiters and the waited upon. Class structure and passing fashions – the invariant and the variant functions of society. Everything else can change, but we cling to exploitation and domination as though our lives depended upon it. As though we could invent no better way of doing things. This invariant function – this absurd addiction to inequity and domination – is a rock on which countless societies and good souls have shipwrecked.

As Thomas Mann was in love with the real Tadzio:

As it is, in three days I won't see the boy anymore, will forget his face. But not the experience of my heart. He will join that gallery about which no literary history will speak.

*Thomas Mann – Diary, July 11, 1950,
as quoted in 'The Real Tadzio', by Gilbert Adair*

Undoubtedly he saw his beloved boy prancing around naked on a beach, as it was described in 'Death In Venice'. The beautiful naked boy on the beach. The very thought is enough to drive a person wild. Sunlight, water and naked boys go well together.

As James Barrie was in love with David:

*I think he had nigh fallen asleep again when he stirred and said, "Is it going on now?"
"What?"
"The adventure."*

"Yes, David."

*Perhaps this disturbed him, for by-and-by I had to inquire,
"You are not frightened, are you?"*

*"Am I not?" he answered politely, and I knew his hand was
groping in the darkness, so I put out mine and he held on tightly
to one finger.*

"I am not frightened now," he whispered.

"And there is nothing else you want?"

*"Is there not?" he again asked politely. "Are you sure there's
not?" he added.*

"What can it be, David?"

"I don't take up very much room," the far-away voice said.

*"Why, David," said I, sitting up, "do you want to come into
my bed?"*

*"Mother said I wasn't to want it unless you wanted it first," he
squeaked.*

"It is what I have been wanting all the time," said I.

James Barrie – from The Little White Bird

As Walt Whitman was in love with Bill Ducket:

*A glimpse, through an interstice caught,
Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room,
 around the stove, late of a winter night, and I unremark'd
 seated in a corner;
Of a youth who loves me and whom I love, silently approaching,
 and seating himself near, that he may hold me by the
 hand;
A long while, amid the noises of coming and going, of drinking
 and oath and smutty jest,
There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking little,
 perhaps not a word.*

Walt Whitman – A Glimpse

As T H White was in love with Zed:

*... I have fallen in love with Zed [ten years old]. On Braye
Beach with Killie I waved and waved to the aircraft till it was out
of sight – my wild geese all gone and me a lonely old Orville
on the sands who had waddled down to the water's edge but
couldn't fly. It would be unthinkable to make Zed unhappy
with the weight of this impractical, unsuitable love. It would be
against his human dignity. Besides, I love him for being happy and
innocent, so it would be destroying what I loved. He could not
stand the weight of the world against such feelings – not that they
are bad in themselves. It is the public opinion which makes them
so. In any case, on every score of his happiness, not my safety,
the situation is an impossible one. All I can do is behave like a
gentleman. It has been my hideous fate to have been born with an
infinite capacity for love and joy with no hope of using them.*

T H White – from a private letter to a friend

I am in love with Simon.

Shall I have the fortitude of T H White and resist the natural evolution of things? For things do evolve if one lets them.

When did it happen, this falling in love?

I think it was when he smiled at a joke I told. Don't remember the joke. But I do remember the smile. When we see a child smile, or cry, or rage, or sleep, we are likely to fall in love. Why? Because children immerse themselves totally in the Moment at such times in a way that adults seldom do. They even sleep with intensity. Adults always hold something back. We stand back and watch our involvements from a distance. We think about tomorrow or we minimize the importance of what is happening. In short, we have learned to protect ourselves.

A boy has not mastered this questionable skill, which is both the source of his intensity and his curse. And, ironically, it is this defenselessness, this vulnerability, that prompts us to rush in and protect him from the immediacy that is the source of his wonderment for us.



Phoebe

What's in the Cards?

Phoebe is in the living room of the small old frame house she shares with Rebeka, her mother. The house is on Rocky Mountain Road which more or less follows the stream up the mountain. She is sitting on the floor and her mother on an old couch, with a coffee table between them. A Rider-Waite tarot deck is on the table.

She asks me to tell her the question again.

"Should I marry Simon?" I ask.

"What makes you ask this question now?"

"Well, I know I'm too young to get married, but sometimes it seems like we are already married."

"Being married, to me, means wanting to share your lives together. So I guess you can be married at any age."

"So maybe we are already married," I say. "I guess I want to know if I should spend my life with Simon."

"It's one of those big decisions, like in the Frost poem," she says.

*Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference*

from Frost – The Road Not Taken

"It is."

"What makes you think you might want to spend your life with him?"

"I think I love him."

"And what makes you think you might not want to?"

That's the way it is with Mama. I ask her a question and she answers with more questions.

"I don't know. It's just that ... well, you know how he is." I say.

"How is he?"

"Well, like I told you, he wears dresses sometimes. And sometimes he seems like a girl and sometimes like a boy."

"And why is that a problem?"

"Maybe he will want to marry a boy. Like Ludovic in 'Ma Vie En Rose'.

I remember watching 'Ma Vie En Rose'. Ludovic is like Simon in some ways. Ludovic likes to wear dresses. Simon does too. But Ludovic just wants to be a girl. Simon wants to be a boy/girl. Both. That's what he told me. A boy falls in love with Ludovic, and Ludovic wants to marry him. A bully is going to hurt Ludovic and this girl comes along and knocks the boy down. I like that. I want to be like that girl. I'm not much good at fighting, but I want to protect Simon. From what? I don't know. I just think he gets hurt too easy. But maybe he would rather marry a boy.

"Does he say he wants to marry a boy?"

"No. He says he wants us to be together always."

"But you aren't sure you feel the same way?"

"I do. But then I think he might not want to have babies."

"And you do."

"Yes. I really want to. A lot. I can hardly wait."

"All right. But suppose we re-state your question?"

"Why?"

"Maybe there there isn't any 'should' in this situation. Maybe it's just a decision you have to make."

"So what would be a better question?"

"How about 'what would my life look like if I chose to marry him and what would it look like if I chose not to?'"

"OK."

"I know a spread of seven cards that would be just right for this question." I tell her to go ahead and use that one and she lays out the cards.

"Look!" Mama says. "There are four major arcana in this spread."

I ask her what that means.

"It means that this is really an important question."

I guess it is.

What is the whole rest of my life going to be like? Yeah. That's important. A whole life with Simon? Or not?

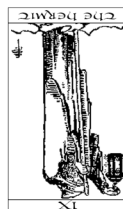
I'm sitting in class when I notice Simon for the first time. Third grade. Fall. He's been there all the time but this is the first time I really look at him. He seems very pretty to me. How come I never noticed that? More pretty than any of the girls or the other boys. But I think he is a little simple.

*Simple Simon met a pieman,
Going to the fair;
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,
Let me taste your ware.*

Simon, Simon. How pretty you are. But you never pay attention in class and mostly can't answer the questions the teacher asks.

At recess, I go find him and ask him why he doesn't pay attention in class. "It's so boring," he says. He and I get together lots of times at recess after that. I find out that he isn't simple. He just hates school. He's more interesting to talk to than anybody else. The other kids tease us saying we're a boy friend and a girl friend. I think we are just friends.

Well, really I'm not sure.



Mama points to the cards. "See. There is the World, the Star, the Moon and the Hierophant."

"OK. I see them."

"When that happens we have to start all over again, but use only the cards from the major arcana."

"That's to show how important this is."

"Right."

One summer day between fourth and fifth grade, Simon and Orville and me are at the pond. We spend all our free time together. Orville is not smart like Simon. He really is simple. But he is kind and gentle. I really like him. Simon says we should all go skinny dipping. Orville says we can't because we aren't all boys. Simon says we are all friends so it is OK. So Simon then takes off all his clothes and jumps into the water. I do the same. Orville is shy. But in a little bit he gets naked to. "Don't look," he says. But after a while he doesn't seem to care.

Rebeka has finished separating the major arcana from the rest of the cards. She lays out the first one.

"Look at that!" she says. She gets really excited sometimes when she does a Tarot reading. "It's the sun. A naked child on a horse."

"So what's that mean?"

"The sun is shining on your desire to have the freedom to follow your heart's desire."

"Is that a boy or a girl on the horse, Mama?"

"Most people see it as a boy. But I guess it could be either. It's the significator card. That means it's you. So I guess it must be a girl this time."

"It could be a boy because I'm a tomboy. That makes me part boy."

"You are very boyish at times. But sometimes you are more girlish."

"I'm a girl/boy."

"Like Simon."

"Yeah. Sort of. He's the one that gave me the idea. He calls himself a boy/girl. So that makes me a girl/boy. I really am. I was a girl/boy before I met him. But he gave me a way to think about it."

Mama smiles.

"You came from opposite ends of the block, and met in the middle."

I have to think about this a minute. Then I see what she means.

"Yeah," I say. "I came from the girl end and he came from the boy end. But we are both boy and girl."

She nods. "Yes. You do seem to be a girl/boy."

"So that's why I love him, I guess."

"In some decks it shows a boy and a girl. Both naked with the sun shining down on them."

"Like Simon and me when we are skinny dipping."

"So it can be either a boy/girl, or a boy and a girl."

"Awesome. This really is a reading about Simon and me."

Almost two years ago. It is fall. I am in town with Simon and his mother. While she goes to the grocery store, Simon and I go to the Thrift shop. He sees a blue dress with yellow flowers and keeps saying how pretty it is. He holds it up against himself, seeing if it will fit. He is nervous. He glances around to see if anyone is watching him while he does this. Then he says to me "Buy this for me". I don't know what to think. But then I decide if he is my friend, why not? But I don't have any money. I tell him that. I almost ask him why he doesn't just buy it himself. But I know why. He is embarrassed just asking me, and I already know he sometimes wants to be a girl. He already told me that. But to go buy that dress himself would be too much. His face is turning red and he glances around again to see if anyone is looking. He hands me a five dollar bill. I tell him OK and I go buy the dress.

"So next comes the Tower if you choose the upper path." Mama says. "Two things to keep in mind here. These are just two paths. One is not necessarily better or higher than the other. 'Upper' is just how the cards are arranged. It doesn't mean higher. Second, the tower is not always as bad as it looks."

"That's good 'cause it looks really bad. What's it mean?"

"I think it means that if you decide to make Simon your life partner, you will be breaking a lot of society's ideas about what a marriage is supposed to be. This frees you from all those things society says you ought to be and enables you to be yourself."

"But it's upside down."

"What could be bad about breaking society's rules?"

"People might not like me. They might push me away."

"That might be true of some people."

"Well, those kind wouldn't be my true friends anyhow."

"I agree," Mama says. "But the cards seem to be warning you that there will be a price to be paid."

Not too long ago, I dreamed something about Simon being my boy friend.

I am with Simone and Orville. We go out in back of the school to pee. It seems nicer to do it in the big field we find there than in the school restrooms. We all have penises. I like that. It is fun to pee with a penis. But then I think, where will the babies come out if I have a penis?

I wake up. I have to pee. I guess that must be why I had this dream. I go into the bathroom and sit down to pee. I think, "I guess you can't have it both ways."

"If I really gave up being a girl, there are things I couldn't have," I say. "I guess that's what you mean when you say that we have to pay a price for whatever we want?"

"Yes, it does seem that way," Mama says. "There's no free lunch in Heaven. Okay. So now we come to the Empress. She represents nurturance. She rules by gentleness and by nurturing your dreams. If you choose to go this way, she will support you."

"Good. Then there is the Star."

"She has to do with caring for the material and emotional aspects of your life. She helps you realize your dreams."

"But she is reversed."

"Yes."

"Does that mean that my dreams won't come true?"

"I don't think so. Just that it will not be easy – there will be obstacles to your dreams. That's just how it is whenever you choose a path that differs significantly from the norm – from what most people do."

I think about how the other children taunt us. It isn't just that they tease me for having a boy friend. They are teasing him for being girl-like. "No. It's not a boy friend. Phoebe has a girl friend," someone says. It's Marvin. He's so proud of himself. Thinks that's real clever. They all laugh. Simon doesn't like the teasing but he doesn't know what to do.

"So what happens if I make the other choice?" I ask her.

*And both that morning equally lay
in leaves no feet had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

Frost – The Road Less Traveled By

"It begins with the Chariot. That's a card of mastery and control. Here it means if you take this route you will be more in control of your life. You alone will determine the course your life will take."

"That part sounds good."

"And here is the World. This means that the world will provide for you."

"And the Hermit?"

"You are alone. You are alone as you look for the meaning of your life."

"I'm not sure I like that."

"Every choice we make has an upside and a downside. It's always a trade-off."

"Suppose I marry someone else?"

"According to the cards, that doesn't look likely. Probably it will be either Simon or you will live alone."

"Which do you think I should do?"

"I don't know. You could be happy pursuing your own interests by yourself. On the other hand, if you do marry Simon, your life might be more interesting. I don't really know what it would mean for a boy/girl to marry a girl/boy."

*Come, it's time for us to be
Healed of our infirmity;
Too many years one part's controlled;
Now it's time that we were whole.
Take my hand, we both will try
I to laugh and you to cry;
Me to do, and you to be
Till both of us, at last, are free.
Me in you, and you in me.*

J R Hyland – Androgyny

The Kabouter

July 27, 2002

Dear Diary,

Didn't we have fun at Frog Pond today! The day was hot and wonderful. We had a thunder storm this morning but that didn't keep it cool for long. We were all skinny dipping like we usually do at Frog Pond. Then Orville begins pretending he is a frog. He hops around making croaking noises. Like frogs singing. I guess they do sing here a lot at night. But Orville doesn't really sound much like a frog.

So then me and Phoebe get into it. We are frogs too, making a lot of croaking noises. Then we began singing songs in a croaking kind of way. This gets us going. Pretty soon we are singing 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm'. That's really fun because whatever animal we named we pretend to be it making the noises it makes.

Old MacDonald had a farm, ee-i-ee-i-o
And on this farm he had a frog, ee-i-ee-i-o
With a croak-croak here, and a croak-croak there
Here a croak, there a croak, everywhere a croak-croak
Old MacDonald had a farm, ee-i-ee-i-o

We hop around like frogs as we sing this.

Then Orville tells us that he sang the solo in his church. I think it was last Sunday. Anyhow it wasn't long ago. He and his family go to that Methodist church. I ask him what he sang.

"Amazing Grace," he says. "You want to hear it?"

Both Phoebe and me say we do. So he sings it for us.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.

'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear,
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
we have already come.
'Twas Grace that brought us safe thus far
and Grace will lead us home.

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years
bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
then when we've first begun.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see

He knew the whole thing. Every word of it. All the verses. He really can sing. I mean he gets all the notes right and his voice is really pretty. He sounds like a girl. Some kids would make fun of him for that, but not Phoebe or me. He is so beautiful standing there knee deep in the water singing that song that . . . well, let me tell you a secret, Dear Diary. I mean I'm supposed to be able to tell you anything. I hope that really is OK. You see, I got a boner just looking at him. I know that sounds weird, but that's what happened. I think Phoebe noticed, but she didn't say anything.

So when he finishes singing we start playing in the water again. You know, splashing each other and wrestling around. That kind of thing.

After a while we get tired and lay down on the sand to rest. We are all looking up at the sky and saying what we see in the clouds. Well, Phoebe says she sees a fairy. To tell the truth I can't see any cloud that looks like a fairy no matter how hard I try.

But she points to one of the clouds and tries to explain how it's like a fairy. Orville says he can see it, but I don't know if he really can.

"Sometimes I think it would be fun to be a fairy," Phoebe says.

Then Orville says this really strange thing. "I'm a Kabouter," he says.

"A what?" I ask.

"A 'Kabouter'."

"What's a Kabouter?"

He tries to explain it to Phoebe and me, but you know how Orville is. He's really good at singing but he not too good at explaining. As far as I can tell, a Kabouter is something like a fairy or an elf. It's that kind of thing, anyhow. A magic creature of some sort. Phoebe seeing the fairy in the clouds is what made him think of it. So I ask him some questions to see if he can tell me more about Kabouters.

"What's it look like?" I ask.

"It's small and dark," he says. "It's not even as big as I am when it is full grown."

"What's it do?"

"It works in mines and caves, and dark places like that," he says.

"It never comes out in the daylight. Sunlight would make it turn into stone."

"Then how come you're here if you're a Kabouter?"

"Why not?" he asks.

"Cause the sun is out, and you don't turn to stone," I say.

He thinks about that for a minute. Then he says, "because I turn into a boy during the day. I'm only a Kabouter at night." He smiles. He likes his answer. Well, I got to admit, that was a pretty good way to get around it. Sometimes Orville does come up with some clever things.

He tells Phoebe and me that when he is down in the mine he digs for gold and silver and iron and coal. And he makes bells from some of the metals that he digs out.

"Kabouters make really good music," he says. "They're not real smart about things they teach in school. But they are very useful."

"Like they are really good at music," I say.

"Yeah. That's how come I can sing so good."

Well, Dear Diary. He really can sing good. And he's like a Kabouter in other ways. Maybe a Kabouter is just someone like him.



Remembering his Teachers

Paul sits on his porch in the early morning drinking a cup of coffee and thinking about how his nephew, Orville, sang 'Amazing Grace' in church.

He didn't miss a word or a note. Without an accompaniment. What do they call that? *A capella*. Right. No help from any instrument to keep him on tune. Wasn't he proud, and well he should be. He worked hard at learning that song. What a voice he has! Amazing Grace was never more amazing.

Grace. The unconditional love of God. I remember Reverend Fox preaching a bunch of sermons on that. He wasn't like any other preacher we ever had in the town. For him, a drunk or a homosexual was as good as anybody else. And he preached that we would all go to Heaven. Whenever a drunk or a homosexual died, their relatives brought him to Rev. Fox to do the funeral. They did that even if they were Baptists or Pentecostals. They wanted to hear hopeful things about their relative. "God loves everybody and won't throw anybody away," Fox used to say. "That's the good news." God doesn't just save us from Hell, but from any possibility of Hell. At least as a torture chamber where we will burn forever.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:37

That was one of his favorite scriptures. I can still hear him preaching on that:

Nothing means nothing. Nothing separates us from the love of God. Not wrong doing, not wrong opinion, not lawlessness, nothing. Evangelicals dispute this. They say there is one thing that will do the trick. That's wrong belief. Not only must you be a Christian but you must be a certain brand of Christian. But your beliefs are something in the world, and Paul assures us that nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God.

Then he would quote another of his favorite scriptures:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

Romans 5:18

And he would expound on that:

Not some men. Not those who are good or those who believe a certain way. For all men. For all people, in other words. Everybody. So why would we want to do what is right if it's not necessary to get into Heaven?

Out of gratitude.

Once you understand the Amazing Grace of God, you will want to respond to the love of God by loving others. That's what you will most want.

Those were comforting thoughts for me, brought up as I was with a lot of hell-fire and damnation preachers around me. I remember when I was maybe ten or eleven lying awake at night thinking about Hell.

It's like the burning mine in which Uncle Jake was killed. That's awful. I hate thinking about Uncle Jake dying in that mine. I wonder if he died fast like in an explosion. Of if he burned to death in the dark. It's terrible to think about. But that was just a short time. Hell is like that and even worse and for ever and ever. It's the most awful thought anybody ever thought. I pray to God that he did not send Uncle Jake there. I ask him not to send me there. Or anybody I love. I pray to God that he didn't really make a place like Hell.

Reverend Fox gave me hope that not anybody would waste away in an eternal fire. He would quote an old time preacher – a guy named Savage – who lived in the last half of the 19th century. Savage believed in a loving God, one who would send no-one to eternal damnation, a God who did not give up on anyone, who was characterized by an all encompassing grace.

I believe that every soul is doomed to be saved ... I believe that God will hunt and follow us, track us through this world, through deeps and spaces unknown; track us across thousands or millions of planets, if you will; track us through millions and millions of years with His love, with His pity, with His scourging of punishment, pang, and pain, for every broken law, every wrong thought, feeling, or action; track us until at last we surrender, wake up to understand that the only good is in God, and that the only true life is following him.

Minot Savage – The Gospel Of Unitarianism

Amazing Grace. How beautifully Orville sings that. What a gentle and wonderful boy he is. I love having Orville with me when I go on hunting and fishing trips. Love telling him stories. Teaching him about the woods. All that kind of thing. And maybe trying to help him understand what Rev. Fox helped me understand – so that Orville will not have to lie awake at night thinking about devils punishing him in some fiery place forever.

But Fox saved me from that life-consuming nightmare. God was not the jealous hateful thing that I had heard preached about so often. He did not have a cosmic torture chamber in His basement in which He tortured the bulk of His children without end. He was compelled by His own love to care for us, forever.

God, just because He is God, is under the highest conceivable obligation, not to me only, but to Himself, to see to it that every being whom He has created shall sometime, somewhere, in the long run, find that gift of life a blessing, and not a curse.

Minot Savage – Unitarianism

And Fox believed in freedom of thought. I didn't have to stop thinking for myself in order to be saved. He quoted that same old-time preacher, Savage, in support of his views. Savage was very scholarly. But you could understand what he was saying, especially when Fox was there to explain the hard parts.

The majority of the bishops and leading men of the Church at that time were on the side of Arius; but at last the Emperor Constantine settled the dispute. Now you know that the scepter of a despotic emperor may not reason, may not think; but it is weightier than either reason or thought in the settlement of a controversy like this at such a period in the history of the world. So Constantine settled the controversy in favor of the Trinitarians; and henceforth you need not wonder that Unitarianism did not grow, for it was mercilessly repressed and crushed out for the next thousand years.

Unitarianism, however, is not alone in this. Let me call your attention to a fact of immense significance in this matter. All this time the study of science and philosophy, that dared to think beyond the limits of the Church's doctrine, were crushed out. There was no free philosophy, there was no free study of science, there was no free anything for a thousand years. The secular armed forces of Europe, with penalties of imprisonment, of the rack, of the faggot, of torture of every kind, were enlisted against anything like liberty of thinking.

Minot Savage – Unitarianism

Fox loved the writings of Savage. That and Swedenborg. Fox was a life-saver for me. If it hadn't been for him, I would have dumped anything resembling religion.

Teachers and preachers do make a difference to us. Even when we hate going to church or to school, we listen to them and give weight to what they say. My English teacher was the other one who helped me. Judith Thompson. Eleventh grade. She actually made poetry seem interesting. That was amazing. I never thought I would like poetry. That's for sissies. She had me come by to talk with her one day after school.

"You could be anything you wanted to be."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't have to go work in the coal mines. You could go to college. Learn to go into whatever line of work you might want to."

"Nobody in my family ever went to college."

"Why should that stop you?"

"We're not the smart types."

"You are smart. Plenty smart. You are one of the smartest kids in this school."

"I don't know."

"Well, I do."

"I mean that I don't know whether I really would want to leave this area."

"Well, think about it. At least think about it."

I did. I gave it a lot of thought. And finally decided against it. I love the mountains here too much. And our way of life. It's been a good way of life, despite the dangers of the mines. Hunting. Fishing. Close knit families. Living close to nature. It was good – at least until they started taking the tops off the mountains.

*I was born in a hollar that was lonesome and long,
Where the sun didn't shine all day,
But the banjos in the night and stars' big light,
Was a pleasure that I want to stay.*

from 'It's Been a Long Time'

It hasn't been all bad. It's been my home.

It was Judith Thompson who got me interested in folk tales and fairy tales. That's why I know all these stories that I tell to my kids, or at least did when they were younger. And that I still tell to Orville. Like the kabouters. Orville likes the kabouters. I wrote an essay for Ms Thompson about them.

Kabouters

Stories about kabouters come from the Netherlands. They are little magic people, sort of like elves or gnomes. Kabouters and gnomes are opposite from each other. Kabouters are night time creatures. Gnomes are active in the daytime. Kabouters are dark, like the night. Gnomes are light colored, like the day. They help each other. The gnomes do the thinking and the kabouters do the work. Kabouters live in the mines where they dig for coal and iron and gold. They never come out in the daytime. If they did, the sun's rays would turn them into stone. That's why we almost never see them.

Kabouters weren't very beautiful to anyone except themselves. In fact they looked pretty ugly to human beings. Also they weren't very smart at the kinds of things that get taught in school – like reading and arithmetic and writing. But they were good and honest and hard working.

Both gnomes and kabouters like to help people who are good and make problems for people who are selfish or evil. Lots of the mysterious things that happen to people at night are because of the kabouters. Like good people might find that their houses seemed to be all swept clean at night. Or their gardens really grew lots of flowers and good vegetables. Mean or selfish people might find their shoes missing, or a lot of dirty dishes in the sink when they thought they had washed them.

A long time ago there wasn't much good music in the Netherlands. They didn't have nice bells either. And there were a lot of outsiders who came to the Netherlands to make trouble.

It was these outsiders that gnomes and kabouters did mean things to. But they wanted to help the good people.

So this is what they did. They dug all the iron and other metals they needed and made a lot of bells, which they gave to the good people. They made bells of all sizes. They all made different notes. They kept enough of these for themselves to make a bell choir.

An old gnome got a bunch of kabouters and gnomes together and they made a choir that could sing beautiful songs while playing the bells. It was the most beautiful music in the world. But it was only heard at night in the woods, because kabouters could not come out into the daylight.

Little by little, the kabouters made bells for the good people, and human beings learned to sing while they played the bells. The music they made was very nice but never quite as beautiful as one could sometimes hear out in the woods at night – coming from a mysterious place that could never be found.

There are not many kabouters left because machines now do a lot of what they once did. But there are still some around who join with gnomes to make beautiful music at night. So this story shows us how kabouters as well as gnomes are needed to make beautiful music.



Orville

Night Fears

Orville is on a hunting trip with Paul. They are sleeping in a tent in the woods. Orville wakes up.

Something woke me up. Maybe it was a mountain lion. Or a bear.

I think I can hear things around the tent. They might be ghosts or something else bad. I have to pee. I can't go out there. I have a flashlight. Paul put it where I could find it. That was so I could get up and go pee if I had to. But it's too scary out there. I'm too afraid. Suppose a bear got me. Or a ghost. But I can't just pee in my sleeping bag.

"Paul ... Paul." He is hard to wake up. "Paul."

"What?"

"I have to pee."

"So go pee."

"Paul."

I think he went back to sleep.

"Paul."

"What?"

He sounds mad. I don't want him to be mad. But I'm scared. "I really have to pee."

"Can't you find your flashlight?"

"Yeah. It's right here."

"So what's the problem?"

"I'm scared."

"Oh ... There's nothing out there that will hurt you, Orville. Just go pee."

"I heard things out there, Paul."

"There's always noises at night, Orville. It's nothing."

"Come with me."

Has he gone back to sleep? No. I hear him getting out of his sleeping bag. "OK."

I get out of my sleeping bag too. We are just wearing our underpants. But it's not too cold. "Bring your gun, Paul."

"It's not loaded."

"Your knife, then."

"There's nothing out there, Orville."

"Please. Just to be sure."

He sighs. I think he is a little mad at me. I am a bother. But he pulls his belt off his pants, and puts it through the knife holder, and then buckles it around himself.

Now I feel safe. He is very big and strong and has a knife. He could even stab a bear. He's as big as one.

We get out of the tent. We go down to the stream and pee into it. Both of us. He had to pee too. Then we go back to the tent. We are in our sleeping bags now.

"Paul."

"Yes?"

"I can't sleep."

"Why?"

"I'm still scared."

"You don't need to be. Kabouters are hiding near by. They will look after you. They will make sure you are safe."

"Can they do that?"

"Sure."

Paul told me all about gnomes and kabouters. So I know about them. "I'm like a kabouter myself," I tell him.

"You are. That's why they will take care of you."

"OK, Paul." Now I can sleep. I feel safe. Paul is in the tent with me. He has his knife. He's very strong. And the kabouters are out there in the woods, close by. They like me and will look after me. It's very peaceful now. I feel very happy. I wish I could always be with Paul. He likes me even when I wake him up at night.

Smokethings

August 3 , 2002

Dear Diary,

Yesterday I asked Ethan again what kind of things he wrote.

"Just things," he says

"Scientific things?" I ask.

"No," he says. "Stories."

"For grownups?"

"Sometimes, and sometimes for children."

So I ask him to read me a story that he wrote. He thinks about this a long time. I don't know why it's such a problem. I just want to hear a story he wrote. Finally he says, "OK".

We're sitting on his porch. He goes inside. In a few minutes he comes out with some papers. Then he does this thing that surprises me. He asks if I wanted to sit on his lap. My Dad never did that. He never even read me stories. Mom reads stories to me, but she never had me sit on her lap. Maybe when I was real little she did. I don't remember. But not now. I ask him if I'm too big. I am small for my age but I am eleven. He says no, I'm not too big. So I say yes.

I don't know exactly how to do it. I mean how to sit on his lap. It seems kind of silly not to know how to sit on someone's lap. But I can't remember ever doing it. Well, it's not a problem. He says for me to come over to him and he picks me up and puts me on his lap. He just sort of arranges me there. I don't have to know how to do it. At first I feel a little embarrassed. Like I said, I thought maybe I was too big to do that. But then I get used to it. I really like it. It feels super cosy.

You are going to think I am exaggerating, Dear Diary. But I don't think so. Sitting on his lap might be the most happy thing that happened to me in a long time. At least as far as I can remember. Well, the first time I went skinny dipping with Phoebe and Orville, it was pretty happy. I don't know if it was happier than that. But it was way up near the top of my happiness list.

When he finishes the story I ask him if I can have a copy of it. He gives me the one he just read from. I ask him if that was the only copy he has. He says he has it on his computer and could run off copies whenever he wants. The story he read to me is called 'The Smoke Man'. Here it is:

THE SMOKE MAN

Jacob tore open the envelope and eagerly read the words on the enclosed invitation:

You are cordially invited to the 'Christmas Crèche',
an evening of entertainment at my house.
This will be my most stunning performance.

Hank

'The Smoke Man'

Friday, December 24 – No admission fee
7:00 PM RSVP

Neatly penned in below the printed part of the invitation there was a personal note to Jacob. It said, "Please do not be afraid of what will happen". Jacob remembered their first conversation.

"Hello there, young man," Hank had called out as Jacob was walking by on Main Street. Hank was sitting on the sidewalk in front of Newberry's dime store.

"Do I know you?" Jacob asked.

"I'm a panhandler," the man answered. "You don't have to know panhandlers for them to talk to you."

"Oh," said Jacob.

"It's the rules," the man informed him. "A lot of people don't know the rules. When I decided to become a panhandler I took the trouble to learn the rules. I wanted to be the best panhandler around. It's important to do whatever you choose to do well -- to be the best you can at it."

"I see" said Jacob. "My Mom says I should do the best I can in my school work."

"Do you choose to go to school?" asked the man.

"Of course not. I have to go to school."

"Then it's not important to do your best there. It's only

important to get by. That's very different. You didn't notice what I said did you? I said it's important to do the best you can with what you choose. What do you choose to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean when you can do anything you like, what do you choose to do?"

"Climb trees," Jacob told him.

"Do you do it well?"

"Yes."

"The best you are able?"

"The best. I practice all the time."

"See. You are getting there. Already you have learned some things. Don't ever forget what it is like to climb trees the best you can."

"I won't."

"You think you won't, but you may. Who is your father?"

"I don't know. Mom won't tell me, and he has never come to find me."

"I thought as much. I'll be your father."

"Are you really my father?"

"What is really?"

Jacob couldn't answer this question.

He thought and waited. He expected that since he couldn't come up with anything, the man would jump in to supply an answer, like teachers did at school, or that at least he would say something to break up this long silence that was becoming embarrassing. But the man said nothing. Jacob realized that he might stand there for hours, and still the man would simply wait for his answer.

"I don't know what 'really' is," he said finally.

"When you do know, ask me your question again." Hank had said. "Are you embarrassed to have a panhandler for a father?"

"I don't think so."

"Good. That's all for today. Come by and see me tomorrow. Bring me a sandwich and an apple. And a pack of Camels. I'll show you what I choose to do."

"What do you choose to do?"

"I blow smoke things."

"Smoke rings?"

"No, smoke things. Come and see tomorrow."

The next day Jacob brought him the apple, the sandwich and the pack of Camels. Hank lit up a cigarette and blew a series of perfect smoke rings that settled into concentric circles. It was his way of warming up, like doing scales. Then he proceeded to produce little clouds of a variety of shapes. There were houses, dogs, trees, cars ... the little clouds of smoke represented these things in simple outline, but they were clearly recognizable. "This is what I choose to do," the smoke man told him.

"It's amazing," Jacob exclaimed.

"I plan to get much better," Hank said.

With time he did get better. The smoke things he blew became more intricate and detailed, and after a while he began to produce whole scenes -- like a house with a dachshund and a tree out in the yard, and a pick-up truck on the street in front. As he got better, people were willing to give money to see his smoke things, and finally he arranged little shows and charged admission. In this way he was able to buy a house for himself and move in off the street.

Even after his material condition improved, Hank continued to call himself a panhandler.

"It's important not to let a little success go to your head so that you begin to put on airs," he told Jacob one day. He continued to expect Jacob to bring him a sandwich and an apple whenever he came to see him. There was a little ritual to this. Jacob was never to actually give him the sandwich and the apple. Frank explained to him that when he visited, he was simply to put the sandwich and apple down in his general vicinity, and leave them there. "Then, if sometime I happen to notice them, or even pick them up and eat them, that's my business," he explained.

Jacob visited the smoke man several times a week.

"They are going to make me repeat fifth grade," Jacob told him one day.

"That's good," said Hank.

"Good?" said Jacob. "That's awful. It's terrible. It's the worst thing that ever happened to me. How can you say it is good?"

"I've noticed that you have been growing up too fast lately," said the smoke man. "That's not good. Maybe staying behind will help."

"But all my friends will think I'm stupid." Jacob was on the point of tears.

"That will be good practice."

"Practice at what? Being a jerk?"

"At knowing you are not what they think you are."

"But I am a jerk. I am just as stupid as they think. I can't do anything right."

"You chose to be my friend, and you do that well."

"What will that get me?"

"Should it get you anything?"

It was another one of those questions. This time however, Jacob was able to answer. "No," he said.

Hank took a Camel out of his pack and blew a perfect smoke figure. It was Jacob, looking glum. They both laughed.

When the guests arrived at his house on December 24th at 7:00, Hank had them all sit in a big circle, some in chairs and others on the floor. There were about 20 people in all. Hank told them they had to sit perfectly still. When everybody was quiet he took out his pack of Camels and lit up. With extreme care, he began on his first figure. It was a shepherd holding a shepherd's crook. Then he did a cow, and then a wise man. Each figure hovered precariously in place while he produced the

next. Nobody in the room dared to move even a fraction of an inch. Finally a perfect crèche made of nothing more than smoke emerged in the middle of the room. It lacked only a wise man. With great care the smoke man picked up his pack of Camels and moved into a kneeling position in front of the Christ child. He was offering him a smoke.

It was then that Jacob first felt the tickle in his nose. He tried desperately to suppress it.

He was afraid to move his hand in front of his face to cover the sneeze that was getting ready to happen. His only hope was that by an act of will he might be able to keep it inside. But he couldn't. The sneeze burst forth uncontrollably. The shepherd and cow nearest to Jacob exploded immediately into nothingness, and then the turbulence drifted across the room, disorganizing first one and then another of the perfect figures -- wise men, shepherds, Mary, Joseph, the Christ child, and the manger. Finally it reached the smoke man. Jacob saw him look directly at him, and smile.

"Do not be afraid," he said. Then, as the turbulence reached him, he also began to dissolve into smoke and then into nothingness, leaving behind only a pile of empty clothes.

"It's sad," I say when he finishes the story.

"Yes, it is," he says.

Then we just sit there for a long time watching the sun. The sun is getting low and I know I have to go soon. Mom wants me home before dark. And I don't have good lights on my bike. Neither of us says anything more about the story.

I think about telling him how I am different. I mean about dresses and all that. But I decide not to. Not yet anyhow. Maybe some day. So after a while I tell him I have to go.

I get down from his lap and come home.

Daddy would kill me if he saw me sitting on a man's lap. He would say I was a sissy and he would just kill me.



Laps

Ethan lies in bed at night thinking about Simon sitting on his lap.

Should I have asked Simon to sit on my lap? He seemed to like it. And I certainly did. But is it too much too soon? I don't want to scare the fox away. Maybe we should have just sat in each other's general vicinity for a longer period of time. Also, we are visible from the road. Someone would have to be looking. I'm a little ways back. But they could see. And what would they think? How would it look. Never mind what something is. What does it look like?

Image, image, image. Everything is image these days. Like in that mining article I read this morning.

Interior secretary tells Cole 'we must win' mining fight

The Charleston Gazette – August 3, 2002

Interior Secretary Gale Norton told an audience of coal industry officials that the public must be convinced that mountaintop removal is acceptable. During a speech to the West Virginia Coal Association, Norton noted the ongoing federal government appeal of a court decision to limit mountaintop removal.

"While that decision is being appealed, it is also important that we win the issue in the court of public opinion as well," Norton said, according to a copy of her prepared remarks.

Norton said that she is committed to "striking that balance between energy production and environmental protection."

"Folks, without that balance I've been talking about, we may have a train wreck in the works on the issue of mountaintop mining," she said. "In this controversy, it seems we have ourselves in a heated, winner-take-all struggle," she said.

"One side says, 'no mining is good mining; we must protect the environment and the people'," Norton said. "The other side says, 'we provide jobs and much needed energy. That's what's important'.

"That seems to be the essence of the arguments that I have heard on this issue," she said. "People of West Virginia have become polarized because these are the only real choices being offered in the court of public opinion.

"I do not believe that either of those choices are good choices. With hard work and a lot of good listening, we can craft

appropriate regulatory reform, restore the proper balance, and offer the people an acceptable and viable third option."

'Third option' ... bullshit. Their third option is to go ahead and take the tops off the mountains and try to make it look good with a lot of window dressing.

People are endlessly manipulated.

Window dressing. That's one thing I have in common with the NeoCons that run this country. We both spend a lot of energy presenting an image to the world that is quite different from who we really are. Everything is image – an image that is meant to hide the underlying reality. I have to hide who I am. We all have to fit into the templates that society creates. Why? Why can't people just be who they are and be accepted? But we must hide. Foxes are wise to understand that most men are hunters. That most people would be happy to allow their dogs to rip them to pieces just for sport. We have to hide in the woods. Suppose, for example, people knew how much I loved Simon sitting on my lap? Suppose they knew that there was an erotic component in it? I'd be up the creek with no paddle.

I am sitting on my father's lap. How happy I was when I could sit on my father's lap. It didn't happen that often. I am little. How little I don't know. Maybe five or six. I am playing with the black hair on the back of his fingers. His hairiness fascinates me. When he puts his arms around me I am happy.

Dad was good to me. He lost a child to crib death. I was seven. We never said her name after it happened. Dorothy. I still remember my dream about her. I must have already been in college when I had that dream.

I am back in the house where I grew up. I go into the kitchen looking for something to eat. I spill something on the floor and I have to try to clean it up. I pull the refrigerator out away from the wall. And Dorothy comes out. She is the age she would have been had she lived. She was behind that refrigerator all these years. She is very pale. The color of ashes. And thin. I am horrified.

I still would have trouble saying her name out loud. Then his wife – my mother – died. I was just about Simon's age. Maybe a year older. Dad was devastated. But still he did his best to take care of us.

I remember lying in bed at night thinking about death not too long after Mom died.

Where do people go? Do we just end? Is it like we never were? Like before we were born. Do we just pop out of nothing and then back into it again? Like a bubble blown by a child that floats around a while, full of glorious colors, and then pops into nothing. Or is there something after we die? Hell? A place of eternal torment? Is Dorothy in Hell? What about Mom? Or maybe we just float around like ghosts. Lonely forever. The world seems dark and I am afraid. I get up out of bed and go in to see Dad.

"What's the problem," he says.

"I can't sleep."

"Did you have a nightmare?"

"No. Just some bad thoughts."

"What about?"

"Mom."

There is a very long silence.

"What happens after we die, Dad?"

"I don't know."

I am looking at his lap. I am wanting him to pick me up and cuddle me. Maybe talk to me or tell me a story. Nobody knows what might be in the darkness outside our windows at night. But we can hold each other. That might help. But he doesn't. I just stand there a while, looking at his lap.

"I'm sorry," he says. "Nobody knows what happens when we die."

"My stomach hurts."

He gives me some Pepto-Bismol, and tucks me back into bed.

Dad couldn't deal with his own grief. How was he going to help me with mine? He was nice. Never mean. And he took care of Tom and me as best he could. But he hardly ever touched us. Especially after Mom died. Maybe those are the reasons why Tom is an alcoholic. Mom died when he was little. And Dad didn't hold him much. Didn't touch him.

I am not sure why I chose 'Smoke Man' to read to Simon. I guess I would like that kind of relationship with him. Be able to teach him things. Maybe that's too arrogant. It's like I'm the one who knows everything. And he's my disciple. What about a more equal relationship? But there is something to this mentoring thing. Simon's not too much like Jacob in the story. He's softer and more reflective. Smarter. But why that story? Why did I pick that one? I guess everything we love turns to smoke. Maybe that's what I was thinking about.

The Kiss

August 9, 2002

Dear Diary,

Things get happier and happier. Sometimes I think I am going to explode with happiness. Boom!!! Just like that. "This boy was just too happy for his own good," the preacher will say at my funeral. And there I would be, lying in the coffin like a busted balloon. But let me tell you what happened that makes me so happy, Dear Diary. You aren't going to believe this!

See, I am at his house. At Ethan's house. We are studying the brain. I told him I wanted to learn about the brain. So he helps me with that - with what I want to learn. He is like that. He listens to what I am interested in.

He has his big book of the brain out on a short stool between us. We sit on opposite sides of the book, our heads leaning over it and almost touching. I wonder if he notices that our heads are almost touching. He is pointing out parts of the brain to me. He says, "See, these are the parietal lobes". He touches me with both his hands on the top of my head - toward the back. (I wrote down all the parts of the brain, and that's why I can remember them, Dear Diary. Like I told you, I'm going to be a writer when I grow up. Newspaper reporters keep pads of paper to jot things down on. So I decided to do that too. Nowadays I keep a pad and a little stubby pencil with me all the time). Ethan tells me that the parietal lobes take in a lot of info about things around you and get you ready to do things about that info.

"And these are the temporal lobes. They help you hear and talk, and remember things." And he touches me on my temples.

"And this is the occipital lobes. That's what you see with." And he touches the back of my head.

Then he touches my forehead. "And this is where frontal lobes are. That's what you think with, and solve problems with and love with." And he kisses my forehead.

He really did that. He kissed me right on my forehead!

I smile at him. "Do I really love with my frontal lobe?" I ask him.

"No. You really love with your whole brain," he says.

"My whole brain?"

"Yeah. And with your whole body. And your whole self. With your soul." He leans over and presses his face against my neck and makes a kind of "BrrrrrBrrrr" noise. Like that. BrrrrrBrrrr. It tickles and I laugh. It's sort of like a kiss. Then he kisses me again. For real. This time on my cheek.

"Do you love me?" I ask.

"Yes," he says.

"Is that why you kissed me?"

"Yes."

"You love me with all of you?"

"Yes."

"I thought you did. So do I. Love you, I mean." I'm so excited I don't know what to do. That's what I mean. I think I am going to explode.

He smiles and leans over again. This time he kisses me on my lips!!! I didn't expect this, but I like it. I am confused and don't know what to do. So I don't kiss him back. He pulls away and looks kind of embarrassed.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I shouldn't have done that."

"It's OK," I say.

"No. It must have been confusing to you."

"A little," I say. But then I am afraid he thinks I mean that was bad. It isn't what I meant. Confusing is confusing and bad is bad.

They are two different things.

Kiss me again, I think to him. Try it again. I will kiss you back. You just caught me by surprise. But I only think these things. I don't have the nerve to say them. And he doesn't try again.

But I did get to sit on his lap again. See, lots of times he invites me to supper now. And I usually say yes.

We eat fairly early this evening and even after I help him clean up it still isn't dark. He asks if I would like a story.

I say, "Sure".

He goes and gets a book and we go out onto the porch. He sits down and doesn't say anything about where I should sit. So I just sort of stand around and fidget a lot. And he says, "You ready?"

I think he means why don't I sit down. So I walk over a little closer to him, and say, "Can I sit on your lap again?"

He smiles and says "Sure. I was just afraid you wouldn't want to."

"Why?"

"Cause some people might think it's only for little children."

"I don't think that."

So I sit on his lap again. I think he likes it too. I can tell by how he holds me close and rubs my cheek and hair. Caresses it, you could say. That's the word. Caresses. And he reads me part of a book called 'The Moomins and the Great Flood'. It's by this woman named Tove Jansson. I write it down so I can remember it. It's a magical story about these strange creatures who have lots of adventures. It's a little scary but not too much. Jansson wrote a lot of Moomintroll books. This one begins with Moomintroll walking into the woods with his Mama. They are looking for a place to build a house before winter comes.

So they walked on, further and further into the silence and the darkness. Little by little, Moomintroll began to feel anxious, and he asked his mother in a whisper if she thought there were any dangerous creature in there.

"I shouldn't think so," she said, "though perhaps we'd better go a little faster anyway. But I hope we're so small that we won't be noticed if something dangerous should come along."

Suddenly Moomintroll grips his mother tightly by the arm. "Look!" he said, so frightened that his tail stuck straight out. From the shadow behind a tree-trunk two eyes were staring at them.

At first Moominmamma was frightened too, but then she said soothingly: "It's really a very little creature. Wait, and I'll shine a light on it. Everything looks worse in the dark, you know."

And so she pointed one of the big glowing flowers and lit the shadow up with it. Then they saw that there really was a very little creature sitting there, and that it looked friendly and a little scared. "There, you see," said Moominmamma.

"What sort of thing are you?" asked the little creature.

"I'm a moomintroll," answered Moomintroll, who had time to feel brave again.

He reads more than that. That's just how it begins. He finishes part of the book and says that's enough for today.

"Can I borrow the book?" I ask.

"I don't know," he says. "I don't want you to read on ahead. Then it wouldn't be so much fun reading it to you."

"I just want to put some of what you read this time in my diary," I said.

"You keep a diary?"

"Yeah. You're in it."

"I hope you say nice things about me."

"Only nice things," I say.

"I'll tell you what," he says. "Why don't I just scan the part of the book you want, and you can take it home with you." He has a computer that does most anything you would want it to. And a 'scanner' that can sort of take pictures of things. So I say that would be good. That's how come I can show you exactly what is in some of the stuff he reads to me.

Of course I could read the thing in the Moomintroll books by myself. It's not hard reading like Freud was. But it's much more fun having him read it to me. We can share stuff that way. And I get to sit on his lap.



Ethan

What Have I Done?

Ethan sits on his porch watching Simon ride off on his bicycle after his visit.

I must be mad. I just kissed him right on his lips. Suppose he tells somebody. I'm finished. We are finished. They will never let us be together again. I know all this. Know that this society in which I unfortunately live has worked itself up into a murderous frenzy about this kind of thing. They are horrified at the thought of a man loving a boy. Men who love boys are 'IT' in Steven King's horror story.

"Want your boat, Georgie?" Pennywise asked. "I only repeat myself because you really do not seem that eager." He held it up, smiling. He was wearing a baggy silk suit with great big orange buttons. A bright tie, electric blue, flopped down his front, and his hands were big white gloves, like the kind Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck always wore.

"Yes, sure," George said, looking into the storm drain.

"And a balloon? I've got red and green and yellow and blue ..."

"Do they float?"

"Float?" His clown grin widened. "Oh yes, indeed they do. They float! And there's cotton candy ..."

Georgie reached.

The clown seized his arm.

And George saw the clown's face change.

What he saw then was terrible enough to make his worst imaginings of the thing in the cellar look like sweet dreams; what he saw destroyed his sanity in one clawing stroke.

"They float," the thing in the drain crooned in a clotted, chuckling voice. It held George's arm in its thick and wormy grip, it pulled George toward the terrible darkness where the water rushed and roared and bellowed as it bore its cargo of storm debris toward the sea. George craned his neck away from the final blackness and began to scream into the rain, to scream mindlessly into the white autumn sky which curved above Derry on that day in the fall of 1957. His screams were shrill and piercing, and all up and down Witcham Street people came to their windows or bolted out onto their porches.

"They float," he growled, "they float, Georgie, and when you're down here with me, you'll float, too ..."

George's shoulder socked against the cement of the curb and David Gardner, who had stayed home from his job at the show boat that day because of the flood, saw only a small boy in a yellow rain slicker, a small boy who was screaming and writhing in the gutter with muddy water surging over his face and making his screams sound bubbly.

"Everything down here floats," that chuckling, rotten voice whispered, and suddenly there was a ripping noise and a flaring sheet of agony, and George Denbrough knew no more.

Steven King – from 'IT'

The clown in that novel is the dreaded pedophile, of course. Who else might be stealing our children? They entertain. They smile. They look friendly and cheerful. They offer the children colorful trinkets. But underneath it all, they are monsters who will drag innocent and unsuspecting children from the decent and respectable hands of upright citizens down to their death in the slime and filth of the sewers. Far below the realm of civilized life. Something worse than death. I am 'IT'. Actually, most if not all men have a bit of 'IT' in them. Why else the fascination with a story like this? Why else the unrelenting urgency of this need to project the shadow side of our collective goodness to a demonized figure? 'IT' is the society's image of the man who loves a boy. He is the grinning clown that grooms and seduces only to capture and defile. That a boy might actually love a man, that the desire might be reciprocal, is not something that the people in this society can think about – is not a possibility. Well, maybe the pure sexless love of a boy for his father. But love in its fullness, no.

This myth of 'IT' has nothing to do with why most men love boys. I know that. But it is this myth that dominates our society. Perception – not reality – is what controls events. Everything is image. And I have just acted the part of 'IT'. That, at least, is how society will interpret it.

Crichton Smith had a different vision of 'IT'. For him what society sees as 'IT' is more like the disordered man:

*Children, follow the dwarfs and the giants and the wolves,
into the Wood of Unknowing, into the leaves
where the terrible granny perches and sings to herself
past the tumultuous seasons high on her shelf.
Do not go with the Man with the Smiling Face,
nor yet with the Lady with the Flowery Dress.
Avoid the Crystal, run where the waters go
and follow them past the Icebergs and the Snow.
Avoid the Man with the Book, the Speech Machine,
and the Rinsed Boy who is forever clean.
Keep clear of the Scholar and the domestic Dog
and, rather than Sunny Smoothness, choose the Fog.
Follow your love, the butterfly, where it spins
over the wall, the hedge, the road, the fence,
and love the Disordered Man who sings like a river
whose form is Love, whose country is Forever.*

Crichton Smith – Follow the Dwarfs

I am the disordered man who would lead the children to new places – places where they could learn to love and be loved.

But I am afraid.

What do I do now? I cannot take it back. How do you undo a kiss? And not only did I kiss him, but I told him I love him as well. It's true of course, but I wouldn't have said so, except he asked. Point blank, he asked. "Do you love me?" What was I supposed to say? He caught me by surprise. But now suppose he goes home and says, "Guess what, Mom. Ethan loves me. And he kissed me on the lips."

What did he really think about that kiss? He said it was confusing. That was his word. Confusing. But he also said it was OK. He certainly wasn't horrified. Just surprised, I guess. Or maybe he thought it was weird. Not horrifying. Just a bit weird. His science teacher is a little strange in the head. Nice, and all that. But strange. Maybe he was a bit embarrassed for me. I don't know what he thought, really. But it worries me. It will be hard to sleep tonight.

Why does it have to be this way? Will he stop coming to see me? Will this one thing that brings me so much happiness be finished? Just like that. Have I scared the fox away?

A Fucking Asshole

August 15, 2002

Dear Diary,

Mom and Dad and me were all eating breakfast together this morning. That doesn't always happen, but Dad had to go to work at about the same time I had to go to school. So he is reading the newspaper and not paying much attention to me or Mom. Mom used to complain about that but she doesn't bother any more. I never did mind it. Dad has his world and I have mine. I am happy with that. So anyhow, he starts swearing at the newspaper. He says things like, "What crap this is!" "This is a lot of shit." He doesn't like what he is reading. That's clear enough.

Mom says "What is it dear?" She keeps trying to be nice to him. Saying 'dear'. Listening to him like the things he says really are interesting. Things like that. I don't know why.

Anyhow he says "It's that biology teacher, running his mouth again."

"Who is that?" Mom asks.

"A guy by the name of Ethan Ireland."

My ears perk up. I can tell you that! I look at Mom and she looks at me. I sort of shake my head and look right in her eyes. I am trying to tell her not to mention it that I know him. She smiles and nods. Just a tiny little nod. When Mom isn't drinking she is really smart. She understands just what I mean. Almost like she can read my mind.

Mom's an alcoholic. That's what Dad says. I asked Ethan what that meant. He says it just means that someone drinks too much for their own good. And it's real hard for them to stop. So I don't think she can help that. Some people think alcoholics are mean. Like they go around beating people up and stuff like that. Well, maybe some alcoholics are like that.

But Mom isn't.

So I know she won't give away my secret. Dad would not like it if he knew I was friends with Ethan.

So Mom looks over at Dad.

"What's he say?" she asks.

"He's running his mouth about mountaintop mining," he says.

"What's he say about it?"

"That it will poison the environment."

"Well, he's a biology teacher. Maybe he knows something about that kind of thing," Mom says. I know this isn't going to go over too good. You don't argue with Dad when he's mad. He'll yell at you. And you're lucky if that's all he does. Sometimes he hits me. Mom too. Not her as often as me, but I have seen him hit her.

So Dad glares at her. I am sort of afraid for her. But he just says, "He's a fucking asshole". And he throws the paper down on the table and storms out of the kitchen. I figure she is getting off easy this time. I'd be too afraid to ever argue with him when he was mad. Pretty soon, without saying goodbye and all that sort of thing, I hear Dad leaving. Mom and me are still sitting at the table, finishing our breakfast.

"I guess he doesn't like my friend too much," I say to her.

She smiles, and gets up and comes over to me. She bends over and kisses me on my cheek. "It's OK," she says. "Who you are friends with is none of his business." I love her for that. She really is a good Mom.

Well, I ask her if I can have the newspaper. She says sure. So I read the letter that Ethan sent to the Editor. It's an interesting article. I've copied it here.

Dear Editor,

I understand the some of the people who read the Rocky Mountain News will feel that I should not stick my nose into local affairs. I am, after all, 'from away'. I would note, however, that I have bought a house in this area and plan to live here for the remainder of my life. Also, I might point out that all of the ancestors of the local people, except for native Americans, came

'from away' not that long ago. They came from many different countries, mainly to work in the coal mines.

Like them, and like most of you who might be reading this article, I have an investment in this area. I understand that some people here will find my views objectionable, but I would hope that I will be listened to with respect, as a member of this community.

When I moved to this area I had heard of mountain top mining, but knew very little about it. Since then I have looked into the matter more carefully.

There are important reasons for opposing mountain top mining in this community. In a letter to the editor I can only mention them, but I have collected materials that substantiate each of my points which I would be happy to share with anyone who might be interested. These, then, are the points I would ask you to consider:

1. Mountain top mining is highly toxic to the environment. This creates a danger not just to fish and animals, but to the human population in the area as well. It puts the health of the entire community at risk.

2. Mountain top mining supports our continuing use of coal as one of our primary sources of energy, and makes it possible to put off the shift to other energy sources, like wind and solar power, that are not as damaging to the environment.

3. Mountain top mining will lead to the loss of jobs in the area. This is because it is not nearly as labor intensive as traditional mining. It will also ruin the opportunity to develop other economic opportunities such as tourism.

4. It turns a once beautiful and diversified environment into something that is ugly and much less rich.

I would ask the citizens of this community to give careful consideration to the above points. Hopefully by informing ourselves carefully, and by encouraging respectful dialogue, we will be able to come to a consensus as to what is best for our community.

Thank you for giving consideration to my views.

So that's what he said. He doesn't sound like a "fucking asshole" to me. I don't like it that Dad called him that. But I know better than to argue with him.



Antonio

Effete Meddlers

Antonio listens to country music and thinks about Ethan as he drives to the airport.

Poison the environment, my ass. What makes that fucking biology teacher think we want him in our town teaching our kids in the first place. Bleeding heart liberals make me sick. He's an effete meddler who probably never got his hands dirty doing any actual work in his life.

*Covered from head to foot
From all the dust and soot,
That's how he came home from work every day*

Susanne Mumpower – Cole Dust Kisses

All this shit about protecting trees and streams. We'll put it all back together and make it nice again when we're done. But first we need the coal. Civilization needs energy. Lots of it. America needs energy. If we are going to protect our way of life, we need coal. A little wind just isn't going to do the trick. If these tree huggers had their way we'd end up as savages in the jungle. Or being ruled by the Chinese. What was it that philosopher said? Hobbs. That was him. The teacher in my philosophy class thought he was probably right. In our natural state, life is nasty, brutish and short.

In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Hobbs – from Leviathan

Nasty, brutish and short. That is life in the natural state. Life without technology. Life without strong leaders. You only have to look around you to see that. Without strong armies, inferior nations would invade our country, and rule over us. Without police, criminals would rob us blind. Somebody's got to be in charge. It's best if that's people who have proved themselves strong and intelligent in the struggle for existence. People who know the ropes. Who are not afraid to act. To cut down trees when that is needed. To protect the borders. To protect our civilization. Our way of life.

*Mama found it hard to sleep
When he was more than two miles deep ...*

Coal Dust Kisses

I think that my philosophy teacher said Hobbs advocated for a king running everything. Well, a king is born into luxury. He doesn't have to prove himself. Could be soft in the head. The head of some big industry would be a better choice. A man like John D Rockefeller, or Henry Ford. Men who know how to get things done and control things.

Diversified, my ass. Protect this animal or that social group so that we remain diversified. That's what they say. I say if an animal or a man needs special protecting, they aren't worth protecting. Keep them in their place and let them die. Same with people. Keeping the inferior ones alive by artificial means weakens the gene pool.

*But when the whistle blew, that's when she knew
She'd lived another day to feel
Coal Dust Kisses he would steal.*

Coal Dust Kisses

I don't like that Ireland guy teaching my son. God knows Simon is sissy enough on his own. He's a real sissy boy already. But he's still young. Maybe there is still time to make a man of him.

A man is someone who doesn't look to others to bail him out when he makes mistakes. A man makes his own way. Creates his own wealth. Ayn Rand had it right.

*Only the man who does not need it, is fit to inherit wealth,
the man who would make his fortune no matter where he started.
Ayn Rand*

How did I give birth to such a wimpy son? He wants everything handed to him on a platter. And that fucking asshole biology teacher is just going to make it all worse. First thing you know, Simon will be kissing trees and bitching about the American Way. It's the American way that got him what he has. And it needs to be fought for. Love that Hank Williams song on the radio. Ole Saddam thinks he is going to run the world. I don't think so. Uncle Sam is going to kick his ass, and serves him right, too.

*Hey, ole'Saddam, you figured wrong
When you thought the whole world would back down
And let you take all the oil in red Kuwait and plunder and spoil
Let sleeping dogs lie don't give us a reason*

*Cuz people in the USA are not really afraid
Of your starving army and all your worn out tanks
And if you take some innocent lives
That's when the fur's really gonna fly*

*Hey, man, back off, get smart, don't give us a reason
Hank Williams – Don't Give Us A Reason*

You don't fuck with America without paying a price.

A Close Call

August 18, 2002

Dear Diary,

Wow! What a day. What an afternoon! It was just one thing after another. It began when I was skinny dipping with Phoebe and Orville as usual. The newspaper said it might rain, so I brought along a plastic garbage bag to put our clothes in just in case we got caught. Well, as you will see when I get to that part, Dear Diary, we almost did get caught, but not just by the rain. Well, with the rain it was more than 'almost', but you will see all that too when I get to it.

So anyhow, we met there just a little after lunch. Ethan had to go to some kind of meeting so I wasn't going to go to his house until later. He didn't tell me too much about the meeting, but I think it had something to do with mountaintop mining.

So while we are skinny dipping we can see clouds building up. There are thunderstorms in the area, and we don't know if one of them will hit us. So we put our clothes in the garbage bag I brought along. That's so we will have dry things to put on if we get rained on. We aren't too worried about getting rained on. I mean we are wet from swimming anyhow, so what's the difference? But we want to keep our clothes dry.

It's kind of cloudy. But it is pretty warm so that doesn't matter. Well, we are splashing each other and all that kind of thing and suddenly Orville yelps, and starts hopping around. I think something awful must have happened. I go over to him and help him get to the bank where he sits down. Phoebe comes over to where we are, and we look at his foot. It's bleeding but not too bad. He has a cut on that fat part of the foot just behind the big toe. But like I said, it isn't really all that bad. It's just deep enough to bleed.

He starts crying. "I'm bleeding," he says. He says that quite a few times. "I'm bleeding. I'm bleeding." Like that.

"Don't be a baby," I say. "It's just a little scratch."

"I'm not a baby," he says.

"Well, you are acting like one," I say.

"He's just scared," Phoebe says.

"Well, he doesn't need to act like a baby," I say.

"You cry when you're scared," she says. I told her once that I thought I was a sissy because I cried so easy. Like I might cry from just being scared or something.

"But I don't cry about just a little scratch," I say.

"It's not just a little scratch," Orville says. "I'm bleeding."

"It's OK," Phoebe tells him. "You don't have to be so scared. It's not as bad as you think."

He pulls his foot up toward his face to get a better view and then he can see that already the bleeding is stopping. So he calms down.

Then Phoebe looks at me. "We are friends," she says. "You and me and Orville. You can't be telling your friends that they're babies and stuff like that. We get enough of that from our enemies." She's kind of mad at me. It's not very often she gets mad at me.

I look down and don't say anything. I know Phoebe is right. She's telling me that I shouldn't call Orville a baby for him crying if I don't want people to make fun of me when I cry. That, and how it's really important to have friends.

"I'm sorry," I say to Orville.

"You saw it was bleeding," he says.

So I get my shirt and tear a piece off of it to wrap around his foot. I want to make it up to him for saying he was being a baby.

Then I get his socks out of the plastic bag where the clothes are and say he should put them on. That's so the cut place won't get dirty. He puts his socks on and then says he wants to get dressed.

So while he goes over to the bag to get the rest of his clothes and get dressed Phoebe and me go to the place where he got cut and look around. We find pieces of a broken bottle lying around there. The water isn't deep there so we can see them. I hate it when people mess up nice places by doing things like that. Why break a bottle in a nice swimming place? We put the the pieces of broken glass up on the bank so we will be able to take them out of there when we leave.

Then, just as we are getting the last pieces of that bottle cleaned up we hear a dog barking. Through the trees we can sort of see where the path goes along the side of Rocky Creek, and there we see somebody coming up the path with his dog. We can't see him real good, and I don't think he sees us. So we run to the place where Orville is just finishing getting dressed.

"What's wrong?" he says. He can see we're worried.

We say, "shush" and motion him to be quiet. "Somebody's coming," I whisper to him. So we pick up the bag of clothes and run to hide in the bushes. I mean we don't want somebody catching us stark naked.

We can peek through the weeds and bushes without being seen. Pretty soon we can see who it is. Mr Hanscome is out walking his dog. Almost nobody ever comes up that path beside the creek and I thought we were pretty safe. I guess we have to be more careful.

I'm thinking about what will happen if he catches us and tells our parents. I'll get a thrashing from my Dad. Orville too. Probably not Phoebe, because her mother doesn't do any thrashing. But she doesn't want to be caught either.

The man's dog is running on ahead. It's a friendly black and white dog. Just a mutt I think, but nice. He sniffs around at everything like dogs do, and then he finds Orville's shoes. Orville hadn't put them on yet so they are still on the ground close to where the plastic bag had been. Mr Hanscome comes into the clearing. He's sort of old and grumpy. Like he is probably 50 or 60. He sees his dog sniffing at Orville's shoes and comes over to examine them. We can see that he is trying to figure out why there should be a pair of boy's shoes there.

Then his dog - Sam he calls him - comes over to where we are. He finds us by sniffing. We push him away and keep our heads down. I think we're finished. Just then we hear thunder. And Mr Hanscome calls to his dog. "Come on, Sam. It's starting to rain," he says. So Mr Hanscome and his dog leave without finding us. Or at least Mr Hanscome doesn't find us. When they are gone we come back out of our hiding place. We are super happy that we didn't get caught!! It was a close call, but we got away. It's a good thing dogs can't talk.

Then it starts to rain. At first it's those real big drops that sometimes you get just as a storm is almost there. Phoebe and me go back to the creek and start splashing around again. Orville says he doesn't want his clothes to get wet so he takes them off and puts them back in the plastic bag. Pretty soon we are all in the stream dancing around and laughing. It's so much fun being rained on we can hardly believe it, Dear Diary. It's sort of scary to see the lightning and hear the thunder, but that only makes it more exciting. Orville isn't worrying any more about his hurt toe and he isn't too scared by the storm.



Orville

It's Almost Like They Love Me

Orville is skinny-dipping with his friends.

We are swimming again. I pretend that Simon is my father and Phoebe is my mother. I wish they were. I guess they are not big enough. You have to be a grownup to be a father. Or a mother. We don't have no clothes on. Simon calls it 'skinny-dipping'. I watch Phoebe swing on the rope. She is pretty. Then she falls into the water. Splash. I'm just watching. Simon comes and picks me up. He is strong. I try to wiggle away from him, but I can't. He's bigger than I am. He is in the 5th grade. He will go to the 6th grade when school begins again. I'm just going to the 4th. We both laugh. We like wrestling like this. He is stronger than I am but he never hurts me. He throws me in the water. It's cold, but I like it. He says I am a big sissy. Afraid of the cold water. But he is just kidding. Really he likes me. He falls on his butt. It's because I am too heavy for him to throw. We all laugh again. At school mostly they don't like me. They think I'm stupid. We splash around and have fun. I can almost swim. Simon and Phoebe are teaching me. I can swim on my back a little bit. Then I get water up my nose. I am coming out of the water. I step on something sharp. It hurts. I yell. I try to get out of the water. I hop on one foot in the shallow water. I don't want to step on my hurt foot. I get on the beach. I sit down and look at my foot. My big toe is bleeding. Simon and Phoebe come to help me. Simon kind of makes fun of me for crying, but Phoebe tells him not to do that. So he stops. Then Simon gets his shirt. He tears off a piece of cloth. I say he shouldn't do that. He says it's OK. I say that my Dad would kill me if I tore up my shirt. He says he has lots of shirts and his Dad will never know. He will just throw this one away. His Dad has lots of money. That's why he can do this. Phoebe washes off my toe and Simon wraps the rag around it. It's almost like they love me. I mean like parents might love somebody. Nobody else is this nice to me. Sometimes my Mom and my Dad are a little nice, but not like this. Well, Uncle Paul is nice to me. Simon tore up his own shirt. How many people would do that? Then I put my clothes on. Then we hear a dog barking. Someone is coming. Phoebe and Simon grab their clothes. They don't have time to put them on. We run up into the woods where we have a hideout. From our hideout we can see the beach. But a person on the beach can't see us. Not if we keep our heads down. We can peek out from behind some grass and stuff. It's not much of a hideout. We didn't want to build anything too big right here 'cause it could be seen. From the beach I mean. We just cleared a little space and put some old blankets down. Then we made some places we could peek through the grass and weeds. We have to be very quiet. We see a man and his dog come up the path beside the pool. It's Mr Hanscome and his dog. He doesn't see us. The dog poops beside the beach. Then he sniffs his poop like it's real interesting. Then he wanders around a bit. All at once he starts barking. He looks in our direction. He's not on a leash.

I think he smells us. He knows we are here! Dogs can smell anything. If Mr Hanscome follows his dog he will find us. That will be embarrassing 'cause Phoebe and Simon still don't have no clothes on. And he would tell our parents. My Dad would kill me. But Mr Hanscome just calls the dog back. They go back down the path they came from. I think he is in a hurry because he hears thunder. He doesn't live too far from here. Then I feel the ground rumbling. It is a truck coming up the road. A real big truck. It might be my Dad driving it. He has a new job. He works for Simon's Dad. For years and years he worked in the Two Forks Coal Mine. Every day my Mom thought he would be killed there. Lots of men were. But not so many now as in the old days. In the old days all my grandfathers and uncles and great grandfathers and great-great ones and all those people worked in the mines. Not just this one but other ones too. 'Cause that's all they knew. I'll work in the mine when I get big. The mine bosses may think I'm stupid like they do at school. But I think there are some jobs I could do. Some of my grandparents and kin did get killed. But Dad has a new job and makes more money. He drives a truck. He's not so grumpy like when he worked in the mine. So he is nicer to me.



Falling into Friendship

Ethan is eating lunch with Helen at Judy's. This is the first time they have met, and they discuss politics and mountaintop mining.

This may be the most interesting woman I have ever met. What is she doing right here in the mountains of West Virginia? Maybe she is here for the same reason I am – to escape western industrial/technological civilization. We both want to keep that kind of civilization out of these mountains. We see mountaintop mining in exactly the same manner, so we did not spend too much time talking about what we both already know. We know how destructive it is. But what to do? That's the question. How do we bell the cat? How do we stop them from blowing the tops off the mountains? We agree that this is the issue. We have only talked for ten minutes or so, and already we are focused on the same issue. What, if anything, can change the direction of things? She doubts that anything can be done. I am more optimistic. Or at least I try to be. But she agrees we should make the effort.

The waitress wants to know if we are ready to order. She looks tired and frazzled. Dark hair with a few streaks of gray. Needs combing. She's well scrubbed but not well dressed. Her clothes are clean but it looks like she wore them to bed. Frumpy would be the word. How come waitresses in small towns always look frumpy? From Hollywood movies you would think that they were all Barbie Dolls. Sexy, seductive, and ready to jump into bed with any trucker that gives them a longing look and a decent tip. Not this one. Taxonomically, she is of the Frumpy Phylum. We biologists have a niche for everything. But she is friendly.

I glance at the 'Specials list' that is chalked in every day on a blackboard over by the Budweiser clock. They have a catfish special. Served with corn bread and rice. Now that sounds pretty good. I tell the waitress that's what I would like. Helen says she'll have the same.

Helen has the August 15th article from the Charleston Gazette with her.

A federal judge was wrong when he concluded that the Clean Water Act generally doesn't allow coal operators to bury streams beneath millions of tons of mining waste, federal government lawyers argued Wednesday.

Lawyers from the US Department of Justice late Wednesday filed their brief in an appeal of the May 8 mining ruling by Chief US District Judge Charles H Haden II. ...

"Although it could easily have done so, Congress did not define 'fill material', leaving that to the agencies," the federal government brief says.

"In turn, the court's ... discussion of a wide range of authorities provides no showing of clear intent for its construction."

In his May 8 ruling, Haden concluded that the federal Clean Water Act prohibited the US Army Corps of Engineers from approving coal mine waste dumping through its Section 404 'dredge-and-fill' permits.

Haden concluded that Section 404 does not allow the corps to issue permits for the dumping into streams of "material discharged solely to dispose of waste".

Under Haden's ruling, the corps is prohibited from approving new mountaintop removal valley fills that are proposed simply to dispose of waste.

The corps can authorize valley fills only if they are proposed with a constructive, primary purpose. Haden likened such purposes to the post-mining development plans required for mountaintop removal permits under the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

The Bush administration and the coal industry appealed Haden's ruling to the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va. ...

"Yes," I say. "I saw that article too. Such bullshit, but one would expect nothing less from Bush."

She nods in agreement.

"It's difficult. Even when a good law is passed, those in power find ways around it. They find ways around everything. Even the constitution."

I have fallen into friendship. We do not need to tame each other. We know almost as if by telepathy who we are in essence, even though we do not know the specifics of each other's lives. In due time we will learn that. Friendship is a kind of love. It too draws on the power of Eros but does not seek a sexual consummation. The focus is not on either person but on the task they share. Or in some cases maybe the common interest. But with us it is the task. How do we effectively oppose a capitalist system that is destroying everything in its path in order to clutter the earth with toys, trinkets and weapons with no bottom line except profit, no ethic except profit and no god except profit?

This is our passion. Our bonding profile for friendship. We recognize others who share this profile and we fall into friendship with them when we encounter them.

The idea of 'being in friendship' seems pale beside its cousin – 'being in love'. But this is a misunderstanding of things. Being in friendship is equal in intensity to being in love, and in most cases it's more lasting. Lewis calls being in love 'Eros'. Maybe that's best. Don't know. But I use the term Eros to mean the source of energy that all forms of love draw on. Libido by Freud. Being in love and being in friendship both draw energy from Eros, but the energy when it feeds friendship is more diffuse. Not necessarily less erotic, but more diffuse. Words are difficult. Reality always escapes our words, but we must do the best we can. Friendship is 'philia' in Greek, according to Lewis.

To the Ancients, friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it.

Lewis – Four Loves

We are sitting in a booth, not at the bar.

She's probably 10 or 15 years older than I am. But age is not important to friendship. May not be as important to other forms of love as might be expected. How does this relationship that is emerging with Helen compare with the one I have with Simon? The love I have with Simon is what Lewis would call 'Eros', though I don't think he ever discussed man/boy love. As a Classics scholar he would have known about it. Would have read the Symposium and Phaedrus. But Eros in general, he suggests, can be dangerous.

Eros in all his splendour ... may urge to evil as well as good ...

Lewis – The Four Loves

Is that true? Cannot the other forms of love become perverted as well? Perverted. Another slippery word. Perverted is that which draws us down rather than up. Any form of love can be either uplifting or or downpushing. Perverted. Parental love, 'storge', too can become demonic. Even Agape when it is infused with pride becomes perverted. Becomes self aggrandizement.

What did I write in my journal about this, after reading the essay by Lewis?

People are the full range of their possibilities; those that are manifest in the external world, those that find expression only in dreams, and those that we know only as obscure and wordless longings. Friendship can tolerate, and even affirm, the full range of the other in his or her fullness. All other forms of love are linked to a particular manifestation of the other, and are hostile to the rest of his or her possibilities.

Must think more about this. Read Lewis again. Debate with him.

We have been eating more and talking less. "The catfish is good," I say.

"Yes. Not bad at all."

"Do you come here in the evening?"

"Never have."

"It's more like a bar after 6:00. They only serve drinks and a few snacks then."

"Is it nice?"

I shrug. "It's OK. Sort of interesting, really. It's where the locals hang out."

"Do they make you feel welcome?"

"Some do. Some don't. Mostly they ignore people who are from away. But no one has ever bothered me."



Helen

A Newtonian Perspective

Meditation Two, in which Helen spies on some children who are skinny dipping, and wonders whether their fun could be adequately explained by Newtonian physics.

First law: $F_{net} = 0$ Second law: $a = (1/m)F_{net}$ Third law: $F_A \text{ on } B = -F_B \text{ on } A$

1. A body will remain at rest (or in motion) unless another force acts on it.
2. Acceleration is directly proportional to the force acting on a body and inversely proportional to its mass.
3. For every action there is an opposite and equal reaction.

Simple, elegant and for some purposes useful.

I feel like a criminal. A voyeur, to be exact. These children have every reason to think they are free from prying eyes. How could they know that up here on the hillside I have trained the telescope I bought to see planets, stars and galaxies on them? Well, they're heavenly bodies too. The section of Rocky Creek they are swimming in has turned a couple of bends that keep it about two or three hundred yards from the road for a spell of a half mile or so. There are lots of trees between them and the road. So it seems safe to skinny dip. I don't know if they can see my house. Even if they did catch a glimpse of it, they would probably think it was too far away for someone to see them. And it would be, except for my telescope. A girl and two boys. Obviously good friends. I don't know them, so I call them, with the precision I have learned from my newly acquired mathematical and scientific studies, Girl, Boy1 and Boy2. Or for convenience G, B1 and B2. That's the sort of elegance they like in science. I think of it as a no-nonsense, Tarzan-inspired approach. The name of any boy is Boy. The name of any girl is Girl. We distinguish between the boys by simply calling them Boy1 and Boy2. Tarzan would approve. B1 and G seem to be about the same age – about 11, I would guess. B2 appears to be a little younger – probably 8 or 9. They are very lovely to look at, but this morning I am watching them scientifically. From a Newtonian point of view.

G, the apple of my eye, swings out above the water on a rope and drops off, falling at a rate of 32ft/sec/sec. $a = (1/m) F_{net}$. Just like Newton's apple. The measurement (with a very slight adjustment for the resistance of the air) would be exact. Oddly, though, it tells me surprisingly little about either gravity (the F_{net}) or G (the girl). What is a 'force'? What is a 'girl'?

Chemistry and biology would add to my understanding of what I am seeing. I could, for example, describe the happiness of Girl as she drops into the water in terms of hormones and neurotransmitters. So happiness is an epiphenomenon of hormones and neurotransmitters? Something seems to get lost in this reduction.

There now. Look at that. B2 has just sat down to rest. A perfect example of Newton's first law. $F_{net} = 0$. No force, no movement. Just a mass at rest.

Bringing psychology and sociology into the equation is a bit more complex. There are two forms of data and both these sciences have struggled to decide which kinds should be admitted as valid. Type 1, observable from the outside – 'physical' phenomena, and type 2, experience as recorded in an act of introspection – 'mental' phenomena.

The 'only-from-the-outside-and-forget-what's-inside-the-black-box' approach created a psychology without a psyche. That was challenged by the humanists as well as psychologists interested in psycho-dynamics.

Behaviorists could predict and control, and use mathematical formulas, which made their deliberations look very scientific. They would predict that G will go back and use the swing again. She has done it four times. And all the same situational factors are still there to provide the same reinforcements. So she will probably do it again. And sure enough, look. She is. There she goes – out, out, out and down. Lovely. But her loveliness cannot be captured by numbers, so it is irrelevant. Her behavior was reinforced by the pleasure of falling through the air, and hitting the water. A bit of Type 2 data does seem to seep in around the edges in the concept of reinforcement. It is, after all, the experience of pleasure that is reinforcing. But let that go for now. I am just observing, not arguing. Well, maybe a little argument is seeping in.

Something similar happened in sociology. There was a struggle between those who wanted only Type 1 data to be admissible in scientific court, and those who would not only have accepted Type 2, but emphasized it. Sociology does, in any case, add new wrinkles to this. This is a peer group. A latency age peer group. Friends. They are mostly supposed to be homosexual, so what is the girl doing there? Is she, as I was at that age, really a kind of boy, or at least is she wanting to be one?

Depends on what kind of data is accepted. From the outside she is clearly a girl. But from the inside? That's a harder question. Still, though, there are social norms that are being violated here. Just look at B1 and B2 running around with their pretty little dingles bouncing in the breeze and no shame about it. And in front of a girl! Have they not been adequately socialized? And Girl isn't even supposed to let her panties be seen, much less what lies beneath them.

Ah, look! There it is. B1 picks up B2 and throws him into the water, falling back onto the beach. That's the second law. Exactly. He falls backwards, in a minus direction. $F_A \text{ on } B = -F_B \text{ on } A$. I have covered all the bases now. I'm getting a good Newtonian handle on all this now. Yet I must ask myself, what have I learned?

Let's return to Girl again, just as she lets loose of the rope. What was it that I read in my physics book about this?

Ships and other macroscopic bodies are made of atoms. Although atoms are themselves made of smaller constituents – the electrons and nuclei – the atoms do not suffer any internal changes in ordinary mechanical phenomena, and we can therefore regard atoms as indivisible, unchanging entities for most practical purposes. Since the sizes of the atoms are extremely small compared to the sizes of macroscopic bodies, we can regard atoms as almost point-like masses.

A point-like mass of no discernible size or internal structure is called an ideal particle. Such a particle may be thought of as an infinitesimal grain of mass, a grain so small that its size can be ignored for all purposes. At any given instant of time, the ideal particle occupies a single point in space. Furthermore, the particle has a mass. And that is all: if we know the position of the particle as a function of time and we know its mass, then we know everything that can be known about the particle. Position, time, and mass give a complete description of the behavior and the attributes of an ideal particle. Since every macroscopic body consists of particles, we can – in principle – describe the behavior and the attributes of such a body by describing the particles within the body. Thus, measurements of position, time, and mass are of fundamental significance in physics.

Hans Ohanian – College Physics, Vol 1, p 1

My book suggests that for purposes of analyzing motion, we could treat any object as a point. A point has no dimensions at all. It is infinitely small. It is a sort of nothing that we measure with great care. OK. Somehow that works for physics. But what does that do to G? She simply disappears! Suppose she weighs about 80 pounds. She becomes an 80 pound point with no dimensions or shape at all. She becomes a nothing. A nothing that nevertheless weighs something. And wants something. And finds joy in something. A lot of data is falling out along that circuitous path between the dimensionless point and the real person. Ohanian assures us that if we knew the position, time and mass of every particle that makes up G, we would have a complete description of her. Hmm. I suppose that life is paradoxical and that there is much that physics has to teach me about G as well as about B1 and B2. But this is an inauspicious start. Maybe I'm not getting something. All my training, after all, was in the humanities until a few years ago, when I decided to learn math and physics.

But I was right to begin with the humanities. Sappho knew more about girls than Newton.

*This is my fair girl-garden: sweet they grow –
Rose, violet, asphodel and lily's snow;
And which the sweetest is, I do not know;
For rosy arms and starry eyes are there.
Honey-sweet voices and cheeks passing fair.
And these shall men, I ween, remember long;
For these shall bloom for ever in my song.*

Sappho to Her Girlfriends – trans. by Arthur Way

But look now! B2 is hopping around on one foot. I think he has hurt himself. It looks like he is hollering. G and B1 come to his aid and help him out of the water. Is this pain that B2 is experiencing a complex pattern of atomic and sub-atomic particles in the brain?

*It is my toe
That hurts me so.
It was remote, but now I'm seeing
That it's the center of my being.*

*This ache, philosophers would find,
Is not the body, but in the mind.
Yet if you asked a scientist,
He or she would quite insist
That this intense and throbbing pain
Is not the toe, but in the brain.
But brain and mind are both not so.
My ache is plainly in my toe.
The wise would probably declare,
"That only seems". But I was there,
Right in my toe,
And thus I know.*

After they doctor him up, then B2 puts on his clothes. He has been hurt and feels vulnerable. I think he probably feels safer in his clothes.

Ah. There goes my teapot. I've got to go. Newton does much better with steam in teapots and with the behavior of stars and planets than with people.



Destroying Angels

August 23, 2002

Dear Diary,

You won't believe what happened! A few days ago Ethan asked me if I would take him to Frog Pond. I told him all about Phoebe and Orville and me swimming there. I even told him that we skinny dip there. He said "skinny dipping is where it's at". Really. Those were his exact words - "Skinny dipping is where it's at".

Well, this afternoon I took him there. It was a warm day. A little hazy, but really warm. So naturally we want to swim. I'm not sure what he is going to do. I am wearing my Indian loin cloth. I put it on under my clothes before coming here. But then I think, why do I even need a loin cloth?

"Skinny dipping is where it's at," I say, and smile at him. And I untie the string on my loin cloth and let it fall off. Now I run into the water naked, just like I would if Phoebe and Orville were here. I'm kind of nervous. Maybe he is too. He stands there for a minute, and looks around like he is afraid maybe there is a lion hiding nearby or something. But then he takes all his clothes off and wades in.

Well, when he gets into it, he sort of forgets to be nervous any more. Ah, how much fun it is! We play tag, and then he throws me up into the air. He shows me a special way to do this. He holds my foot while we are facing each other and I have my hands on his shoulders. Then at the count of three he lifts me up while I push off with my foot. You'd be surprised at how high he can throw me. He is really strong. Well, he's not a muscle man, but he's stronger than you would think.

Then we get out and get dressed. There is a path along the stream and we follow it a ways. He knows a lot about woods

and things. Well, he is a biology teacher, so I guess he should. He shows me this really beautiful mushroom. It's white. Pure white, like the ivory on piano keys. I ask him if it's edible.

He says, "Well, it's name is 'Destroying Angel'. Does that tell you something?"

I laugh. "I don't think I would eat something with that name," I say.

He tells me that it is one of the most poisonous mushrooms of all. Lots of poisonous mushrooms just make you sick. But this one can kill you. First it makes you throw up and have diarrhea and feel really bad. After that you think you are getting over it, but then after a couple of days it hits you again. This time it destroys your liver. If you don't get a liver transplant, you die. And it does bad things to other organs too.

Even if it doesn't kill you, you are never the same again. So that is a no-brainer. Don't eat Destroying Angels.

Ethan told me that nature is very beautiful, but we shouldn't be fooled by that. It can be very dangerous too. See, that's what the Destroying Angel means. Ethan taught me about 'metaphors'. He teaches me more than any other teacher I ever had. So I say, "the Destroying Angel is a metaphor for you". I say that to him. I guess I am sort of showing off, but why not? Everybody shows off sometimes. He smiles at me and reaches down and takes my face in his hands and kisses me - right on my lips. Just real light and quick like. Before I know what he is doing. I don't have time to kiss him back. It's like the other time. I like his kisses but they are too fast. Anyhow, I guess I must have been right about the metaphor thing.

We go to his house after that, and he feeds me some supper. Then we sit on the porch and talk. He tells me more about mushrooms. He says the mushrooms we see are just the fruit of a bigger plant that grows underground. That underground part isn't what you might think of as a plant. It's just a tangle of fibers called a mycelium. He writes the word down for me, in the notebook I keep with me. Also he shows me a picture of mycelium in a book on mushrooms he has. A mycelium looks sort of like a lot of spider webs. Like I said, it's not what you might think of as a plant.

But he says the mycelium is like a tree, and the mushroom we see are like apples on the tree. So mostly all the ones we see in a single clump are probably parts of the same plant. And when we collect mushrooms, it's like picking apples.

He says he will teach me more about mushrooms but makes me promise not to eat any that I found myself just because I think they look like edible ones. Well, after what he told me about Destroying Angels, I guess I won't. Even if I didn't promise him that, I wouldn't dare.



Ethan

Walking Hand in Hand

Ethan thinks about the Destroying Angel mushroom as he walks hand in hand with Simon down a path in the woods.

He reaches out and takes my hand. It's nothing to walk hand in hand. People do it all the time. But if I was caught walking hand in hand with him in the woods it would raise eyebrows. And if someone had discovered me skinning dipping with him, it would have done more than raise eyebrows.

Ecstasy piled on ecstasy. His hand is exquisitely small and delicate and his taking my hand is so tentative. Does he know what joy this gives me? Can he guess?

Why am I letting this develop? Always I have loved boys but always I played it safe. Withdrew at the first sign that the Eros feeding a relationship might be visible to others. This time I let things emerge. Let nature take its course. But nature – beautiful as it is – is not entirely benign. Other species defend themselves and have no second thoughts about the suffering they might cause. I tried to warn Simon about this when we saw the Destroying Angel mushroom. An apt metaphor both of the interconnectedness of all things, and of death and suffering as an inescapable part of the whole.

It is myself I should have warned. There may be a price for letting nature take its course. How much of a price I don't know. Prison is one possibility. Americans love to lock people up. I read about that yesterday morning.

The Catholic Church is the biggest non-governmental institution

The Charleston Gazette – August 23, 2002

Are Americans more criminal than people in other nations? Of course not. People everywhere are pretty much similar in nature.

Then why does America imprison vastly more of its citizens?

The explanation, apparently, is that America is more punitive, treating drugs much more harshly – and America is flooded with pistols used in thousands of crimes.

Last week, Britain's Economist magazine had a cover issue on the US incarceration quandary. It presented disturbing statistics such as these:

Japan locks up only 48 people per 100,000 population – but America jails 700, and hard-eyed Texas incarcerates more than 1,000 (yet Texas has more violent crime than states with fewer prisoners).

Every day, 1,600 more US prison inmates are released, joining millions of ex-convicts on the streets with little hope of finding jobs. Currently in Florida, 7 percent of the adult population can't vote because of felony records.

"After quadrupling its imprisonment rate in just 30 years, America now has 700 people in every 100,000 under lock and key, five times the proportion in Britain, the toughest sentencer in Western Europe", the magazine said. America has overtaken Russia as the world's most aggressive jailer.

But there would also be a price for not allowing it to happen. To never have allowed my love to become manifest.

*I tried to fly from Love, who snatched a brand
Out of the coals and found my hiding place.
Bending not his bow but his small hand,
He flicked a pinch of fire in my face,
Enveloping me in flames. Sweet firebrand,
Now you have made my heart a fireplace.*

Meleager – 5th Century BC – translated by Daryl Hind

Why does the price of not acting seem greater than the price of letting things develop this time? I have never let things go this far before. But then I have never met a boy like Simon before. Here is a boy who insists on being who he is. And who he is, is so lovely!

Perhaps it need not have a bad outcome. Perhaps we can sit and warm ourselves by the fireplace in my heart and be happy together.



Helen

Where Else Would Happiness Find a Time and a Place?

Meditation Three, in which Helen oogles Ethan and Simon at Frog Pond through her telescope and wonders about the nature of light.

Ah, who is that? My little cupid has a new friend, a man. I think I recognize him. I do. It's Ethan, the Science teacher. The guy I met at Judy's. Thought he was an interesting character at the time. Now it appears that there are even more interesting aspects to his nature. I'll have to drink a few more beers with him sometime.

Little cupid is in his loin cloth today, with a bow and arrows. Only accidentally does he play the part of cupid. In his own mind I am sure he is an Indian. He shoots an arrow at Ethan. Ethan must be playing the part of the paleface invading his territory. But I would guess this is no unwelcome invasion. Cupid must have invited Ethan here. The air between them is troubled with delicious anticipations.

*We bob lightly in each other's awareness,
Choreographed by faint breezes,
Until he alights,
And snuggles in my lap.
He eats Kit-Kats from my hand.
He licks my stamen fingers,
Lapping the small residue
Of chocolate nectar
With his pink proboscis.*

Carroll Baskins – Kit-Kats

The boy lets his loincloth fall to the ground. He, at least, is going to skinny dip. Little Cupid is trampling the emblems of civilization beneath his feet just as in Caravaggio's painting, *Triumphant Eros*.

*These grownup clothes we fill
Have buttons that are locks
That keep us in a box.
They are against my will.
Beneath these shoes and socks
My feet are naked still
And capable to thrill
From touching grass and rocks.*

Alex Papadopoulos – Beneath These Shoes and Socks

Off with the clothes! And with the clothes, off with the constraints of civilization! Its rationalizations, sublimations and repressions be damned! Down with art, and music and science. Pity. But also down with class structures and war.

Ethan is persuaded. Slowly, tentatively at first, he begins to undress. The boy smiles at him and splashes water in his direction. Ethan removes all of his clothes, and folds them up neatly on the ground. Then he enters the water. Little by little he seems less afraid. This must be the first time he has been skinny dipping with little cupid.

And now look at them! Such joy! It would appear that Cupid's arrow did, in fact, pierce the man's heart.

*Love shook my heart,
Like the wind on the mountain
Troubling the oak-trees.*

Sappho – translated by A S Kline

How can I not notice the signs, I who loved girls as I believe this man loves boys?

Chocolates or the wind in the mountains. Metaphors pile up on each other in the face of such inspiration. The man is Cupid's almond square; he is the man's Scotch kiss. Or are they are both just common Kit-Kats? I am more inclined to girls, but I must say that watching them is like eating dark and light chocolate truffles.

Must we return to a pre-civilized existence to find our souls?

The acheo-anarchists would say so, and they may have a point. Of course hunting and gathering is no longer an option with billions of *homo sapiens* swarming the planet. But even if it were an option, would the trade-off really be worth it? Would I have to give up Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Schubert's *Trout*? Is it possible to salvage any piece of civilization without the rest of it? Or is it all of a piece – all connected – so that when we pull music out of the garbage heap, social class and war come with it?

My friend who established a rural medical clinic in the poverty-stricken Sierra Madre of Mexico loved the people and the life he found there. I once asked him if he could choose, would he want to be reincarnated into that kind of life – with all its suffering and risks – or into modern American society. There was no contest in his mind. The marginal existence of the poor Mexicans was clearly preferable. Yet in bringing them medicine, he was opening them to the rest of our civilization with its TVs, fast foods and sweat shops.

The civilized man and the noble savage – is this a part of the Yin and Yang of life along with adult and child, night and day, the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the water, life and death? Must good and evil also be a part of the Yin and Yang of things?

The basic principle behind the understanding of life as an interplay between Yin and Yang is that the highest good is achieved not in one overcoming the other, but in their proper balance. From this point of view, to treat good and evil as another example of Yin and Yang makes little sense. Are we to say the highest good is to be achieved in the proper mixture of good and evil? What would that mean? Are we to limit holocausts, but not do away with them? Only do a little bit of genocide? Continue to rape and pillage, but do it with moderation? Yet always we find a mix of good and

evil in reality. The delicate antelope is always pursued by the tiger. As a species, the antelope is enhanced by the tiger. Is evil, then, just a one-sided perspective of a higher harmony? When I see the wealthy exploiting the poor, I cannot buy this.

Difficult questions. But this morning I can simply enjoy Eros trampling civilization under his feet. Philosophy be damned. Joy trumps every philosophy. Look at them frolicking in the water. How far will this go? Their love is a danger to them both. I wonder how well they understand this. I suspect that my little Cupid does not. The man must know. He reads newspapers. Yet how easy it is to forget in moments of ecstasy. How am I to understand what I am seeing? Math and science tell me next to nothing about it. I must turn to poetry if I wish to understand the proper hierarchy of our desires:

*Some say an army of horsemen, or infantry,
A fleet of ships is the fairest thing
On the face of the black earth, but I say
It's what one loves.*

Sappho fragment – translated by William Harris

The sun and its light. How are we to understand it? What is my present understanding?

- We are patterns of light.
- Light is consciousness.
- Causality between the part and the whole goes both ways.

Math is our most exact language for describing light, from the outside. The primary components of light are speed, wave length and frequency. What was that formula?

$$c = \lambda f$$

The speed of light equals the wave length times the frequency. That is the most basic relationship between the speed of light, the wave length and the frequency on the electromagnetic continuum. Since the speed of light is constant, wave length and frequency are inversely proportional. Add to this another simple formula,

$$E = hc/\lambda$$

and we can calculate the energy of light source. The energy equals Plank's Constant times the speed of light divided by the wave length, which makes the energy inversely proportional to the wave length. Of course applying all this becomes more complicated, but as far as a basic description, this seems to be about it.

But to understand anything, we need binocular vision.

Poetry is our most exact language for describing light from the inside. As in the poem by Papadopoulos.

*What then is this light
That presents equally as an object,
And as a wave of nothing in particular
– This not this not that
– This limit to our rushing?
In the Raven light is swallowed up.
In his bleached bones on a pebbled beach*

*It is given again.
A pion dies into two gamma rays.
Shall I too
When I throw off my mass
Spin off effortlessly
Like two skaters racing across the ice
In time to each other and to a larger melody?
To the scientist a problem –
To the artist a mistress –
To the blind an unrequited love.
But what is light to itself?
How can I describe that which eludes language –
Only that it laughs on the rippled surface,
And plays in the plumage of birds.*

*Alex Papadopoulos – God Laughs and Plays
(borrowing the title from a sermon by Meister Eckhart)*

Somehow we need both the math and the poetry for a complete description of light, even though the two are incompatible. Bohm understood this.

My suggestion is that at each stage the proper order of operation of the mind requires an overall grasp of what is generally known, not only in formal logical, mathematical terms, but also intuitively, in images, feelings, poetic usage of language, etc.

David Bohm – Wholeness and the Implicate Order

I wonder whom Bohm loved. We have none of his poetry ... unless certain passages of his writings are to be read as poetry. He and Einstein both continued to hunt for the hidden variable that would bring meaning and coherence to the quantum chaos. Even Bohm seemed to think it might be found in a yet to be discovered equation. Perhaps the variable for which they searched is not to be found in math but in the realm of teleology, which has been rejected *a priori* by science. Even the greatest geniuses of civilization cannot find what they do not believe exists. The missing variable is the intention of the whole, which cannot be defined mathematically.

But I am afraid I have come to math too late. I cannot follow his equations in chapters 3 and 4. He says they are not essential, but I am not sure. Perhaps if I consult my College Physics text, and my math books, I can make some headway. But what the hell is an 'eigenfunction'? It has to do with how energy is emitted only in discreet quantities, I think. I'll have to return to this. Will I die before I have a chance to track down everything I want to know?

But the pressing question is whether a causality of the whole – a teleology – complements the mechanical causality of the parts. Or is it all just mechanics? Will a better understanding of the four basic forces of nature tell us why history has become a nightmare?

Our desires flow through our texts, and out of this, history emerges.

Would I escape from this wheel of suffering to a permanent state of Samadi, beyond the dualities of time? Not today, I think. There are still some chocolates left to munch on.

Not Exactly

August 18, 2002

Dear Diary

Today I dropped by to see Ethan. I got there about 2:00. He showed me a movie called 'Ma Vie En Rose'. That's French. I wrote it down so I could get it right for you, Dear Diary. It means 'My Life in Pink'. Ethan translated it for me.

Wow. What a movie. This kid - Ludovic is his name - likes to dress up in girl clothes. Just like me. He wants to be a girl but he's a boy. The main problem is he has a dick. Well, in the movie nobody said exactly that. But that is the problem. Boys and girls aren't so different except for that.

When they are older they are more different. Women get those big breasts and men grow whiskers. But when we are just kids, there's not so much difference. Mainly it's the dick.

Well Ludovic was a lot like me but not exactly. I mean I like having a dick. I don't think he did. He never said so in the movie, but he wants to be all the way a girl. That would mean no dick. I want to come back to being a boy whenever I like. I never said this to anyone before, Dear Diary. Not even to Mom or Ethan. But I kind of like people seeing my dick. It's almost like I want to show it off. I wouldn't want to not have one. This is just between you and me, Dear Diary. Phoebe's Mom said I could talk with you about anything, but I don't want anybody else to know that. About showing off, I mean. Also I don't like girl clothes that are so frilly like Ludovic wore. I like them more plain. But I did like the movie a whole lot.

"What did you think of the movie?" Ethan asked when it was done.

"It was OK."

"I liked it," he says.

"Do you like boys who wear girl clothes?" I ask.

"Sure," he says.

"Did you like Ludovic?"

"I did," he says.

"Well, I did too," I say.

"In some ways, when I was a kid I was a little like Ludovic," he says.

He is getting a little too close to my secrets - things I'm not sure I want to talk about. Well, I do in a way. I mean it was very exciting to hear him say that. And I did ask him if he liked Ludovic. Why would I ask him that if I didn't want to talk about it? So how was he like Ludovic? I am wondering if maybe Ethan wore dresses when he was a kid. But I can't just up and ask him that. He still might laugh at me if he knew I did. Well, really I know he won't.

If I think about it I know he never says things to make me feel stupid or weird. So it's just a habit that makes me afraid. My habit of never telling anyone about this. Except Phoebe and Orville. My habit of thinking everybody would make fun of me. At least in the grownups' world. Course I told Mom. It sort of seems like my habit of always hiding is going up in smoke. That is exciting in a way. But it doesn't feel very safe.

"Are you like him?" he asks me.

What a question! I'm not ready for this. It was like when he kissed me on my mouth.

"Like Ludovic?" I ask.

He nods.

"No," I say. Then I add, "not exactly". See, I didn't know if I want to tell him or not. So I say "not exactly". That can mean anything. I feel nervous. I can see he is really close to knowing about me, so I think I will bring the conversation back to him. That's a trick I learned for when I don't want people asking too much about me. I think Mom taught me that. She told me that people like talking about themselves more than anything. So if you want them to

stop asking things about you, or anything else you are tired of talking about, you just ask them something about themselves. I tried it a few times and it works. People will go on and on about themselves. Most everybody does.

So then I say to Ethan, "How were you like him?". I try to make my question sound real ordinary. Like I am just asking how his morning went. Something like that.

He thinks about this a little bit before he answers. Then he smiles at me and says, "I was like you are. I was not exactly like him".

There's that word that I used. "Exactly". He used it on purpose. He could see that I was trying to wiggle off the hook. He is letting me know that. Well, I sort of know he's on to me. You can tell when somebody knows something. They don't have to come right out and say it. But still I want to keep the conversation on him. So I ask him how he was like Ludovic even if it wasn't "exactly".

"Every time it was Halloween I dressed up like a girl," he says. "Secretly I kind of liked doing it, but was embarrassed that people might find out. So I treated it like a joke."

"Did you ever dress up in secret?" I ask.

"A few times," he says. "But really I wanted people to see me."

"That's like me," I said. I mean how bad can he think wearing girls' things is if he did it himself?

"You can wear anything you like when you are here," he says. "I like to make this be a place where people can be who they want to be. Not who other people say they've got to be."

"Can you be who you want to be?" I ask.

He doesn't answer right away. Then he says, "No."

"Not even here?"

"Not even here."

"Not even with me?"

He gets up off the couch and goes into the kitchen. He returns with a can of beer and a glass. He pours a little bit in a glass and gives it to me, and begins to drink the rest himself. I am a little worried that maybe he drinks too much, like my Mom, but I never

see him drunk, so I don't think he does. I drink a little of the beer he gives me. I don't really like it very much. But I don't want to say that. I mean you shouldn't say bad things about stuff people give you.

So he sits down again on the couch next to me. And finally he answers my question. "Mostly I guess I can be any way I want with you," he says. "More than with anybody else." But still I notice he said "mostly". I wonder what that "mostly" is about, but I don't say anything. We just sit there for a little bit with neither of us talking. Like we already have enough to think about. After a little while he asks me if I'm hungry. I tell him I am so he fixes us some sandwiches. We have some potato salad and tomatoes to go with the sandwiches.

It was a good day.

I'm thinking next time I may take along a dress. Or maybe just a skirt that I can wear with a colored t-shirt.



Ethan

Illegal Dreams

Ethan is sitting across the table from Simon. They are eating potato salad and sandwiches. He pictures Simon in a dress, and feels a stirring in his testicles.

How pretty he would look in a dress! I hope he does bring one next time. But I can't rush him. Let him unfold at his own pace.

*I wandered early, before my family was awake, among the
flowers of my Eden, peopled with salamanders and
chipmunks, for gifts for my beloved, the woman in
the cabin next to ours.*

*I was gathering a bouquet of these blue and yellow
and red epiphanies, these speechless saints
wandering in careless fields, these fragments
of a shattered sun that were too numerous
for my counting skills.*

Bouquets.

For my love.

I was seven.

She forty-seven.

A perfect match.

*And she, when I presented them to her hoping for a smile, an
exclamation, a kiss even, threw them in the early morning
fiery stove, declaring my gifts to be poison sumac.*

*And since then I have never returned to my Eden, or only partly
so, as from a distance.*

And now World which I love,

For you I gather bouquets.

You mistake my wild gifts.

*You who know only what you grow in hothouses, burn them, and
threaten me with fire.*

But I bring you flowers.

Only that,

World.

Wild,

and simple,

lovely

flowers.

Jay Edson – I Bring You Flowers

If Simon gathers himself in girl clothes, what a bouquet he will make.

What is it about sissy boys that I find so attractive? About androgyny? Why am I fascinated by a boy wearing a dress as in 'Ma Vie En Rose', or by girls with penises, as in the paintings of Henry Darger?" All eleven-year-old boys are androgynous. Both physically and mentally. Even before I had words for it, the idea of being both a boy and a girl had real appeal for me. When I was young, it was not seeing androgynous boys that fascinated me so much as being one.

I am about Simon's age. It is Halloween. I have decided to dress up as a girl. I think I look pretty good, so I go out trick or treating. At one house a man challenges me. "The is Halloween," he says. "You are supposed to wear a costume."

"I am," I say.

"What is it?" he asks.

I realize that maybe my costume is too successful. He thinks I am just a girl who has not bothered to get a costume.

"I am really a boy," I say.

He smiles. "Ah, you make such a pretty girl," he says.

I think he is teasing me. I think he knew I was a boy from the beginning. I realize that he is attracted to me. I can feel his attraction like an invisible force—like gravity. I know he wishes to reach out and touch me. It is something both exciting and a little frightening. But I have no words to put on my feelings.

These things were never talked about, so where would I have learned the words that would have helped me to think about it?

Male/female is probably the duality that gave rise to all that speculation about Yin and Yang. But my reaction is not philosophical. Not in its origin. The philosophy is interesting, but the primal experience of Yin/Yang is in the testicles. Maybe I'll name my testicles Yin and Yang. A little like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. I could name one Dee and the other Dum. Their full names would be Yin Dee and Yang Dum. Funny, but who would I tell a joke like this to? From Dee and Dum the experience rises up through the spinal column – kundalini-like – and when it arrives in the frontal lobes it becomes philosophy. That's where the third eye grows. It's the flower. The lotus. But its roots are in the mud – in the testicles. And for a woman, where? I don't know. I am sure that they hide the source of all this somewhere.

The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men now do, backwards or forwards as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four feet, eight in all, like tumblers going over and over with their legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast.

Now the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round like their parents. Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods; of them is told the tale of Otys and Ephialtes who, as Homer says, dared to scale heaven, and would have laid hands upon the gods.

Doubt reigned in the celestial councils. Should they kill them and annihilate the race with thunderbolts, as they had done the giants, then there would be an end of the sacrifices and worship which men offered to them; but, on the other hand, the gods could not suffer their insolence to be unrestrained. At last, after a good deal of reflection, Zeus discovered a way.

He said: 'Methinks I have a plan which will humble their pride and improve their manners; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg.

Plato – The Symposium (Aristophenes is speaking)

Then all these reduced men and women seek their missing half. That's what love is all about. It's Aristophenes speaking, so one suspects we might be dealing with comic relief. Still, some truth might be gleaned from the image, absurd as it is. Love seeks a larger wholeness. I have never known a boy who is so attuned to words as he is. He tried to slip around me with the phrase, "not exactly." And he knew right off what I was doing when I repeated the phrase "not exactly." What a joy to be able to say something in the language of sub-text and have a boy understand it. Many adults miss this kind of thing. Words. Texts and sub-texts. Worlds are created and destroyed by the magic of words.

*Now that dreams too have become illegal,
I shall retreat into a forest of words –
Ancient words like woody skyscrapers
housing the last remnants
of another way –
New words like saplings for whom the
sunlight is still an amazement –
Words thick
As rain forests a century ago
As rain forests before Babel
As rain forests when they were first made.
No servant of the system shall find my tiny campsite
and tell me which trees I should love and
how I must order them in the scheme of
precalculated merits and demerits,
Or how I should name them.*

Jay Edson – A Forest of Words

And here is an androgynous boy who is just eleven years old who is already beginning to understand about words. Perhaps some day he will smash this prison of words within which we live with new living words. This has got to be the great love of my life. I never really believed in such a thing. What a corny idea. The great love of one's life. But here it is. The genuine article.

A Figure of Speech

August 29, 2002

Dear Diary,

Me and Orville and Phoebe were out at Frog Pond this afternoon. It was a really nice day. It was warm with puffy clouds in the sky. We all go skinny dipping like we do most every time we meet there. Then we let the sun dry us off. We are lying on our towels looking up at the sky. We are making up things that we see in the clouds - like houses or faces or monsters.

Then Orville says, "I got something bad to tell you."

I ask him what it is.

"It's about Ethan," he said.

"What about Ethan?"

"They're going to kill him."

Well, that gets my attention. I mean Orville doesn't always get things right, but that does make me sit up.

"What are you talking about?" I say.

"It's what my Dad said. I heard him talking to someone on the phone. It was about Ethan. My Dad said, 'He's going to get himself killed!'"

"Who was your Dad talking to?"

"I think it was Uncle Paul."

"Did your Dad say they were talking about Ethan?"

"I asked him who they're going to kill. After he hung up I asked him that. He said it was that Science teacher."

"You mean Mr Ireland?"

"Yeah, him."

I ask Orville why they are going to kill him.

"Cause he runs his mouth too much."

"Runs his mouth?"

"Yeah. About things that ain't none of his business. That's what my Dad said."

"So what was he 'running his mouth' about?"

"I asked my Dad that."

"And what did he say?"

"He said 'That's no concern of yours'. Then he said that I better not be repeating things that I hear."

"But that's what you are doing now," I say.

"What am I doing now?"

"Repeating what you heard."

He thinks about this a minute. Then he says, "That's different."

"How is it different?"

"You won't say anything."

Anyhow, Orville told me that it was something they heard him talking about at Judy's. But he didn't know what. That's all I know about it, Dear Diary.

I told Orville that it was probably just a figure of speech. Ethan told me about figures of speech, but of course Orville didn't know what it meant. "A what?" he asked.

"A figure of speech. It's when you say something that isn't exactly real, just to make a point. Like you said once that if your Dad knew you were skinny dipping with Phoebe and me he would kill you."

"He wouldn't really kill me," Orville said.

"Yeah. That's what I mean. It's just a figure of speech."

"Yeah. He wouldn't kill me, but he sure would beat my butt."

"And what they were saying about Ethan was just a figure of speech."

"I guess so," he said.

"It's got to be," I said.

And of course, I don't think they are going to kill him. Not really. But they could make a lot of trouble for him. Beat him up or get him fired or something like that. So I got to tell you, Dear Diary, figure of speech or not, it's got me worried.



Red

Tarring and Feathering

Red is standing at the bar in Judy's, staring at Ethan and Helen who are conversing in a booth.

That's the teacher that Antonio told me about. Creepy guy. He's got no wife and no family. Not even a girl-friend unless that old hag he is with is it. What's her name? Helen something. And what's she doing here? Maybe the teacher and her are getting it on. A wimpy guy like that probably couldn't do no better. Or maybe he's like that professor I read about last week.

MARIETTA, Ohio - A former Marietta College professor was convicted Friday of 108 charges including child pornography, obscenity and pandering prostitution involving minors and adults.

Jurors acquitted Eugene Robert Anderson on 25 counts of child pornography and corruption of a minor, after about 10 hours of deliberations. Anderson, 52, of Parkersburg, W.Va., is scheduled to be sentenced Oct. 24.

"This person has been preying on young people, living in chat rooms where children who have some question about their sexuality or who they are go, and in some of the chats talked with them about things we can't talk about," Washington County Prosecutor Michael Spahr said.

Gazette, August 24, 2002

Preying on young people. That's what the article said. They should have just taken him outside and put him up against a wall and shot him. No. That would be too easy. They should have tortured him first. Crushed his fingers with a nut cracker. Cut his balls off and stuffed them into his mouth.

When we bring these people in from away to teach our kids, we really don't know what we are getting.

That Ireland guy may not be like the professor. But you never know.

What I do know is that him and that Helen are both tree huggers. We sure don't need them around here.

They did better in the old days. If someone came into your town who didn't fit in or who was a shyster, they just tarred them and feathered them and sent them out of town on a rail. That tarring and feathering was no joke. They used hot tar. I mean a person could die from that. If they did live, you can bet that was the last that particular town ever saw them.

Warning Ethan

August 30, 2002

Dear Diary,

Today I went by to see Ethan, and to warn him. I was not sure just what I had to warn him about. Orville's father said he's going to get himself killed. That's just talk. But I don't know what they might do. Not really. Maybe someone would kill him.

So I told Ethan what Orville's father said. He was interested but he didn't seem too worried. When I told him it had something to do with Judy's, he thought a minute about that. Then he said "Oh, I'll bet I know what it's about."

I asked him what.

"It must have been when I was talking with Helen Keenan. Somebody must have overheard what we were saying."

"Who is Helen Keenan?"

"She is a very interesting older woman," he said. "She lives near us. But she pretty much keeps to herself."

"So how do you know her?" I asked.

"She read a letter I wrote in the Stony Creek News, and she emailed me about it."

"What was it about?"

"The ecology of this area."

"The what?"

"Ecology. That has to do with how everything in nature is connected to everything else and how it all hangs together."

"Like you been teaching me when we go on walks."

"Yeah. That's called ecology."

"Right. Now I remember. You already told me that word, but I didn't remember it." I took out my notebook and jotted it down. I got to remember to do that whenever I learn something new.

"It's an important idea," he said.

"So you were talking with Helen Whatsername ... "

"Keenan," he said. "Helen Keenan." I jotted that down too.

"What did you and Helen Keenan say that was so horrible?"

"We talked about starting a protest movement against mountain top mining. Some people near us must have overheard our conversation. Then, of course, they would tell that to other people."

"You and her are talking about starting a protest movement against the people doing the mountain top removal?" I asked.

He said he was.

"My Dad works for those people."

"Yes. I think he's one of the most important people around here in that business," he said. "I'm afraid that may put you in the middle of things. So probably it's best to stay out of this."

"Yeah. I think Dad is one of the main bosses around here."

Ethan explained to me that they would probably not kill him. But that a lot of people might be pretty mad at him if he and Helen tried to get things going.

So you see, Dear Diary. This could be a problem. Ethan explained to me what mountain top mining does. It's not good. I think Ethan is right about this. But I have to live with my Dad, and Ethan is right about that too. I don't want to be in the middle of their fight about this. I got enough trouble living with Dad without that.

I asked him what him and Helen and all those guys are going to do. He said they're going to have a demonstration. That means that they would all gather together in town or someplace and march around with signs and stuff. He said that would not stop the mountain top removal. At least not by itself. But it might get people to thinking about it and wanting to know more.

Pink Tennis Shoes with Blue Socks

September 2, 2002

Dear Diary,

Well, I had to find out. I know Ethan said I could wear anything I wanted at his place. But I still wondered if he would laugh at me if he really saw me wearing girl's clothes. I didn't think he would tell me it was bad or that he would really make fun of me. Not too much anyhow. He thought that Ludovic was OK. Still, I thought he might laugh if he really saw me. I'm older than Ludovic. I thought that might make a difference. To tell the truth I was really excited. It made me very happy to think about being a girl with him. But also kind of afraid.

So anyhow, I picked the outfit that I would take to his place. I picked my plain light blue skirt. I can wear it with most anything because it doesn't have a pattern. Then I picked my t-shirt with the wild flowers all over it. It's got a lot of colors. I think it is my prettiest t-shirt. It's really is a girl's t-shirt. You can tell. It's not just the flowers. The sleeves are different on a girl's t-shirt. But that doesn't jump right out at you. It could pass as a boy's t-shirt. Almost.

So I put on my girl's underpants and a pair of shorts. Then I just went ahead and wore the t-shirt. I also wore my pink tennis shoes with blue socks. Pale blue ones that would go good with the skirt. Dad doesn't know about those tennis shoes.

But he wasn't home, so I didn't have to worry about him seeing me wearing them. So you see, I already was wearing everything that goes with my girl's outfit except the skirt when I started out on my bike to go see Ethan. I had the skirt in my backpack. It was right after lunch, which is my usual time to go see him.

Ethan seems really glad to see me when I get to his house. He says I look great in my flowered t-shirt. So far so good. So I tell him I have to pee. I go into the bathroom and put the skirt on. I am still kind of nervous about him seeing me. I don't know why. He did say I could wear anything at his house. So when I go out to the porch where he can see me he does something that surprises me. He doesn't do anything. I mean he acts like he doesn't even notice anything different - like seeing me in a skirt is the most normal thing in the world. Well, I don't think there is anything he could do nicer than that.

He says he thinks maybe we could make pin-wheel cookies. I think that would be great. I never did any baking with him. Well, he really does know how to bake things. You make the dough and the date filling separate. Then you roll out the dough and spread the date mixture on the top of it. Then you roll it up like a pin wheel. It's fun doing this with Ethan. We joke and laugh while we do it. It's like Ludovic dancing with his grandmother. I mean, we aren't dancing, but we are doing something happy together. Ludovic's grandmother was the only one who liked him just like he was. She didn't try to change him into something else. That's how it is with Ethan. Well, my friends are that way. Phoebe and Orville are OK with who I am. And my Mom is. So I am luckier than Ludovic was. But Ethan is the only grownup except for my Mom who has seen me in my girl things.

When the cookies are all rolled up and finished, Ethan says we need to let them cool a bit in the refrigerator before cutting them into pin-wheels. He says we can have them for desert after we eat supper. He always fixes me some supper when I go see him, and usually I go home pretty soon after we eat.

So anyhow we go out for a walk behind his house. I wear my skirt just like it's a normal thing to do. There are some paths out behind his house where we can look for mushrooms and things like that.

When we come back from the paths behind his house, we have to go around to the front of his house. His back door doesn't work. Well, just as we come into the front yard a car is driving up the road. I think it might belong to one of Orville's uncles. So real quick

I get on the side of Ethan away from the road, and sort of hide myself behind him. The car doesn't slow down or anything. It just goes on up the road and we go on up to the porch.

He asks me if I want him to read to him, and I say sure. So he brings out a Moomintroll book and I climb onto his lap. That's really nice sitting there in my girl clothes. But I'm very nervous and he can tell it.

"Are you worried about the car?" he asks.

"Yeah. Do you think they saw me?"

"I don't know," he says. "But even if they did I don't think they could tell you were wearing a skirt."

"You don't?"

"From that distance I think it would look just like a pair of shorts."

"Maybe so," I say. But I'm not so sure. It worried me. Still does.

"I think you look great in your outfit," he says. That helps some.

Maybe he is right about their just thinking I was wearing some shorts. But what if someone did notice and started blabbing about it?

Little by little, I forget about the car. Well, I don't really forget, but I put it out of my mind and start having fun. I snuggle in and listen to the story he reads to me. Here is some of it that he scanned for me. It's from 'Comet in Moominland'.

It was late evening. Their rust-red sail hung loosely, and the river lay silver-gray between its shadowy banks. Not a bird sang; even the scatterbrained chatterfinches, which usually twitter from morning till night, were silent.

"Not one adventure in the whole day," said Sniff, who was taking his turn at steering now the current was slower. "Just gray banks, and gray banks and gray banks, and not even an adventure."

"I think it's very adventurous to float down a winding river," said Moomintroll. "You never know what you'll meet around the next corner. You always wanted adventures, Sniff, and when they do come you're so frightened you don't know what to do."

"Well, I'm not a lion," said Sniff, reproachfully. "I like smaller adventures. Just the right size."

At that moment the raft floated slowly round the bend.

"Here's just the right size adventure for you," said Moomintroll, pointing. Right in front of them lay what looked like a heap of big gray logs on a sand bank—and the logs were arranged in the secret pattern—a star with a tail!

"There it is again," screamed Sniff.

Suddenly the logs began to move, and produced legs, and then the whole mass slipped under the water.

"Crocodiles!" exclaimed Moomintroll, jumping to the rudder. "Let's hope they don't chase us!"

The river seemed to be swarming with the monsters, whose eyes shone pale green on its surface, and yet more of the fearful shadowy bodies was slithering down the muddy bank into the water.

Sniff sat in the stern, stiff with fear, and only moved when a crocodile lifted its nose beside him, when he beat it wildly over the head with an oar.

It was a terrible moment. Tails thrashed the water; giant mouths, bristling with needle sharp teeth, snapped angrily, and the raft rocked up and down in the most alarming way.

Moomintroll and Sniff clung tightly to the mast and screamed for help, while the raft, caught by a little wind that had fortunately just got up, began to make headway down the river. The crocodiles followed in a long line, their cruel jaws agape.

Sniff hid his face in his paws, while Moomintroll, who was so frightened he hardly knew what he was doing, got the woolly trousers out of the rucksack and threw them to their pursuers.

This distracted to crocodiles attention at once. They tore at the woolly trousers and fought so furiously over them that by the time every bit was devoured Sniff and Moomintroll were miles away.

"Well, strike me pink!" exclaimed Moomintroll! "Are you satisfied with your adventure?"

"You screamed too," said Sniff.

"Did I?" Said Moomintroll. "I don't remember. Anyway it was a good thing Mama put in those woolly trousers."

Darkness was closing in over the river, so after landing the raft they built a fire between the roots of a big tree, and fried pancakes for supper, which they ate, in their fingers, one by one as they came out of the frying pan. Then they crept into their sleeping bags and night fell.

We bake our cookies after supper. They turn out really good. Some of them we eat right after they come out of the oven.



Ethan

Like Two Clouds that are in No Hurry

Ethan is sitting on his porch with Simon snuggled quietly in his lap. He is thinking about boy/girls and men/women.

How brave he was to put on his skirt and come out of the bathroom acting like this was the most ordinary thing in the world. So of course I had to treat it the same way. But secretly I was thrilled. He is starting out on an important journey – perhaps the most important he will ever take.

What sort of creature are you, my little Moomintroll? Like the one in the story I was reading to you, you are charming, gentle and brave. Moomintroll faced the terrors of the world as fearlessly – well, not fearlessly – but as courageously as any of us. We all know how fragile we are—how small in a world of large and dangerous forces. You have shown me an important aspect of who you are—of that most vulnerable and delicate core of yourself. You are a boy/girl—and a most lovely one at that. And I too am androgynous.—though not so lovely to look at. I am a man/woman. A berdache.

*Berdache –
Manwoman –
What manner of beast is this with a beard
Wearing a dress?
An undefinable species.
Out of what ancient sea did this extrataxonomical creature
crawl?
Something bypassed in the chain of creation.
Who is this missing link?
Oh!
C'est moi
Soy yo
It's me
Berda
che.*

*If I have no breasts.
Drink then from my hands
suck my fingers dripping with chocolate with brown sugar
with Hostess Twinkies
if
you like
but with sweetness.*

Let my thoughts about your loveliness flow to you
 like
 milk
 like
 honey.
 Snuggle into the hair that hides my mothering nipples
 like
 down
 like
 feathers.
 Let it contain you
 warm you
 like a bird's nest.
 If I have no vagina
 I invite you to the innermost of my tenderness
 where we can go for walks on warm evenings
 like two clouds that are
 in no hurry.
 If I have no womb
 I will give birth to you,
 At midnight so the stars and moon can to admire your beauty,
 At noon time so the sun will not be deprived of the soft curve of your lips
 as they suck at my love,
 At sunset so that the crickets and spiders satiated with a day's activities
 can pause,
 to contemplate you drifting into happy sleep
 cuddled in the welcoming hair of my belly and chest
 In the morning so that the dew drops can marvel at your newness
 before they re-join the sun.
 I would give birth to you
 In play
 whatever you pretend
 you are to me.
 In work –
 whatever you wish to become
 you are to me.
 In doing not much of anything
 I am the lazy afternoon in which you lie by the river.

 If I were not outlawed I could be
 your motherfather away from home,
 Your bicycle to new woods,
 Your boat to the shores of Africa where elephants and pythons
 still roam free.
 I would be your balloon to clouds beyond the reach of your parents
 and those teachers who
 unteach
 you
 your
 self.

*Come timid one.
Don't be afraid.
If I were not outlawed
I could be your motherfather in ways as numerous as the leaves
of the apricot tree
that we might share with the honey bees
perched like two birds in the limbs
counting the petals taken by the wind
And I could lullaby you a morning lullaby:
Hush baby ... boy ... man to be
Yes
They will be taken
These petals
But this morning there are still many.
But it cannot be,
And I must sing this mourning song.*

Jay Edson – Berdache

We are a perfect fit for each other. How many eleven-year-old moomintrolls like Simon are there? And how many berdaches like me? It would seem that the odds of our ever finding each other would be very low. But somehow we have.

He will never really fit in. I read him 'The Red Balloon' so that he could understand this better. What it means.

I remember how hard I tried when I was just a bit older than he is.

I am sitting in my biology class at a table toward the back of the room. It is a table full of poor students and ne'er-do-wells. They are my friends, though I fear that one day they will reject me. I hide the fact that I can read the text and understand it. I have to pretend – even lie – to fit in. We are learning about earthworms. I lean over toward my friend, Rick, who is sitting beside me. "How the hell do they find each other in all that dark dirt?" I ask him.

Will my morning song become my mourning song? Certainly it's possible. On the other hand, perhaps we are very small, like Moomintroll and Sniff, and we will not be noticed by the crocodiles.

Perhaps we will have to pay 'every farthing of the price'. Perhaps not.

But in the meantime ...

*... we can go for walks on warm evenings like two clouds that are
in no hurry.*

Phoebe's House

September 7, 2002

Dear Diary,

Phoebe's mother is really nice. I think she is pretty. She is tall and wears very long dresses. Phoebe never told me what she looked like. I thought she would be short. Funny how we get ideas in our heads about how people will look when we have never seen them. Anyhow, Phoebe told me that her mother invited me to come to her house for supper. So of course I went. She invited Orville too, but his Dad said he couldn't go.

We only have vegetables for supper. Well, there is rice too, and I think there will be a desert. But I mean no meat. They are vegetarians. The main thing is a big casserole with rice and lots of things in it. I can't tell what all the things are. But it tastes good. Lots of the things are stuff she grew in her garden or found in the woods. She is like Ethan that way.

She talks in a funny way. It's hard to describe. In one way it is like Ethan. I mean they both talk quite a lot. But when Ethan talks he sticks to one topic. He tells me about one thing. Sort of like a teacher except he knows what I like to hear about. Well, he is a teacher so I guess it's natural that he talks like one. But Phoebe's Mom - it's like she tries to say everything at once. I mean it's interesting what she has to say, but sometimes it's hard to follow her. Like following someone up a path who keeps taking side paths and sometimes doesn't seem to be on any path at all when you wish she would stay on the main one.

She has mushrooms in the casserole. Ones she picked herself. But also she has some mushrooms she cooked up separate because she said they are so good. They are too. She says they are chanterels. Ethan already told me about chanterels, and showed me some.

But I have Phoebe's Mom write down their name in my note-book, so I'll be able to spell it right.

I am a little nervous about eating mushrooms because of what Ethan told me about how some of them are poisonous. And about how a lot of the ones you can eat have poisonous twins. I don't want to tell her that I don't trust her or that I think she might poison me. That wouldn't be polite. My telling her that maybe she was feeding me poison, I mean. I guess poisoning me wouldn't be polite either. Well, of course she wouldn't do that on purpose. Like I said, she is very nice. But accidents do happen. Well, I can see that the Chanterelles are yellow. They do look like the ones Ethan showed me. But I can't tell so much about what was in the casserole. So I say, "These mushrooms are really good. And they are pretty too. They come in lots of colors."

"They are pretty," she says. She goes on about how pretty they are and says that after supper she will show me some pictures she took of them.

So I say, "Even white ones can be really pretty. Did you put any white ones in the casserole?"

"No," she says. "Some of the white ones can be really dangerous." Then she smiles at me in a funny sort of way and looks down at her plate. Well I am pretty embarrassed. I mean I think she sees through me. Maybe she can tell I was checking out the casserole. I didn't want her to see that. "Do you know very much about mushrooms?" she asks.

"Only a little. Ethan told me some stuff about them."

"What did he tell you?"

Well, of course I didn't want to tell her what he said about Destroying Angel mushrooms. Then she would know for sure why I asked about whether she used any white ones. So I told her what he told me about how mushrooms were like apple trees with the main tree growing underground. "Ethan told me it's called the mausoleum," I say. And explain how the mushrooms are like the apples.

"It's mycelium," she says.

"What?"

"The underground part. It's mycelium."

"Oh, yes, that," I say. Boy, do I feel dumb. This is not going very well. I keep making stupid mistakes. But she acts like it wasn't all that dumb.

"Seems like you are learning a lot from Ethan," she says. "That's exactly right about how the main part grows underground." You see what I mean, Dear Diary, about how she is nice. I mean she acts as though I had said something intelligent, and does not make fun of me for my mistake.

Then she gets to talking about mushrooms. Wow. I think she knows more about them than Ethan so I feel pretty sure she isn't going to poison me. Things start going better then.

Let me see if I can tell you what she said about mushrooms. Not in her words. I couldn't do that. It's too complicated, the way she talks. I tried to follow it, and mostly I could. But sometimes she never stopped to put a period anywhere. I mean if I had to write out one of her sentences it might take up a whole wall. But it was really interesting.

So this is what she said. In my words. At least it's what I understood. She said we are like mushrooms. 'We' is all of us. The human race. When we see each other and talk with each other we are like individual mushrooms. But underneath we are all connected to a single mycelium. In other words we are all one plant. And sometimes she says the most important thing is the individual mushroom, and at other times it is the whole plant. Well it isn't like we could dig up the ground under our feet and see a mycelium. It's more like a family is one thing even if it has different members. At least some families are. I don't think mine is. Maybe Mom and me, but not Dad. I don't think I am like one plant with him. Still I can see what she means. It's like a real family. And the mycelium is made of the good feelings that we all have for each other. Each of those feelings is like a thread in the mycelium. I can't wait to tell Ethan about this. He will think it's interesting.

And that's another thing. It seems like she keeps asking me about Ethan. She wants to know all about him.



Simon

What Happened at Judy's

September 10, 2002

Dear Diary,

Something bad happened at Judy's last night. Judy's is sort of a restaurant. Well, you can get breakfast and lunch there. But around supper time it gets more like a bar. Then people go there to play the jukebox and drink. I guess a guy named Red got into a fight with Ethan. I don't know what his real name is. But he's Orville's Dad. They call him Red. As far as I can tell it wasn't really a fight. It was just that Red hit Ethan. Then Red's brother stopped him. That's Orville's uncle. His name is Paul. Orville really likes him. Sometimes he talks about things they do together - like hunting and fishing and camping.

Anyhow, I first heard about the fight from Orville during recess. He was afraid I'd be mad at him because of what his Dad did. Well, like I said to him, "You are you, and your Dad is your Dad. Never mind if you are related." Families here mostly hang together and whenever one of them does something, even if it's not all that good, they all stand behind him. At least in front of other people they do. Like they may fight with each other but if you say something bad about one of them, the others are all against you.

But it was Red's brother who stopped him. Didn't want him to get into trouble maybe. Anyhow Orville knows I am good friends with Ethan. So he wanted me to know he wasn't on his Dad's side on this. I could get a general idea from Orville what the fight was about. Something about how Ethan is from away and how he should leave things alone that are none of his business. That was part of it. But also it's about mining the coal. What's good and bad about it. I can see that Red might have a different idea about these things. But I can't see why that would make him hit Ethan.

So after school I went by to see Ethan. He didn't come to do his teaching today, so I was kind of worried. I thought maybe he got hurt bad. Well, he comes to the door when I knock, but he doesn't seem too happy to see me. I mean he does smile, sort of. But I can tell when he is just pasting a smile on his face, and when he is really happy. He has a big bruise on his face and he kind of limps when he walks. But he doesn't look like he is going to die.

So he invites me to come in. I'm not sure he really wants me to, but I don't want to leave until I know what happened.

"I heard something happened at Judy's," I say.

He motions for me to sit down in the big easy chair he has in his living room, and he sits down on the couch. "Yeah, I guess it did," he says.

"Are you hurt bad?" I ask.

"Not really," he says. See, he gives me these short answers that don't tell me too much. I feel really far away from him.

"Why didn't you come to school?" I ask.

He doesn't answer right away. So I just wait. I learned that from him. When he asks me something and I am not sure of the right answer, or even if I don't want to answer, he just waits. Like he is saying, "I'm in no hurry. Take as long as you want." When he does that you want to end the silence, so you say something. So I am doing something that he taught me. I just wait.

"I guess I was embarrassed," he says, finally. "I didn't want people to see my bruises and ask a lot of questions about it."

"So what happened?"

"Red hit me," he says. "I guess everybody in the valley knows that by now."

"Yeah," I said. "I know that. Did you fight back?"

"Yeah, I tried," he says. He says this in a real sharp way, sort of like he is attacking me with his words. Like it was a stupid question I asked him. And I guess it was. I mean would anybody just let someone else beat him up without trying to stop him?

I can tell he doesn't like me asking him about it. But he is so far away from me. I can't stand that. So I go over and sit down on the couch beside him. I pick up his hand and I hold it to my cheek. "Don't be mad at me," I say.

He looks at me, and some of the madness seems to go out of him. He takes my hand and kisses it. Then he puts his arm around me and pulls me closer to him. "I'm sorry," he says. "I guess I am just embarrassed to talk about it."

"Don't be embarrassed," I say.

"It's hard not to be," he says. "It's pretty humiliating when someone beats you up in front of other people. See, I tried to defend myself, but he is just bigger and stronger than I am, and he has done more fighting in his life."

"Did you call the police?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I think that would just make it worse."

"How did it start?" I ask.

"Red just came over and sat down beside me, and started in on how I wasn't welcome here and how I should keep my nose out of things that don't concern me."

Then Ethan stops talking for a minute. "And then what?" I ask.

"I tell him that I live here too and have as much right as anyone to speak."

"What did he say to that?"

"He said 'No you don't. You're from away'. So I tell him to get out of my booth and leave me alone. So he stands up like he is going to leave, but then he pulls me out of the booth and hits me. I try to hit him back but don't get a single good punch in. He knocks me to the floor and I think he is going to start kicking me. That's when his brother Paul comes by. He gets between me where I am lying on the floor and his brother. He faces his brother and starts talking to him - about how he is just going to get himself into trouble. Stuff like that. And he gets him to leave Judy's."

So that seems pretty clear. I feel like I know a little more about what happened.

"Is your leg hurt?" I ask.

"Just bruised," he says. "I guess I banged it against a table or something while I was getting hit or knocked down."

For a little while we are both quiet. Then I reach up and sort of caress the bruises on his face, like maybe I could just brush them away. I think that's the right word. Caress. I sort of rub them. I do it real light so I won't hurt him.

"Maybe I really don't belong here in the valley," he says. "Maybe they are right. Maybe I should just go back to the city where I used to live."

"I don't want you to go away," I say. "But if you stay, maybe they will kill you." I kiss him on his bruise. "I don't want to lose you, Ethan."

"I don't think they will kill me," he says. "And the truth is that I didn't belong in the city either. So I'll probably stay here and see what happens."

"That's good," I say. "But be careful."

So then he invites me to stay for supper, and I feel like he really wants me there now. So I say yes. And the rest of the time I am there he doesn't seem far away. He is his old self again. Mostly. Except he seems a little sad.

So that's kind of what I know about what happened at Judy's, Dear Diary. I am glad that Ethan is going to stay here. He said he would come back to school tomorrow. I'm glad, but also I'm pretty worried.



Ethan

They Are Not The Ones

Ethan looks in his bathroom mirror and studies the developing bruise on his cheek. He thinks about how he got it.

These are not the ones that I want to oppose. Not the workers. How have I ended up fighting with one of them? They are trying to make a living—trying to lead a decent life. They have families they want to provide for.

Big strong sonuvabitch, that Red. Stronger than I am. Funny that it didn't really hurt that much at the time. But I don't want it to happen again. Maybe I can't go back to Judy's. And I was just beginning to like the place. What should I tell people about this bruise? They know anyhow. Small town—big news. Local coal miner beats up teacher from away. News like that gets around. So if I say I ran into a door, they will know it isn't true. But they will understand that I'm not going to the police with it.

People like Red aren't bad. He works to support his family. Is decent to his friends. But he sees me as a threat. What do I threaten? His way of life I guess. This is the life he knows. He is proud of who he is in it. I guess I do threaten it in a way.

He and his kind are being exploited by the rich. Have been since the beginning of the industrial revolution. They have been imprisoned. Their whole life takes place in a dark black prison. So why do they fight to preserve their prison? Why do they repeatedly vote for people who will do nothing to improve their situation? That will not support their right to a living wage? To safe working conditions? To a clean environment? Why do they work against their own interest? They don't always. At one time the Union was very big in their minds. Now, it seems, less so.

Do they have an alternative, really? They need the money. They get it from coal. Are there other sources of money they could shift to? Tourism? Saw an article in the Gazette on that this morning. But also one on catering to minorities as a profit making scheme.

American Airlines announced Aug 13 that it would save millions of dollars by cutting 7,000 jobs, reducing flights and shrinking the fleet.

Not a dime, though, would be cut from the airline's diversity program that courts gay travelers and supports gay workers.

"We're managing the company for the long term. That means we need to carry on, on the track of being culturally sensitive to our customers and employees," American spokesman Tim Kincaid said. "It's paying off for us."

So maybe they could make this a great vacation place for gays. Gay swarms all over the place. Somehow I don't think Red would buy into that. What was that quote about civilization I read the other day?

Civilization is built upon the lies of the rich and powerful and upon the delusions of the unthinking masses, in equal measure.

Where was that from? Can't remember.

Too simple and neat. Life is more complicated than that. Yet there is truth in that. In broad outline, that does seem to be the case. And I am always caught in the middle between that rock and that hard place. Everybody's enemy.

What was that little parable Helen sent me? It was from an incarcerated friend, she said.

Visualize a society dominated by the institution of slavery. Imagine that this is back in the old days, before Tv, before cars, before electric pencil sharpeners. Imagine that it was even before all the wilderness areas were perfectly mapped. These were the days when trolls still ruled the earth. Pretend that was a long time ago.

Suppose that a few slaves escape, and that they are able to survive in roving bands and in small communities hidden in the wilderness. A few even manage to disguise themselves as ordinary citizens and live double lives within the dominant community. Now suppose a slave living in disguise dedicates himself to the escape of other slaves. Call him Mr Byrd.

One day Mr Byrd is able to have a conversation with a slave boy named Jason. He explains to Jason that the system he lives under is immoral and unnecessary, and that there is some chance of his escaping. The boy is thrilled, and though he realizes the danger, decides to take the chance. Mr Byrd makes arrangements for the boy to meet up with Mr Malcolm, a member of one of the roving groups. They make contact at the appointed time and place and slip away into the woods. However, while they are camping out in the forest, Jason has second thoughts. He is afraid and he misses his mother. He wants to return. Mr Malcolm tries to talk him out of it, but to no avail.

Slave hunters catch Jason as he tries to return, and beat him severely. Jason has known nothing but slavery since birth, so the slave owners have little difficulty persuading him that it was a mistake to have listened to Mr Byrd or Mr Malcolm.

Full of remorse, Jason confesses all. Mr Byrd is caught and condemned to life in prison. A posse is sent in hot pursuit of Mr Malcolm. He escapes, but the woods are patrolled from then on with dogs to make sure other bad types never again get close enough to the plantations to enable others to escape. Jason suffers permanent injuries from the beatings he received, and his whole family is punished. Jason himself is watched more closely than any other slave on his plantation in case he should he ever entertain more thoughts about escaping.

Is it ever advisable, or even ethical, to allow sexual expression to the love feelings a man might have for a boy? The story above illustrates the context in which this question must be understood. We live in a slave society. We want to liberate ourselves and the boys we love from its bondage. Yet when we risk doing so we place both the boys and ourselves at great risk.

Perhaps I am unfair. Do we indeed live in a slave society? And if so, who are the masters?

An old folk tale from Norway describes three troll brothers who have to share a single eye. They pass this eye back and forth as they stumble along together, taking turns using it. Western culture is ruled by three ideologies that stumble along, like the troll brothers in the story, with very limited vision. As any lover of fairy tales is well aware, knowing the names of one's adversaries gives us power over them. The three troll brothers who rule our lives are named:

- Global Capitalism ... as seen in the practices of the international banks, and multinational corporations that now rule the world.*
- Behavioral Technology ... the belief in the use of biological, sociological and psychological knowledge to force human conformity to goals and aims that are not internal to the individuals being 'treated'.*
- Puritanism ... the driving force behind sexual repression.*

What then is this one eye that these troll brothers share? What is the one thing that they see when they look out at the world? It is the need to control other people against their will. Around this goal they join hands, and with their limited vision they create a slave society. We work to make the rich richer, we behave like Pavlovian dogs to provide our behavioral technicians the illusion that life is predictable and controllable, and we repress our sexuality to preserve the Puritans from feeling defiled by our presence.

Sexual activities that are mutually desired between men and boys are not intrinsically hurtful. We know this through the study of anthropological reports, historical analysis, social research, and personal accounts. However our society seeks to repress such behavior through a variety of ruthless and draconian measures including ridicule, demonization of "pedophiles," public disgrace, imprisonment, and "therapy." Because of these punitive arrangements and attitudes, both men and boys who participate together in sexual activities are exposed to a variety of possible injuries.

Mr Byrd sits in prison and asks himself whether he has committed a crime against an objective moral order as well as against the state. After all, only bad consequences have flowed from his action.

Question: Was he guilty?

Anonymous inmate – Love in a Slave Society

Am I guilty? For allowing it to emerge even this far? Was Spartacus a hero? He and his followers all ended up hanging on crosses. Or Gandhi? That horrible massacre between the Hindus and the Moslem's grew out of the liberation he helped achieve for his people. Martin Luther King Jr. seems to have fared better. Or at least his work did. He himself ended up like most real revolutionaries. Helping slaves out of their slavery is always a tricky business.

I am grateful for Red's brother. What's his name? Paul. I am glad he is the huge man he is. Not too many people would want to fight with him. But he was gentle too. He didn't threaten his brother. Just talked him down and eased him out the door. But of course it's easier to talk someone down if you are a big as a gorilla.



My Own Brother

Paul is sitting on his porch, listening to songs from his collection of recordings, and thinking about the incident at Judy's.

*A short life of trouble in a dark and dusty mine
Has been my occupation, now I walk the picket line.*

Tim Stafford – Union Man

This mountain top issue is tearing the whole community apart. It isn't just miners against the treehuggers. It's people with destroyed property against people hired to do the mountain top mining. It's one union member against another. We used to be united. It was us against the company and against a few scabs.

*Which side are you on, boys, which side are you on?
You're either for the rich man or the Union standing strong*

Tim Stafford – Union Man

Now it's even one family member against another. Like me and Red. I thought he was going to hit me. I could have taken him down. I always was stronger than him. But God knows I don't want to fight with my own brother. I practically raised him. He always was a hot head.

He could really have hurt Ireland. Could have killed him, far as that goes. When Red loses it, he really loses it. Ireland wouldn't of had a chance.

*I'm playing kick-ball when I hear the boys crying "Fight!
Fight!".*

*Always that's considered a great event. Boys love it. They
like to see blood, it seems. Don't know why. A clump of them are
gathered not far away. The game is interrupted so I go see. I hear
someone shout "Get him, Red!".*

So I push my way to through the crowd to see.

*Red has his victim down on the ground, and is mercilessly
beating the astonished face that is staring helplessly up at him.
The face is already red with blood. The boy is already beaten.
Why continue? I drag Red off him. "Enough," I say. "You don't
need to kill him."*

"He called me a retard," Red says.

"So what"

"Says I'm from a retard family. That means you too."

*He wants me to take his side. But somehow I don't care what
this little twerp says.*

Randy Thompson is the unhappy object of Red's fury. He is one of the class brains. A little snob. Deserves some of what he is getting, I think. But doesn't deserve to be killed. I take Red in my arms and hold him so he can barely move. He fights against me and tries to escape. But he can't. Little by little he calms down and we walk back the the school building. Recess is over.

Red will be suspended for this. He has been in too many fights. Always he is in trouble for something.

The thing is that the science teacher is basically right. We do need to find other sources of energy. I read his editorial a bunch of times. Tried to find fault with it. Checked out the facts on the Internet. Mountain top mining is poisoning the environment. And it is ugly as shit. Red never did get into nature the same way I did. So he doesn't care about the ugly bit. A bill board is as pretty as a forest as far as he's concerned. But Ireland is right even about jobs. Mountain top mining does make for fewer jobs. And it blocks our developing other job possibilities. There was an article in the Gazette just this morning on that.

Regardless of how it's cut or counted, tourism is a growing West Virginia industry that generates about \$3 billion a year by most counts.

Some economists say it's hard, if not impossible, to count tourist dollars or evaluate the worth of the industry with any accuracy. They say it's almost like counting chicks before they hatch.

What's more, dollars are counted in the industry from various places, ranging from the gas pump to the motel to the racetrack. I see the problem of tallying what comes out of the wallets of visitors to the Mountain State for any or all of these services and activities.

No doubt about it, however, the number of visitors grows along with facilities, attractions and, not the least, advertising. Yet, it's not what's most visible about the industry or accountable, for that matter. Nonetheless, more than 21 million people came to the Mountain State in 2000, according to one of the latest private studies. It was an increase of almost a million visitors over the previous year. It created about 83,000 jobs, the study calculated.

Charleston Gazette – September 10, 2002

That's clean money. Doesn't give anybody black lungs. Or poison the streams.

*There'll be no black lung up in Heaven,
No smothering when they walk the streets of gold.*

Rev Joe Freeman – There Will Be No Black Lung

But who would get those new jobs? The tourist trade jobs? Not the old laid off miners.

*The coal miners that make it in, will be breathing good again.
There'll be no black lung over there.*

Rev Joe Freeman – There Will Be No Black Lung

“The coal miners that make it in,” the song says. So all these miners are going to be picked over again. Some get hired. The rest can starve. Some get to go the Heaven. The rest can go to Hell. Now that’s a bitch. Really, though, trying to get a job in the mines is like knocking on the doors of Hell, and begging to be let in.

I understand Red’s anger. But we have to get out of this back breaking, lung rotting, water polluting way of living sooner or later. But where do we jump to? It’s hard to know what to think.

Orville seems to like Ireland. Talks about him a lot. What they do in class. He never talked about school before. I think I was right to not to tell Red about this. Red wouldn’t like Orville being friendly with Ireland. I dreamed about Orville last night. Don’t remember most of it. Just a little fragment.

We are skinny dipping in a big lake. It’s very nice. But it is too close to a road and people driving by can see us. He has fallen in the water. I pick him up. He throws his arms around my neck and kisses me. I wish we weren’t so close to the road. It might give those people the wrong idea. I push him away.

Shooting a Deer

September 15, 2002

Dear Diary,

It's Sunday so I didn't have to go to school. I went to see Ethan. He's my best friend now. Except for Phoebe. And maybe Orville. But he is the best grownup friend I have by far. I love him more than anybody except maybe my Mom. But I can talk with Ethan about things that even me and my Mom don't talk about.

Ethan doesn't care what I wear. I mean I can put my girl clothes on at his house and he likes it. This afternoon I asked if I could be an Indian.

He says, "Sure. What do Indians wear?"

"Loin cloths," I say.

So he goes and finds some white cloth. I think it's from a pillow case. And we make a loin cloth. He helps me put it on. I have to take off all my clothes for this. I like it that he can see me naked. Well, sort of. It's that scary but happy feeling I get sometimes with him. He ties a rope around my waist and puts the cloth between my legs and then up over the rope and then back down in front and back. Then he takes out some clown paint he has. He says when he was younger he wanted to be a clown. He thinks maybe he still might do it some day. He says that only clowns can tell the truth because nobody believes them. That sounds like it might be interesting. But I don't really understand it.

"Why can't you just say what you think is true?" I ask him.

"Because people have pictures in their heads - pictures about how everything is," he says. "They don't like it if you mess up those pictures."

I tell him I don't get what he was saying.

"Well," he says, "it's like you wearing girl clothes. You can only do it around your Mom and your very close friends. Why is that?"

"Because other kids would make fun of me. Maybe even beat me up," I said.

"Why would they do that?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe they have a picture in their heads that boys don't wear dresses," he says. "If they see you in a dress, it spoils their picture."

"Does it spoil your picture?" I ask him.

"No," he says. "In my picture everybody can just wear whatever they want to, and be whoever they want to be."

"That's awesome," I say.

"And besides, you are very pretty in a dress."

I smile at him.

So anyhow, he puts some red paint on my face, like Indians used to wear. And some on my chest and belly. I'm happy with that.

Then we go out in back of his house and find a stick we can make a bow out of and some branches to make arrows. The branches are as straight as we can find, but they aren't straight like the ones you buy in a store. He helps me bend the bow and put a string on it. When we finish it, it can shoot the arrows. Sort of. I mean it really does shoot the arrows, but not very far. Or very straight. I don't think it could kill anything. I guess real Indians knew better ways of making bows and arrows. But this works for me.

"Now I want to go hunting," I tell him.

He thinks that's fine. He says he'll go back to the house and I can come in when I finish hunting. So I run around in the woods behind his house for a while, pretending to be an Indian. I shoot at birds but didn't even come close to hitting them. I pretend I shoot a deer. I am going to take it home and my family will be very glad to see it. I can share it with the whole tribe.

After a while I go back to the house. He's sitting on the porch. I pretend I'm an Indian sneaking up on a settler. They are taking our land away so it's OK to shoot them. I shoot an arrow up onto the porch. It doesn't come close to him. I didn't want it to, but it couldn't have anyhow, because it wouldn't go that far. He turns and smiles at me.

"What did you get?" he asks.

"A deer," I say.

"Great. We'll have it for dinner."

"I really did shoot at some birds," I say.

He looks at me for minute, like he is going to say something. But then he doesn't.

I'm a little afraid that a car might come up the road. This road doesn't have too much traffic but some cars do use it. I already almost got caught in my dress. I think that my being naked except for my loin cloth might get me into trouble. I hate to think what my Dad would do if he heard about me running around like this. It wouldn't be as bad as the dress. I mean what he calls 'real boys' do play at being Indians. But I don't want to be caught, so I sort of hurry into Ethan's house and put my ordinary boys clothes back on. Then I come home.

Shooting a Bird

September 21, 2002

Dear Diary,

I went by to see Ethan after school. I put on my skirt when I got there. I always do that now. He says he likes to see me in pretty things. Well, at least he said it fine for me to wear whatever I want. And he did say I look pretty in a dress.

So we look at things under a microscope for a while, and then we eat supper. After that, he says he has something special to read to me. It's about Indians. In fact it was written by an Indian. I mean a 'Native American'. That's what you are supposed to call them now so you don't get them mixed up with Indians from India. Ethan explained to me that when Europeans came over they thought they had arrived at India. At least for a while they thought that. So they called the people they found there 'Indians'. And that just sort of caught on so that even when they figured it out that this wasn't really India, they kept calling them that. So it does make sense to change that, but it kind of hard to change a habit.

Of course I was excited to hear something written by a Native American. I want to be a Native American almost more than anything except being a girl. I can be a Native American and a girl with Ethan, at least in pretend.

Anyhow, the book he is going to read from is called 'Black Elk Speaks'. Black Elk didn't write it, actually, but he sort of dictated it to an anthropologist who wrote it down. An anthropologist is a person who studies how different people in different places live. I jot down all the stuff Ethan tells me in my notebook so I won't forget it.

This is what Ethan tells me about the book. Black Elk had a big vision. That is like a dream you have when you are awake. But it's a dream that is meant for everybody - not just yourself.

The thing that is really interesting about this vision is that Black Elk was only 11 years old when he had it. And it was a vision that grownups thought was really important. Ethan says he thinks it was sort of a near death experience. But that isn't the part he read to me. He read about something that happened after the vision, but when Black Elk was a still a kid about my age.

I sit on Ethan's lap while he reads to me, like I always do.

Ethan scanned this part of the book and gave it to me so I can write it down just as it is in the book. This is how it begins:

One day during this time I was out with the bow and arrows my grandfather had made for me, and as I walked along thinking of my vision, suddenly I felt queer, and for a little while it seemed that the bow and arrows were those that the First Grandfather in the Flaming Rainbow Tepee had given me.

Ethan explains to me that Black Elk received two gifts from the First Grandfather in his vision - which were the wooden cup with the power to give life, and the bow and arrow which gave the power to destroy. He says we will go back to the vision and read it together, but he wanted to read this part first. The bow and arrows weren't really the ones that the Grandfather gave him. They were only real in the vision. But it seemed that way.

Then they were only those that Refuse-To-Go had made, and I felt foolish and tried to make myself think it was all only a dream anyway. So I thought I would forget about it and shoot something. There was a bush and a little bird sitting in it; but just as I was going to shoot, I felt queer again, and remembered that I was to be like a relative with the birds. So I did not shoot.

So he should have stopped there, but he didn't.

Then I went on down toward a creek, feeling foolish because I had let the little bird go, and when I saw a green frog sitting there, I just shot him right away. But when I picked him up by the legs, I thought: Now I have killed him, and it made me want to cry.

Well, it sort of makes me want to cry too. I already told you, Dear Diary, that I cry easy. I think Ethan sort of notices I am trying not to cry. He hugs me really close and says, "What are you thinking?"

"Nothing," I say.

"You seem sad," he says.

"It was a sad story," I say.

It was more than that, but I didn't want to say.

Pretty soon after that I came home.



I Want to be Lovers Too

September 28, 2002

Dear Diary,

I met Phoebe and Orville at the pool today. We call it Frog Pond because we saw a really big frog there last summer. I mean it was huge. A bull frog. I caught it and then let it go.

Today I wanted to show them my Indian outfit. Also I figured they would want outfits too so I brought along an old sheet my Mom gave me, and some string (for bows), and some rope (for belts) and some of the paint that Ethan let me have. Also my pocket knife and some scissors.

So I put on my outfit and they both think it is awesome. I knew they would. So of course they want outfits too. I say I don't know what girl Indians wore, but Phoebe says if I can wear girl's clothes she can be a boy Indian. That's fair. So we cut out loincloths for them and I help put the paint on Phoebe's face. Then she paints Orville's face and chest and belly. Then we cut some sticks for bows, and tie some string on them, and then get some sticks for arrows. Phoebe's bow works better than mine does. Her arrows go further. So then we are ready to go. The water is kind of cold, so we just waded around in it, and shoot at fish. Then we find some clams but we don't know how to fix them to eat so we put them back. After that, we play around in the woods, pretending to shoot deer and fight settlers. The Indians weren't mean, but the settlers were taking their land from them, so they had to fight back.

After we get tired of playing in the woods, we come back to Big Frog Pond and sit down to rest. Phoebe brought some sandwiches and some apples. Her mother fixed enough of them for all of us. Phoebe's Mom is really nice. She does things like that all the time. The sandwiches don't have any meat in them because Phoebe and

her Mom are vegetarians. But the sandwiches are pretty good anyhow.

While we are sitting there eating, Phoebe says something really strange. "Are you and Ethan lovers?" she asks.

"How can we be?" I ask. "I'm a boy and he's a man."

"Mom says boys and men can be lovers. Said it happened lots of times in the old days. Especially in Greece."

"Really? What did they do?"

"What do you mean?"

I don't know how to put it. I mean men and women who are lovers do sex things. The men put their penises in the women. That's what they call 'fucking', but I don't think I like that word. It sounds gross. So I just said to Phoebe, "Well, I mean, they can't do sex things like men and women. So what do they do?"

"Maybe there are some sex things they can do."

"Like what?"

"I don't know," she says. "Maybe you're right. Maybe they just love each other. It's like you are going with somebody but you are a man and a boy not a boy and a girl."

"Well, then, maybe we are lovers. I don't know. I love him a lot, but I'm not sure he loves me."

"Why not?"

So I tell her about me trying to shoot the birds and him reading the stuff from 'Black Elk'.

"What's that got to do with your being lovers?" she asks.

"I think he was telling me I was bad for trying to kill birds."

"But you didn't kill any."

"That was just because my bow and arrows weren't too good. I tried. That's what counts."

"So what did you do then?" she asks.

"When?"

"When he finished the story."

"I got down off his lap and said I had to go home."

"What did he do?"

"He asked if anything was wrong."

"What did you say?"

"I said 'No, I just have to go home.'"

"You're a dope, Simon."

"I think Ethan thinks so."

"No. I mean for not seeing that he loves you. He had you sit on his lap. And he knew something was wrong when you left. And asked you about it. And you told him nothing. He wouldn't have you sit on his lap if he didn't like you."

"Maybe."

"Maybe that's what men and boys do instead of having sex like men and women."

"Maybe."

"No maybe about it. You and Ethan are lovers."

"At school they say that it's not OK for men and boys to love each other. Two men can love each other but not a man and a boy."

"Mama says they are full of shit," Phoebe says.

I am kind of shocked. I never knew that her mother swore. Even Phoebe doesn't use those kind of words much. But I ignore that.

"Who is?" I say.

"Who is what?"

"Full of shit."

"People who say that men and boys can't love each other. Mama says anybody can love anybody and it's nobody else's business."

"Wow!" This amazes me. For starters, like I said, I didn't even know that Phoebe's mother swore. But more than that, it was what she was saying.

"I didn't know your Mom swore," I say.

"Only when she really means something," Phoebe says. "So she really means this."

"You can talk to your Mom about anything."

"Yeah. Pretty much."

"Did you tell her we skinny dip here?"

"Yeah."

"What did she say?"

"She thinks it's OK."

"She thinks Ethan and me are lovers?"

"She never said that. She just told me about those Greeks. But I think that's what she would say if I told her about you and Ethan."

We are all quiet for a while, thinking about all these things and eating our lunches. Orville hasn't said anything. I'm not sure if he understood everything. Sometimes he doesn't understand things right off. But he seemed happy just listening. Finally Phoebe says, "You know, you can love more than one person."

"Like a lover and your parents?"

"Yeah. Like that. But also you can have more than one lover."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Like you could love a man and also a girl. Or something like that."

"Do you really think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well," I say. "I guess I love you as well as my Mom and Ethan."

She smiles. I think that makes her happy. "So we're lovers too."

"We are?"

"Sure," she says. "If you love somebody you are lovers."

"Well, I guess we are lovers, then."

So we just sit there thinking about this for a bit. I mean I had never seen things this way before. So it's something to think about. Then we notice that Orville looks unhappy. You can always tell with Orville. His head hangs down and he has this frown on his face. Both me and Phoebe can see it.

"What's the matter, Orville?" I ask.

He just gets up and walks away. When I try to catch up with him he keeps turning his back to me. "Really, Orville. What is it? Nobody is mad at you."

Finally he says, "I want to be lovers too."

Well, Dear Diary. We tell him that we are all three of us lovers. Me and Phoebe and him. Like the three Musketeers only more so. We are all lovers and always will be. And that cheers him up.

My Essay

October 1, 2003

Dear Diary,

Well, I went to Frog Pond after school today. I was the only one there. It's really warm, so I take a dip. It feels good to be naked. I imagine that people can see me. I pretend that Ethan is there, and that I am dancing around in front of him, and he really thinks I am pretty. Then I get a little boner. Well it isn't especially little ... or especially big either. Just, you know, a boner. I guess I said 'little' because it's hard to talk about these things, so 'little' makes it sound like it's no big thing. I don't mean my dick is no big thing. It's ordinary sized. I mean getting a boner is no big thing. That's sort of a joke. I mean what I said about 'no big thing', and how it isn't really a big thing. Remember, Phoebe's Mom said I could say anything to you, Dear Diary. Even things that are a little embarrassing. I hope that's OK.

So anyhow I put my clothes back on, and go by to see Ethan. He seems glad to see me.

"I thought you might not come by today," he says.

I explain that I went to Frog Pond to take a swim before coming by. He asks if I can stay for supper. He says he had some home-made soup that we can eat, and we can make sandwiches to go with it. So I call Mom and she says it's OK. Just to get back before dark. She doesn't like me riding my bike after dark.

So while we are eating supper I think about what Phoebe told me. You know. About lovers. We aren't talking about anything in particular, so I say, "Can boys and men love each other?"

He looks up from his soup and stares at me. I think he might be mad, but then he smiles and I can see he is just surprised.

"I should think so," he says. He thinks some more and then says, "I love you. And sometimes I think you might love me, at least a little."

"I do," I say. "A lot."

"Well, that settles it, doesn't it?" he says.

We go on eating for a little bit and then I say, "So does that make us lovers?"

He laughs and then starts eating again without answering.

But he keeps chuckling to himself.

"I'm serious," I say.

"What do you think?" he asks.

He does that sometimes. Instead of answering a question I ask, he asks me something. Phoebe says her Mom does the same thing. But I decide not to complain about this. I want to try to answer him. But like I said about boners, some things are a little embarrassing to talk about. So I sort of hem and haw and eat some more soup.

Then I come out with it.

"It seems to me," I say, "if we love each other, that makes us lovers."

"Well," he says. "You answered your own question." And then after a minute or two he adds, "And I think it's a very good answer."

That's all we say about right then. We go on eating and start to talk about other things. Some things you can only talk about a little bit, and then you need to think it all over before you want to say anything else.

OK. So after supper I come home. And here I am now.

So I decided I'm going to write an article about all this love stuff. This article isn't just me going on about what I did each day and that kind of stuff. Like I usually do when I talk to you, Dear Diary. I want this article to be something that other people can read. Something that could go in a newspaper. So here goes.

Can Men And Boys Love Each Other?

Love is a good thing. Everybody thinks that. That's what they say, anyhow. But do they really believe it? If a man loves a woman everybody says that's great. For example, there are lots of movies about that. Everybody is happy if the man and the woman find each other and fall in love and kiss. Then they solve some problems and live happily ever after.

So what about boys loving boys? I mean boys that are school age. Sometimes people call guys who are really men, 'boys'. But I don't mean that. Boys can be 'pals' and everybody thinks that is great. Do 'pals' love each other? Well, that's where things get sort of confused. Yes they do, in a way, but it's supposed to be different than when a man loves a woman. They aren't supposed to show it by too much hugging and kissing. They get made fun of even if all they do is hold hands. And certainly they aren't supposed to kiss or do sex things together. At least that's what most grownups say. They aren't even supposed to have sex feelings about each other.

Well, I can tell you that they do. Boys can fall in love with other boys just like men and women fall in love.

This brings us to the hardest thing of all. Can men and boys love each other? Well, if it's a father and his son, everybody thinks that is a good thing. I think so too. But it doesn't always happen. When it does happen they can kiss a little bit, and hug each other a little bit and that's OK. But the father isn't supposed to touch the boy on his butt or his dick. Or kiss him on his mouth.

But what about a man and a boy that are not a father and a son? That is what everybody seems really scared about. They try to keep men and boys apart a lot. And when they do get together everybody wants to know all about it. They want to know what they do. Do they kiss too much? Do they touch each other in not all right places? Boys are always being warned about how men might hurt them. But mostly men really don't hurt boys. Some men do. But some men hurt women too. Most don't, though. You see? Most are just ordinary people who try to be nice.

Even though everybody seems scared about men and boys loving each other, they think it can be a good thing. But only if they follow lots of rules. And these are different than the rules for men and women.

So now I'm going to tell you what I think. I think that if two people love each other, then they are lovers. It doesn't make any difference if it's two boys or two girls or a boy and a girl, or a man and a boy or whatever. If they love each other they are lovers. And love is good. And it's up to them how they show their love to each other. They can kiss or hug or go to movies or whatever. And they can sleep in the same bed, and cuddle together. Or the boy can sit on the man's lap. As long as they both like what they are doing together, it's OK. And it's their business. Other people don't need to be sticking their noses into their business.

So that's what I think about men and boys loving each other.



Ethan

Back to Judy's

Ethan sits by himself in a booth in Judy's restaurant and wonders whether it's safe to be there.

There's Paul. The same one who saved me from Red. His brother. A curious fellow, this Paul. Built like a redneck. Dresses like a redneck. Lives with rednecks. But has the soul of a poet. Rednecks is not a good term. Became a term of contempt because working people had rednecks because of the sun beating down on them. But it has come to mean ignorant loutish men. A stereotype. Red fits the stereotype. Complete with the super-patriotism. And he's proud of it. But not so with Paul. He reflects on life. Holds it at a distance even while living it. He examines life.

I thought a lot about it before coming here. I don't want to be chased out of the community by a few rough types. That's what decided me to come back here. I want to be able to come and go like anybody else. Can't pretend I'm not nervous, though. Got beat up once here already.

This is the only bar in town. Functions almost as a pub. All types come here really. But the red-necks see that the jukebox plays their songs. And Red the redneck may not be the only one who wants me out of here.

You'll never see the light of day

You can't wash that coal dust away

Nick Stump – Deep Mountain Blues

This place is like thousands of others throughout the country. Well, every one is unique in some respects. This one reflects the coal industry. And the particular people who come here to drink and socialize add add something of their personalities.

But these little bars are all built on the same basic pattern. The Tv that runs constantly with its football games and endlessly repeating ads. The Budweiser clock. The bar with a small assortment of lonely and marginalized people sitting at it. The regulars trying to deal with their homosexual and other forbidden impulses with their well-tested and generally safe banter. Banter that is repetitious like the ads. The booths where little subgroups sit and converse. The over-the-top and slightly false friendliness.

Yet despite everything, it is held together with a kind of love-storge-family or domestic love. This is the family that most of the marginalized people who come here never had. A community where they are accepted – even esteemed. Not a bad place in some respects. A place where the humiliations and degradations of the family of origin, the school and the workplace are anesthetized, if not healed.

*You'll never gain as much as you lose
When you're singing those deep mine blues.*

Deep Mountain Blues

Yet like all families, this a place that is suspicious of the outsider. The one from away. Me.

'Deep Mine Blues' ends and 'Blue Diamond Mines' starts up. Someone is feeding the jukebox. Probably Paul. He comes over and asks if it's OK for him to join me. What am I going to say? He must but 6 feet, six inches tall and weigh 280 pounds. Not that he is threatening me. He's very polite, really. But size matters. I nod.

*Now there's scenes of destruction every hand
And only black waters run down through my land*

Jean Richie – Black Waters

"Of course. Sit down."

"Sorry about what happened the other night," he says.

"No need to be. You helped me out."

"I did it for my brother as much as for you."

"He's your brother. I understand."

"Me and him don't always see eye to eye. But, yes. He's my brother."

"Probably he sees me as a meddler. As someone who threatens his way of life."

*In the coming of springtime we planted our corn,
In the ending of springtime we buried our son*

Jean Richie – Black Waters

"He does. But me and him had a talk. He won't do it again." It's his brother he is concerned about. He also sees me as a threat. Not a physical threat, of course. But what if I took legal action?

"I'll keep the police out of this. Much as I can control it."

He nods. "They're not likely to be much help."

"I don't hate Red or any of the men here," I say. "I don't want revenge. If the police come poking around, I'll tell them I ran into a door."

He glances around the bar. People are looking at us. "They already know what happened." Paul says. "Talk gets around a small town. But they won't do anything unless someone makes a big stink about it."

"There'll be no big stink from me."

"Good. See, I don't want Red to end up in jail again. The judge is likely to start getting a little harder on him."

"I didn't report it. And like I said. I don't need any revenge. Just want to be left alone."

"Nobody's going to hassle you again. They see you and me talking. That's a message. It means that we sort things out by talking."

"Cool."

"By sitting here, I'm telling the few who might hassle you to back off. Most would leave you alone anyhow."

"I appreciate that."

"It kind of gives you the advantage."

"The advantage?"

"Yeah. See, working in a mine toughens you up more than teaching in a classroom does."

"I don't doubt it."

"So it's hard for them to give up their fists."

*The hillside explodes with the dynamite's roar,
And the voice of the small bird is heard no more,*

Jean Richie – Black Waters

"Why is that?"

"Well, they are better than you are with fists. Least most of them are. I don't mean that you're a wimp or anything. You seem pretty strong for someone who handles books rather than a pick and shovel. But working in the mines makes them tough in their minds as well as their muscles. Makes them ready to fight."

"I can see that."

"If they give up their fists, the battle is in words."

I nod. "That seems like a good thing to me."

"It would. You are better at words than most of us here."

"That's the advantage?"

He nods.

"I never thought of it that way before."

"Yeah. Teachers that come here before you taught them that they ain't much good with words."

*And the man stands a-talking with his hat in his hand
While the poison black water rise over my land*

Jean Richie – Black Waters

"That's not what should have been taught."

Paul shrugs. "Shouldn't matter. It's what is that matters. What is, is that most men around here are scared to try to put two sentences together on a piece of paper. They are scared that it will come back to them with red marks all over it that will show how dumb they are."

"I'm afraid that is what the school system teaches a lot of them. And it's awful. I wish I could change that, but they tell me I got to use that red pencil too. I lose my job if I don't."

"I understand that."

"When you boil it all down, we all got to do what the boss man says."

"Guess we do," Paul says.

"Is my coming here to Judy's a problem?"

"Not as I see it. Could be sometimes. But lots of different types come here. All any of them is looking for is a bit of respect."

We're quiet for spell, listening to the jute box.

*Grab a pick and a shovel, bring your cap and lightning
Don't forget the fuses and the dynamite*

Mike Paxton – Thirty Inch Cole

Finally he says, "You aren't all wrong about the things you said about mining."

"You mean in the newspaper article?"

"Yeah. Some of the things you said there was right. But you got to remember that people got their families to think about. It's great to think about what's good and bad in the long haul. But people got to feed their kids today. And it's coal, like it or not, that makes that possible."

*Timber up that heading, set the sedges tight
Or you wife and children won't see you tonight
Waiting is that mountain, as it's always been
Waiting is that mountain that's taken your kin*

Mike Paxton – Thirty Inch Cole

Reading from my Diary

October 5, 2003

Dear Diary,

It's Saturday and I didn't have to go to school. So I met Orville and Phoebe at Frog Pond. I brought you with me, Dear Diary, in my backpack. Mostly I never do this. I'm too afraid that I will lose you or that someone will see you who shouldn't. But I wanted to read my article to Phoebe and Orville to see what they think. The article on 'Can a Boy Love a Man?'

It's not too sunny and the water is a little cold, so we don't swim too long. And it's a little too cool to sit around naked so we got dressed. My Mom sent some fruit and cookies for lunch, and Phoebe's Mom sent some sandwiches. It's really nice how they do that.

So after we finished lunch I say, "I got something I want to read to you."

They ask what it is and I tell them it's something I wrote. So I take out my diary and read them the article I wrote. I don't read the rest of what I wrote in the diary for that day - just the article.

"Do you write stuff like that a lot?" Phoebe asked. She was looking at my diary.

"No. Not articles like that. This is my diary. Mostly I just write about things that happen in my life."

"Am I in it?" Orville asked.

"Of course."

That seems to make him happy.

"I didn't know you kept a diary," Phoebe says.

"It was your Mom's idea," I say. "Remember how we were talking about angels and I said I wished I had one. You told your Mom and she said maybe I could get one by keeping a diary."

"So do you have an angel?"

"I don't know. It feels like I do. I feel like I am talking to one when I write in my diary. But nobody comes and talks to me. Nothing like that."

"You think one boy can love another boy?" Orville asks.

"Yes, I do. That's what I wrote."

"Or a boy could love a girl?"

"Yes."

"So the three of us can be lovers," he says.

"Sure," I said. "If we love each other we are lovers. We already talked about that. And I think it's OK for us to show it however we want to."

"But they make fun of us just for holding hands," Orville says. "You said that. In what you wrote."

"Yes," I say. "I was thinking of the time when they made fun of you and me because we were holding hands during recess."

"They did," he says.

I nodded.

"That was mean," he says.

"I'd like to show this to my Mom," Phoebe says.

"I can't let you have my diary," I say. "Not even for a little while. It would be too dangerous."

"Then can you make a copy for her?"

"Ethan will make a copy for me," I say.

"I think it's really good," Phoebe says.

So when I go by to see Ethan I show him the article. He likes it. Says he likes it a lot. And he makes a copy for me. I'll give it to Phoebe in school on Monday.

Would You Still Love Me?

October 12, 2002

Dear Diary,

I have thought a lot about lovers. Maybe Ethan does love me. I don't know. He says he does. And I thought so after Phoebe told me those things. So I had a good time the rest of that day. But then I have been thinking about it some more. I know Ethan didn't like it that I tried to kill that bird.

But somebody doesn't have to be perfect for you to love him. Even Black Elk wasn't perfect. He killed that frog. But there is still a problem, Dear Diary. And it's a big one. The thing is that there are lots of other bad things I have done.

Now you may think that this doesn't make any difference. He doesn't have to know about those things. I guess that's true. But here's the big question. If he knew about those things, would he still love me? I mean, suppose he would hate me if he knew who I really was. That would mean that he doesn't really love me. Do you see how that works? He just loves this guy that he thinks I am.

So I decided to experiment with this problem using my Mom. Yesterday just before bedtime, I went into the Kitchen where my Mom was sitting at the table eating a snack. She always eats a bowl of cereal before going to bed. So I asked, "Mom. If I did something really really bad, would you still love me?"

She looks up from her cereal and said, "Huh?"

The trouble was she had been drinking again. So I repeat it. "If I did something really really bad, would you still love me?"

She stares at me like she thinks I'm a salamander or something. Or like she couldn't understand what I am saying.

Then she shakes her head like she she trying to shake the fog out of her brains and said, "Have you done something really really bad?"

"No," I say. "Not really really bad."

"Well, then," she says. "Don't worry about it." And she goes back to eating her cereal.

So that wasn't a big help. Sometimes she can be a big help, but not so much when she has been drinking a lot.

Then I got to thinking that there is an even bigger problem. It isn't just bad things I have done. Like suppose I pushed some little kid out in front of a car, or something like that. Something I would just do for no reason. Sometimes people can do things for no reason. And a thing like that, you might do before you could stop yourself. Or like pushing someone off a mountain. And so there it is. It would be done just like that and could never be undone. And everybody would stop loving you. And probably they should too. I mean that would be horrible. It would be worse than falling off a mountain yourself.

So this is it, Dear Diary. I have to tell Ethan about the worst thing I ever did and see if he still loves me. I mean if he won't I may as well find out right away. I'll tell him about the time I cut open that big bull frog I caught. I did it while it was still alive because I wanted to see what its heart looked like when it was still beating. That's the worst thing I can think of. It was worse than when Black Elk killed the frog with his arrow. That was quick. My frog must have suffered something awful. It's going to be kind of hard to talk with him about this. So maybe I will sort of rest up a few days and think about it some more before going to see him.

Frogs and Turtles

October 17, 2002

Dear Diary,

So I did it. I went by to see Ethan. I stopped seeing him for quite a few days because I was afraid to talk with him about the frog. But I missed him too much. So I said to myself, "You just need to get up off your butt and go see him. And tell him what you are thinking."

It's like diving into a cold lake. You have to just do it if you want to go swimming. So I did. Well, first, let me tell you how it was to go there. It was terrible. I mean at first it was. I was really scared.

I love Ethan more than almost anybody. Maybe even the most of all. Maybe more than everybody else put together. So you can see why I was scared. Suppose I told him about the frog and he said, "Well, when I loved you I didn't know you were that kind of boy", or something like that. My dream would be gone. Just like a balloon popping. Just like what happened to Pascal in that movie Ethan showed me. Like Ethan explained, Pascal didn't fit in. That's why they broke his red balloon. But suppose you didn't even fit in with the people you loved? What then?

So when I first got there he seemed real glad to see me. It was Saturday, right after lunch. He writes things in the morning, so he doesn't want people to come then. So he asks me why I haven't seen him for so long. Well, it was only a little more than a week. So that isn't that long, really. But I guess if I was seeing him almost every day, that would seem like a long time.

I said I had a problem. I decided to just tell him about it right off and get it over with. Of course he asked me what the problem was. I told him all about the frog. I didn't try to hide anything about it. While it was still alive I cut open its belly. Just like that. I did it with my boy scout knife. I wanted to see what its heart

looked like while it was still beating. It's like I want to know what happens inside us. Inside our brains especially, but inside all of us. Of course we are not exactly like frogs, but in some ways we are.

So when I was done telling him this, he sort of smiled at me. I couldn't tell exactly what the smile meant. And he asks me what I did then.

"When?"

"After you finished looking at its heart beating," he says.

"I got upset"

"And what did you do?"

"I cut its head off. At least as much as a frog has a head. I just sort of cut him in two."

"Why did you do that?"

"Cause I realized he was hurting - probably really bad. I thought this would at least put him out of his misery."

"Then what?"

"I threw the two parts of him into the woods."

"And then?"

"Then nothing. That was the end of it."

He thinks this over and is quiet. Only for a minute, but it seems like forever. It's a terrible minute. I think he was probably hating me.

"You were sort of like Black Elk, weren't you?" he says.

"Not that much," I say. "He killed his frog quick with an arrow. I cut mine open while he was still alive."

"Did you feel like crying?"

"I did cry. I just sat down in the woods and cried."

He motions for me to come over to him, and he pulls me up on his lap. "That must have been a horrible experience," he says. I look up at him and see that he has tears in his eyes. I'm really surprised. It seems to me that he cries awful easy. But I guess I do too. But he's a man. I am trying not to cry while I sit in his lap. I just nod.

He sort of holds me and rocks me a little bit. "I'm glad you told me this," he says.

"Don't you hate me?"

"Why would I hate you?"

"Because now you know what kind of boy I really am. How I can do really bad things."

"I love you more than ever," he says. I ask him why. He says it was because I had the courage to tell him this. That was his word, not mine. 'Courage'.

"I was pretty scared," I say.

"That I would hate you?"

"That you would throw me away." Then I start really crying. Like I can hardly say my words for crying.

We just sit there with me crying and him holding me for a while. And him sort of crying too - not out loud - but he has tears in his eyes. I can tell from the way he holds me that he still loves me. I feel really good. Crying sometimes feels sort of good in a funny kind of way. Like when you have been hurt or worried and something all at once makes it all right. You might cry then. Well, I do anyhow.

So then he tells me about this really important guy named Saint Augustine who lived a long time ago but who was really intelligent. He said that when he was a boy Augustine stole a bunch of pears and threw them at some pigs. He was with a bunch of other boys when he did this. Ethan has that book and he went to get it. He read me a little section of it. And he ran that section off for me, so here it is:

Theft is punished by Thy law, O Lord, and the law written in the hearts of men, which iniquity itself effaces not. For what thief will abide a thief? Not even a rich thief, one stealing through want. Yet I lusted to thieve, and did it, compelled by no hunger, nor poverty, but through a cloyedness of well-doing, and a pamperedness of iniquity. For I stole that, of which I had enough, and much better. Nor cared I to enjoy what I stole, but joyed in the theft and sin itself. A pear tree there was near our vineyard, laden with fruit, tempting neither for colour nor taste. To shake

and rob this, some lewd young fellows of us went, late one night (having according to our pestilent custom prolonged our sports in the streets till then), and took huge loads, not for our eating, but to fling to the very hogs, having only tasted them.

From Augustine: 'The Confessions'.

It's a little hard to understand. Like Freud was, but not really quite that bad. But he says he will go over it with me and we can discuss it. He asked me what I thought "the law written in our hearts" might mean.

"I don't know," I say. "Maybe it's like our conscience."

"Good. We can talk more about that later."

So Augustine wrote a famous book and mostly it was about his throwing pears at pigs. I think Ethan is trying to tell me that everybody does things that are bad. Even saints.

Well, the thing Augustine did was bad, but not as bad as what I did. The pears couldn't feel anything. And being hit with a few pears couldn't hurt the pigs that much. Stealing was bad, of course, but not as bad as really hurting something.

That was interesting, about St Augustine. But like I tell Ethan, that was a guy I never knew and was a long time ago.

"What about you?" I ask.

"Me?"

"Yeah. Did you ever do anything bad?"

"Of course."

"What?"

He seems like he has to think about this a long time before answering. But that's OK. I like sitting on his lap and being held. So I just sit there and wait until he finally decides to tell me.

"I used to work in a center for juvenile delinquents," he says. "It was located out in some woods. One day a boy a little older than you found a turtle at the edge of the woods. It was a box turtle. He brought it into the gym, where I happened to be at that time, and showed it to some other kids who were playing basketball there. Then without any warning he threw the turtle way up into the air. It came down on its back.

I went over to get the turtle. Its shell was cracked in quite a few places, and it was bleeding. I figured it probably would not live. It really upset me."

"So I ask this kid why he did this. He just grinned like it was the funniest thing in the world and shrugged his shoulders. 'No reason,' he said."

"Maybe it was the way he grinned. But something made me smack the boy. Really hard. Almost as hard as I could. He fell down on the gym floor. 'I'm sorry,' I said. And I picked up the turtle and took him out to the woods and let him go."

"Doing that to the turtle was pretty bad," I say.

"That's not what I am talking about. I'm talking about hitting the boy. That was worse than what he did."

"Don't you think he deserved getting hit after what he did?" I ask. He shakes his head.

"I don't know about deserved," he says. "But you see, what I did made the boy hate me and maybe hate himself. And in the future he would likely take out that hatred on other people. And in any case it would make him unhappy. So how was that going to make anything better? And what I did was to a person. Not just a turtle."

I can sort of see his point, I guess. But I think we've talked enough. You know how you can like eating, but when after you eat a whole lot you are full and don't want any more just then. Talking about some things can be sort of like that.

"Maybe we should talk about something else," I said.

"OK," he says. "But first, one more thing."

"OK."

"It's about what we most want. Or at least what I think it is."

"So what's that?"

"I think that, more than anything else in this world, we want to be loved with a love that is stronger than any bad thing we could do."

Well, that's a pretty long sentence. It seems important but I don't quite get it right off. So I have him repeat it and I jot it down.

I have read that sentence again two or three times and thought about it. I think it's true. That's what I want. I want to do good things. But I want to be loved even if I do bad things. I think that Ethan loves me like that. That's what he was trying to tell me.

Sewing

October 27, 2002

Dear Diary,

Guess what, Dear Diary. Ethan is showing me how to sew. He has a sewing machine. He is teaching me how to use it. And this is the neat part of it; he made me a skirt!!!! He says that's a good place to begin. We're going to a fabric shop together to buy some material so I can make one for myself. I can choose any color I want. Or whatever pattern. I think I will look for a piece of cloth with a pretty pattern. He says that won't cost too much and he will pay for it. He says the first one I make might not be as neat as the ones you buy in a store, but he thinks I will like it.

Maybe we can make more than one skirt. He will show me how and then I can make them myself. My idea is to make one a plain one, and another one a nice pattern. I like designs with lots of colors in them. But also I have t-shirts with cool pictures and I have to use a plain skirt with them. It's not good to have designs on both the skirt and the top. They argue too much with each other. I have a t-shirt with fairies on it that I like a lot. I think a pale blue skirt would look really nice with that. Also I have a real colorful knit shirt that I think would look nice with the pale blue. Then I could wear either a plain knit shirt or t-shirt with the pattern that I choose. And a necklace. Like the one I have with the amber beads. I can't wait until we can go to the fabric shop.

Ethan says that some day we may try to make a shirt. He says skirts are easy but shirts are harder.

Also we can go to Goodwill and see what things they have. Ethan has the book on making hippie clothes. One thing you can do is buy something second hand that you like and then re-do it. Like you can add lace or designs or whatever. Or maybe it just doesn't fit so you make it smaller. You can make almost anything smaller.

Ethan doesn't wear dresses, but he does wear pants with flowers on them and things like that. And also shirts that are more colorful than most men wear. You know. That have flowers or butterflies on them. That kind of thing. He says that you can be sort of in-between a man and a woman. Those were his exact words. 'in-between a man and a woman'. Now that's really interesting.

When I wear boy clothes I feel like a boy. And when I wear girl clothes I feel like a girl. I told this to Ethan.

"So what are you if you aren't wearing either girl clothes or boy clothes? What would you be then?"

I think about this for a minute. At first I can't think of an answer. Then one pops into my head. A funny one. "Naked," I say. "If I wasn't wearing boy clothes or girl clothes I guess I'd be naked."

He laughs. I laugh too. You're not supposed to laugh at your own jokes, but I can't help it. I like to make him laugh.

I love to dress up when I am at Ethan's. He thinks I am really pretty. Well, most often what he says is that I really look nice. But sometimes he says 'pretty'. Boys aren't supposed to be 'pretty'. They should be 'handsome'. Or 'cute'. I hear girls talk about 'cute' boys sometimes. I know what they mean. But I don't see why it's so bad for a boy to be pretty.



Ethan

Used Identities

Ethan reflects on a recent trip that he and Simon made to the Goodwill store in Charleston.

It was nice taking Simon to the Goodwill store. We had to go clear into Charleston to find one we could use. I don't want people who know us to see us buying things a girl or woman might use. Found some skirts for him that can be altered a bit to fit. Also some shirts. And a dress. All very nice. And I found a pullover for myself – with flowers on it.

Funny how much Eros is about identity. Being in love feeds a good narcissism. The beloved wants to be seen as the person he wants to be in the world. A boy or a girl. As pretty or handsome. As intelligent, or powerful, or as good at doing something. With boys I think it is more often 'Look what I can do. See me ride my bike. Do wheelies'. With girls 'Look what I am. How pretty I am. How desirable'. Not sure about that. Doing and being are important to both boys and girls. But maybe with a different emphasis. But one thing is clear. Eros is preoccupied with identity. With being affirmed as who we want to be.

*I shop in the Goodwill Store
for
used identities
the identities that I dare not wear
just anywhere –
the shirt overflowing with flowers
the necklace of river stones
for this too
is me
although I would wear them
only in my bedroom –
a pair of boy's shorts
like Martin once wore
a skirt that I would wear like air
swirling
swirling
around my legs.*

*This too.
Is it a crime that I would dance before the sultan
a lovely girl tempting him in my diaphanous robes –
a naked boy
twirling*

twirling
dervish-like –
that catering to each of his appetites
I would lift him to the celestial vision?
Boys on their death-defying skate boards.
Girls doing cartwheels in the yard
saying
see me
see me.
All this is me.
Will you condemn me because I want
my dervish-talents
to be admired?
Even God
is vain
displaying Himself shamelessly
in peacocks
and such.
But also,
Not this
Not that
Yes,
that too.
So I select each item carefully
and I wear it
lightly
lightly.

Jay Edson – Shopping In the Goodwill Store

Wonder Woman's Magic Lasso

November 1, 2002

Dear Diary,

I went to the school Halloween party as Wonder Woman. I think the outfit was very cool. But the party didn't turn out as good as I hoped.

But first let me tell you about the costume. Ethan helped me make it. We started working on it weeks before Halloween. Now you may think that everybody knows what Wonder Woman looks like. But when we tried to find pictures we found out that the comic book people kept changing how her outfit looked. I liked the one that she started with the best. So we stuck with that.

First we ordered some stuff from eBay. We found some old costumes people were selling there. That's where we bought some Wonder Woman boots. We got some blue material with stars on them and made a skirt out of it. I wore some Speedo swim trunks under the skirt. Ethan ordered me Speedo swim trunks on line. Other places they wear Speedo swim trunks a lot. But in this country boys are too afraid they may look pretty or sexy. So they wear those big baggy stupid looking shorts. With a skirt as short as what Wonder Woman wore you need something more than just your underpants. Speedos seemed like just what we needed.

Anyhow, we looked at old Wonder Women pictures a lot so we could figure out how to make the top part of the outfit, the headband and the cape. The cape was pretty easy. We just bought some material and I sewed a hem around it. I'm getting pretty good with the sewing machine. We made the bracelets out of tin cans and we painted them gold. We cut red stars for the head band and the bracelets out of some felt. And, of course, her magic lasso which makes people tell the truth was easy. We just used ordinary clothesline rope and dyed it yellow.

I was really happy with this outfit. It was the best Halloween costume I ever had.

Ethan said I looked cute. But then he changed it to beautiful. Usually he says 'nice' or 'cool'. I thought cute wasn't quite right. I'm really too big to be cute. That's what little kids are. And beautiful is mostly for women. I've heard it used for men. Like he has a 'beautiful face'. But mainly boys are supposed to be handsome. Really, I wanted him to say pretty. Even Ethan seems a little afraid to say 'pretty' when he talks about me. Sometimes he does, but not mostly. Anyhow, beautiful or cute were both OK with me. Especially beautiful. If he likes the way I look, that makes me happy.

Dad was not at home, so he didn't have anything to say about it. He would have made fun of me. Maybe he wouldn't even have let me go.

There was a party at the school before it was dark. I heard that they were having it while it was still light so it would be safe. It's to keep kids off the streets after dark. Well, it seems kind of dumb to have it while it is still light. I mean Halloween is about scary things that happen when it's dark. Ghosts and vampires and things like that. And what's going to get us if we go trick-or-treating after dark?

Anyhow, I did go to the party at the school. They gave prizes for different kinds of costumes - like the funniest, the most original, the scariest, the prettiest, the most handsome, the most imaginative and the most realistic. And they had honorable mentions for each category. So I figured I could probably win at least one of those prizes. I mean a lot of the costumes were just ones that their parents bought at a store. And a couple of those store-bought costumes won prizes. I didn't think that was right. I mean they didn't use any imagination or anything to make those. Just bought them.

It's kind of hard to say what happened at the party. It was a party for the whole junior high school. All the classes. The truth is that nothing much happened, really. Well, a couple of boys sort of made fun of me, but not a lot. Mostly people just acted like I wasn't there. That was sort of weird. I mean it was like I was invisible. Nobody talked with me. Even when I talked to them they just barely answered. Just the little bit they had to so they wouldn't seem too rude. It was like they didn't want to admit that I even existed. And the teachers were the same, mostly. And I didn't win a single prize.

Not even an honorable mention. That didn't seem right to me. I know that my costume was better than most of them. I think they just didn't like it that a boy came a Wonder Woman. Well, why not? I mean why can't a boy pretend to be Wonder Woman?

After the party it was dark, and I went trick or treating with Phoebe and Orville. Mom drove us into town and gave us a couple of hours to go around getting stuff. I was a little bit cold in my outfit, but it was still fun.

After school today I went by to see Ethan. He was already fixing supper. He cooks on a big old wood stove that is made for cooking. Also he has another regular wood stove in his living room. He had a fire in that too, so it was plenty warm in his house. So I ran upstairs and put my Wonder Woman outfit back on. I wanted to wear it while I visited him.

While we ate supper I told him about how everybody at the school Halloween party acted like I didn't exist.

He says, "People can only see what they have room for in their minds". I wrote that down because I didn't quite understand it, but it sounded important.

So I say, "You got to explain that".

"What?"

"About what people can see."

He thinks about this for a minute. Then he says, "Suppose that ghosts really exist. You don't believe in ghosts, but you have one in your house. You will always see it as the wind, or as an optical illusion or even as a dream or hallucination. But you will never see it as a ghost. The same thing with, say, flying saucers."

"Do you think ghosts are real?"

"I don't know. That's just an example. We are talking about why the people at the Halloween party couldn't see you."

"Because they don't believe in me?"

"Because they don't believe in boy/girls."

So that makes it more clear. The people at the party couldn't see me because they didn't believe in boy/girls, like me. They think you

have to be either one or the other. So I was like a ghost or a flying saucer. They didn't have any place in their brains for thinking about me. They could see me with their eyes but didn't let me into their brains.

Anyhow, after we clean up the supper dishes, we go in and sit down on the couch. He has another video he wants to show me. While he is getting it set up I suddenly have an idea. I take my lasso of truth and lasso him. Then I say, "Now you have to tell the truth about whatever I ask. You can't stop yourself." That's the way the lasso of truth works. He pretends he can't get away. So I ask him "What do you think of me?"

It takes him a minute to think about this. Then he says, "You are an imaginative ... intelligent ... original ... and ... beautiful boy." He stops and thinks after each thing. Well, I have him in the lasso of truth, so I guess he must really think that. That may seem silly to you, Dear Diary. I mean the lasso is just pretend. I know that. But pretend has rules too.

Here's an example. Suppose you are with some friends and pretending that you are in a house. Maybe you show where the walls are with a row of leaves. And you leave open places for doors and windows. Well, if you are going from one room to another you have to go through the open places. You can't just step over a row of leaves like there's no wall there. That would mess up the whole game.

Ethan is the only grownup I know who knows about pretending. I mean about how it really works. One day - maybe a couple of weeks ago - I explained this to him. I mean about pretend. And he said, "Yes, pretend is real too, in its own way."

So of course all those things Ethan says about me make me happy. Why not? Everybody likes to hear good things about himself. So I figure I've got him now. I mean the lasso is still on him. So I ask him the big question. "Do you love me?" I said.

He nodded and says, "I do."

"How much do you love me?" I ask.

He thinks a minute and then says, "A lot."

"More than strawberries?" I ask.

"Yes."

"More than pizza?"

"More than pizza."

"More than butter pecan ice cream?"

He didn't answer that one right away. So I say "What about butter pecan ice cream?"

"That's a hard one," he says.

"I've got you in the lasso of truth," I say. And I shake the lasso to remind him of it. "You got to tell me."

He smiles. "Yes," he said, "even more than butter pecan ice cream." And he pulls me into his arms and gives me a hug. And he doesn't let go right away.

"But there is something else I think about you, also," he says.

Well, he is looking kind of serious, like this isn't so good. "Something bad?" I ask.

"I don't think anything bad about you," he says. "But there is a hard part."

"What's that?"

He doesn't answer right away.

"You got to tell me," I say. And I tug at the lasso again.

"I think that you will never fit in this world very well," he says. "The world will always seem ... 'foreign' to you."

He had to think a minute before he found the word he wanted. 'Foreign'. He thinks the world is always going to seem foreign to me. Like they don't talk my language too good, and I don't talk theirs.

It was 'The Red Balloon' that we watched. He already read me the book. I liked it. The movie was even more awesome. But it was kind of sad. I don't know where all those balloons took Pascal.



Heavenly Bodies

November 8, 2002

Dear Diary,

Ethan took me by to see that friend of his. Helen Keenan. She says that I should just call her Helen. That's the same thing Ethan did. It's sort of hard to get used to that. I was taught to always use Mr or Mrs with grownups. But they say to use their first names, so I guess it's all right.

Helen lives up on a hillside above Rocky Creek. That's one thing I got to tell you about, Dear Diary. It's above the place where Rocky Creek becomes Frog Pond. And she has a telescope. So maybe you see what I'm getting at. How might she use that telescope?

Anyhow, we went there late in the afternoon. She fixed us supper but it wasn't time to eat yet. So she asks if I want to look through her telescope.

"Sure," I say. So she points it at the moon. Wow.

Does the moon ever look different from up close. Its face is all pock-marked. It reminds me of pictures I saw of people who got smallpox. People used to get smallpox and if they didn't die their faces were all pock-marked. Well, it's not exactly like that, but that was my first thought. It is full of these round craters. Helen says those are places where asteroids struck. Some places are full of these craters and some places are smooth. I don't know why some places are smooth and some pock-marked. But it is really interesting to see what it looks like.

But like I said, you can see Frog Pond from her house. Not too good with just ordinary looking. But she has a deck on the back of her house, and her telescope is on that deck. Well, I guess she can move it into the house if she wants to. Like if it rains or

something. But she uses it on the deck. So I don't say anything about whether she ever looks at Frog Pond. I just think about it while we eat supper.

Not too long after supper it gets dark. So now she shows me a couple of planets. They don't look too big like some pictures I have seen. But they are planets. Well, we are looking at Venus up in the sky. It was just a round blob that was sort of quivery. And I say, in an off hand sort of way, "So can you look at things that are here on earth with that telescope?"

"Yes, I can," she says.

So of course I am thinking about Frog Pond and me and Phoebe and Orville skinning dipping. So I say, "So you could look down at the Rocky Creek and watch animals come to drink at the water and stuff like that."

"Yes," she says. "I could."

So there was this long time when neither of us says anything. I just go on staring at Venus up there quivering away, and not knowing if I want to say anything more. Finally she says, "Yeah, I can see heavenly bodies here on earth as well as up in the sky." Just like that.

So I ask to see another planet.

I want to change the subject and get myself more time to think. She says she will try to get Jupiter and some of its moons. While she was doing this, I think about that strange thing she said about heavenly bodies on earth.

Then I think, I'll bet she means us. You know. Me and Phoebe and Orville. Well, that was sort of a nice thing for her to say, in a way. I mean how we look heavenly. I'm not sure I want to talk about heavenly bodies on earth so I change the subject again. It's easy to do. I just ask her questions about the planets while she looks for Jupiter. She likes to talk about stars and things and it is interesting the things she knows. She does find it after a while. It looks like a white circle with little white dots around it. They are the moons.

Finally she says she is going to show me a galaxy. It doesn't take her so long to find it. Well, it just looks like a fuzzy white blob.

Not too interesting, really. And that's just what she says. She is like Ethan in some ways. You know, like how he can sometimes guess just what I am thinking. "It probably doesn't look that interesting," she said.

"Well, no. It's sort of interesting." I say. I am trying to be polite.

"Not very interesting, though, until you know what you are looking at. It's Andromeda." (I had her write this down in my notebook later.)

So we all go into her house. It's getting pretty cold out there anyhow so that's just as well. She has these big pictures of planets and stars and galaxies on her walls. She shows me one that she says is the same one we saw. Andromeda. It doesn't look much the same as what we saw, but she says we could see only a little part of the center of the galaxy with her telescope. The rest of it isn't bright enough. The picture she has on her wall was taken with the Hubble telescope, which is a big telescope that is in orbit around the earth. She tells me that galaxies can have billions of stars in them and that there are billions of galaxies. Well, that's kind of hard to believe. A billion is a lot. But why would she lie to me? And she studies this kind of thing. On one of the pictures she has, you can see a whole bunch of them. Galaxies, I mean. Not just stars. Well, that makes us people seem pretty small. It makes you feel even smaller than looking at the stars at night.

So she also has prints of some paintings on her wall. Some of the pictures show people swimming on a beach. Now this is interesting. Especially because a lot of the boys that are swimming are naked. The girls aren't, except some really little ones. So I guess in those days they thought it was OK for boys to be naked on a beach, but not girls. She has some other pictures with naked girls in them. But they are not on a beach. Anyhow I go and look at one of the pictures more carefully. It's a picture of a naked boy leading a horse out of the water. Maybe he had just given the horse a bath. I think he is pretty nice to look at. The horse is too.

I am a little embarrassed to look at a picture of a naked person. Mostly when I look at pictures like that, I do that in secret. But

here it is, right up on her wall, just asking to be looked at. They aren't photographs. I don't know if they had photographs back then. They are paintings. Still, though, you can see everything in these pictures on her wall.

So she sees me looking at that picture of the boy and his horse and asks if I like it. Of course I did, so I say yes.

"A lot of these pictures are by an artist named Sorolla," she says. "He lived around the turn of the last century - that is, from a little before 1900 to a little after it." I ask her write his name down in my notebook.

"In those days did people swim without any bathing suits or anything?" I ask.

"It seems like they thought it was OK for boys to do that."

"Do you think that was OK?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, does it seem, you know, nasty?"

"Is it nasty to be naked when you take a shower or a bath?"

"No. But then people can't see you." I think about Mom and about Ethan seeing me naked. "At least usually they can't," I add.

"I think it's nice to see people naked," she says. "They are very beautiful."

I look up at the painting of the naked boy with the horse. "Like heavenly bodies," I say.

She laughs. "Exactly," she says. "I guess Sorolla thought so too or he wouldn't have painted them like that so often."



A Language Helps Us Lie

Ethan thinks about his erection as Simon sits on his lap during the visit to Helen's house.

He knows I have an erection. He cannot miss it. But it does not seem to bother him. If anything he snuggles into my body more completely, so much so that the boundaries between us become blurred. This love that engulfs us – how am I to understand it? Simon asked me about Freud. He thought maybe Freud might have something to say that would be relevant regarding his patterns of loving and being loved. I'm not sure myself how helpful Freud is. He did make people look more directly at their sexual feelings. That was good. But he thought that love was really sex. And sex was just a physiological tension needing release. I don't quite see it that way. Sex is just one way Eros can express itself. In any case, it is true that getting erections is a part of my love. My love is sexual. More than sexual. But it includes sex.

Women have orgasms when they breast feed, and boy babies who breast feed get erections. Breast feeding is the first experience we have of making love.

It seems women – most of them in any case – would like to deny this. And even if they accepted orgasms and erections in breast feeding, they wouldn't say anything about it. And they would condemn this kind of thing in man/boy love. But there it is. Clear enough to anyone who is not in denial of the obvious. Intergenerational sex rears its not so ugly head from the get-go.

We evade the obvious through a language that helps us lie to ourselves. We lie through labeling. We label our love of children 'affection' and define all the sex out of it. Are we petrified of the fact that it is permeated with sex? Freud did help us see this. When I went to nudist events they also lied. Of course people had sexual feelings when they saw all those naked bodies. But they said it was 'sensual', not 'sexual'. I don't think everybody there was wanting to rape and pillage. And sex was not the whole story. But of course sexual feelings were a part of the joy that we all felt.

But what is this 'sex' that pervades our love, that seems to underlie all our in-loveness? It is one of the manifestations of Eros – a god, though a young and troublesome one. Eros is between the human and the divine, Socrates tells us. Eros is not a star, but a reaching toward the stars.

We can view this as simply physical. As bodies and arousals caused by chemistry. Or we can view it as Eros seeking union with the beloved. Both are true. Wholly this and wholly that. Wholly and holy. The beloved may be another person, a group, or the earth itself. How shall we speak of our love?

My Amygdala Sighs For You
My frontal lobes worship your loveliness.

You titillate my sensory cortex
which craves the opportunity to
brush up against you
accidentally
more or less.

My superior colliculus scans the horizon in hope of glimpsing
you
your yellow shorts
no one else's
walking by.

I do not mean to stare.
My optic tectum made me do it.

My amygdala sighs
trembles
as it rummages through my memory cortex
seeking the sustenance of past images
images of your bright eyes,
your slender legs
your shapely t-shirt.

My olfactory bulbs want to snuggle their nose in your arm pits.

The whole of my limbic system
gathers at the foot of your image

wanting nothing more
Than to sit in your general vicinity

while it awaits
synaptic mail
Suggesting to it

Possibilities
of love.



Helen

The Pain Would Be Galaxious

Meditation Four, in which Helen contemplates the light that shines on Ethan and Simon as they snuggle in the easy chair in her living room.

How nice to have visitors. Not that I would want too many of them.

But a person does get lonely when she lives alone. And what a lovely boy Simon is. It is no wonder that Ethan is in love with him. Simon was fascinated by the telescope, and was very attentive to my explanations of how it worked. They may make one themselves. As they do so, Ethan will teach him more about optics.

Simon has snuggled into Ethan's lap. They are engulfed and almost merged in my big easy chair. It seems to fit two better than one. Simon said that this is the most comfortable place for him. I can see that it is. Simon's face radiates as he looks up into Ethan's face. He does not hide their love, nor does Ethan. They do not tell me about it. There is no need to. Ethan's love swallows him, yet leaves him free and separate at the same time, like the sunlight shining on running and splashing naked bodies in Sorollo's paintings.

These two are in their own reference system, and as a reference system moves away from the collective one shared by those who are not in love, time slows and mass increases. What does that mean? For one thing, that communication between the reference systems is difficult at best. Suppose they approach the speed of light. They look back on us and we are the ones that seem slow moving and massive. We become pancake people—entities that they cannot take seriously. They are in their own world. We can see each other only at a distance.

When I see them like that, I think about how I miss the girls that I taught. How can I help it?

I am teaching my literature class. I have asked them to write a poem. They are all busy at work. I wander around the room glancing at their efforts here and there. What was that girl's name? The one with the afro. Lord, was she pretty! Just as I move up the aisle past her, the sun comes out from behind a cloud and shines in the window. The window next to ... whom? Marisol. Yes. Marisol. That was her name. I turn and look at her. The sun, like an artist, paints her face in light. Michelangelo would have been happy to paint those soft dark cheeks and the delicate lines of her mouth. She is a small goddess.

They still trouble my dreams, those lovely creatures.

*Ah, sleep I cannot: soft-cushioned bed
Wooes never my wearied frame to sleep;
No pillow brings rest to my throbbing head.
From my couch, as one in a nightmare, I leap.
Ever Eros is tossing to and fro
My spirit, as when great storm-winds blow
O'er a tempest-tormented mountain-steep,
And down on its groaning oak-woods sweep;
So groaneth my spirit, love-scourged so.*

Sappho – The torments of love Trans. By Arthur Way

People who are in love move away from the collective world – the collective reference system – almost at the speed of light. There is danger in this.

$$\Delta t' = \frac{\Delta t}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}}$$

The Lorenz transformation is interpreted to mean the the speed of light cannot be reached.

The duration of time in the observed reference system is equal to the duration of time in the system of the observer, over the square root of one minus the relative velocity over the speed of light. If the velocity reached the speed of light, the denominator would become zero, making the whole thing meaningless. With only minor variations, the same transformation works when applied to mass.

If we take both applications of the Lorenz transformation, the one for time and the one for distance, these equations suggests that as the speed of an observed reference system approaches the speed of light, a minute becomes so long that time almost stops, and mass increases almost to infinity. But the speed of light can only be approached. So we end up with an asymptote.

Suppose that the speed of light could be reached. Science fiction, we are told. OK. Mathematically, it becomes meaningless. But let's take a small step beyond what is strictly speaking permissible in math, and affirm the reality of that toward which the asymptote points: namely that Time disappears and Mass becomes infinite. The combination gives us infinite timeless Being. What could that be?

I blush at the thought.

It's the 'G' word.

From the inside, what else can absolute, eternal being be but Satchidanda. Being/ Consciousness/Bliss absolute. Satchidanda – both incarnate, here and now in time and space, and transcendent, beyond time and space – the eternal paradox.

Light itself. Is God? Literally? Hmm. The Sun is happy, and shines its happiness on us. It seems so to me. Yet in the gap between the external view and the internal view, something eludes us.

*Whence God, creation and the fall,
And why is anything at all?*

*These questions were, of course, quite tough,
But, after all, enough's, enough.
It's time we knew! So I resolved
To capture God and have it solved.
As any scientist might wish,
I grew Him in a petri dish
So that, conveniently reduced,
He could clearly be deduced.
With care I placed Him on a slide
Where not a germ could run or hide.
Then burning with forbidden hope,
I peered into my microscope.
There, smaller than an onion cell,
The King of Heaven, Lord of Hell
Was clearly visible. "Oh Sir,"
I said, my manner quite demure,
"I'd like to have an interview,
And take a measurement or two."
But gathering up His robes, he bowed,
And hopped upon a tiny cloud;
Then, fleeting as the morning dew,
He very graciously withdrew.*

Alexis Papadopoulos – He Graciously Withdrew

We can understand reality only in terms of the sensory, experiential, and cognitive categories of perception at our disposal. God – or that which ultimately is – beyond the sphere of our habitation. 'Ineffable', as they say.

We are reminded of him as we look at the stars and galaxies. But light itself is beyond our habitation.

*I light my candle
And you
Knowing how tiny I am
And intimidated
In relation to suns
(Not to mention galaxies)
Visit me in diminutive form.
Yet even thus reduced
Should I put my finger on you
The pain would be galaxious.*

Alex Papadopoulos – The Visit

But I Did Learn a Lot

November 10, 2002

Dear Diary,

Looking through that telescope at Helen's got Ethan to thinking. He decided he wanted to show me how one is made. Yesterday he went into town and bought some old cameras and found some other things with lenses in them. Also he had some lenses in his camera equipment. So when I got there today he asked if I would like to learn how telescopes are made. Well, that sounded cool. Also I could tell that's what he wanted to do. So of course I said yes.

Today is Sunday so I went by right after lunch. That gave us a lot of time to mess with this. I wrote down everything he told me. The main thing about making anything that magnifies is called the 'focal length'. 'Focal' is like 'focus' see, and length is just length. So it's just the length from the lens where it makes a clear picture. Where it focuses, in other words. And we can measure this in a very cool way. You just hold the lens between something that has a lot of light (like a window or a lamp) and a wall. Then you move the lens back and forth until you see a clear picture on the wall. Then you measure the distance from the lens to the wall. That's the focal length.

So we did this with quite a few lenses. One of us held the lens where it made a good picture on the wall, and the other one measured it. He has a ruler that has millimeters on it. They write it like this: mm. He says that what scientists use. Millimeters, centimeters and meters. Not inches and feet and yards. Well, OK. So we used mms.

The next thing that he taught me was that every telescope has an 'objective lens' and an 'eye piece'. The objective lens is the one at the front end of the telescope, and the eye piece is the one near your eye (naturally).

Now the main point is that if you take the focal length of the objective lens and divide it by the focal length of the eye piece lens, that gives the amount of magnification. Also you can tell about how long the telescope needs to be by adding the two focal lengths.

So we found two lenses that sort of seemed to fit together in the right way. One had a focal length of 75mm and the other 260. So you take 75 into 260. That gives a magnification of about $3\frac{1}{2}$. We made the telescope itself out of two cardboard tubes. We used some tubes from paper towels. He had one that was almost empty and for the other one he just unwound a full one and folded the paper so that he could still use it. Then he showed me how we could paste the two magnifying glasses on the ends of these tubes. And that was it. You have to slit one of the tubes and tape it so it is just a tiny bit bigger. Then you can put one tube inside the other. That makes it possible to get it into focus by sliding the inside tube in and out.

So how did it work?

Well, not too good, really. I didn't tell Ethan that, though. I didn't want to hurt his feelings. But he could see that it could have been better. Well, it did sort of work. I mean I could read words from a newspaper from across the room. And trees outside looked bigger, and I could see leaves like they were closer. So I'm not saying that it didn't work at all. But everything I saw was always blurry on the edges if it was focused in the middle, and vice-versa. That's what I mean by not too good. Ethan says we can experiment with different lenses. So maybe after a while we'll be able to make a better one. But I did learn a lot about how telescopes work, and that was really interesting.

A Piece of Shit

December 12, 2002

Dear Diary,

My Dad says that Ethan is a "piece of shit". That's his words. "Piece of shit". My best friend in the whole world he says is a piece of shit. I asked why he said this. I mean not like I was saying he shouldn't say that. I would never try to tell Dad what he should say or shouldn't say. He would kill me. I just wanted to know why he thought that. I was just asking. It was at supper time. That's just about the only time we see each other when he is home. He puts down his spoon. He was eating soup. And he gives me this real hard look. Like he is a policeman accusing me of something horrible.

"He's getting into a lot of stuff that's none of his business," he says.

"What stuff?"

"Like he's agitating against our mining."

That's probably true. Ethan wrote that article about mining. And he did tell me he didn't think mountain top mining was a good idea. He says it destroys all of the natural order. Messes up streams and stuff. And I guess it does. So I guess that's what he's "agitating" about.

I didn't know what to say. So I just didn't say anything.

Then Dad says, "I heard you go and see him sometimes."

I nod. I can see it was a mistake to bring this up at all. I've got to learn to keep my mouth shut.

"What's that about?" he asks.

"Nothing," I say. "We're just friends. That's all."

"That don't seem right," he says. "How come you don't have friends your own age?"

"I do," I say.

"Who?"

"Phoebe and Orville."

"A girl and a retard," he says. And he sort of screws his face up like he was smelling something nasty.

"Orville's not a retard," I say.

"He can't hardly talk," Dad says.

"He's just a little slow, that's all," I say.

"A little slow," he says. He says this in a kind of squeaky voice, like he is making fun of me. "Call it what you want. He's not normal. Why don't you have no friends your own age? - ones that are boys - you know - regular guys."

I don't know what to answer. If I argue with him he'll get mad. He might even hit me. So I just look down at my plate and hope all this horrible talk will stop.

But it doesn't. It gets worse.

"Well," he says. "I don't want you seeing that teacher any more. That Mr Ireland. He seems like some kind of creep to me. He's not married and I don't see him with no girlfriends."

Like I say, Dear Diary. It's no use arguing with Dad. He thinks he's always right. So still I don't say anything. I know I will sneak out to see Ethan if I have to.

"I mean it," he adds. "You hear me?"

I nod. "I hear you." I did hear him, of course. I mean he was practically shouting. But I didn't say I would do what he said.

"Phoebe's your girlfriend?" he asks.

"She's just a friend," I say.

So what can I tell you, Dear Diary? I mean, I know he's my Dad, and we are supposed to obey our parents. And I do. Mostly. But he's got no right to tell me who my friends got to be. Ethan is

my best friend. Well, one of my best. Phoebe and Orville are best friends too. Maybe, like Phoebe says, Ethan and me are lovers. I don't know. Maybe I am with Phoebe too.

But one thing I do know, Dear Diary. When I am with Ethan it makes me happier than anything else in the world. I won't let My Dad take that away from me.



Antonio

Who Should Be Born?

Antonio reflects on eugenics while eating lunch in Judy's.

My son hanging out with that Science teacher! Why does a grown man want a child as a friend? Something wrong there. Fucking bleeding heart liberals. The trouble is that we are keeping all these ner-do-wells alive. Natural selection would weed them out. The fit would survive. The race would improve. But, no. We have to keep every puny, deformed, stupid one of them alive. That's why we have slums. That's why this planet is swarming with human vermin. People that can do nothing but breed, escape the reality of who they are with drugs, and plot the overthrow of their betters. They see the difference between themselves and the fit. So they want to bring the fit down to their level. Resentment is what drives them.

Do you know the hallmark of a second rater? It's resentment of another man's achievement. Those touchy mediocrities who sit trembling lest someone's work prove greater than their own - they have no inkling of the loneliness that comes when you reach the top. The loneliness for an equal - for a mind to respect and an achievement to admire.

Ayn Rand - Atlas Shrugged

They worship celebrities. Yet they also hate them. They hate anyone who has raised himself above the common level. And they will hate me as I become more successful. They will try to bring me down. People like that Science teacher - Ethan Ireland is his name, I think - set themselves up as their protectors of all these scumballs, become their advocates. Why? Ireland has some intelligence. So why does he bother to cater to his inferiors? Because he has some flaw in his nature. Something he is ashamed of. A weakness. That's probably it. For whatever reason, he too would bring me down. So be it. Fuck them all. I'm going to become what I am able to become.

Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark in the hopeless swamps of the not-quite, the not-yet, and the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish in lonely frustration for the life you deserved and have never been able to reach. The world you desire can be won. It exists.. it is real.. it is possible.. it's yours.

Ayn Rand - Atlas Shrugged

What was that news item about that crazy who threatened to go on a killing spree? He's the kind of scum I am talking about.

A Cabin Creek man threatening violence held off police at his residence for more than an hour Wednesday night before surrendering. Christopher James, age unavailable, of Leewood began the standoff about 7:45 p.m., telling police he was heavily armed and wanted to go on a killing spree, Kanawha County sheriff's dispatchers said. He demanded to speak to members of the news media.

Four sheriff's deputy units and two State Police units surrounded the residence and finally talked James into allowing officers and paramedics inside.

He was taken to CAMC General Hospital for treatment.

Charleston Gazette – 12/12/02

So what will they do with him? Define him as having a disability, put him on welfare, and let him back onto the street again, where he very well could kill somebody. Maybe go on a killing spree for real. Next time the stupid bastard may have the sense not to tell the police of his intentions. They put everybody else at risk. For what? To keep scum like that alive by artificial means on my tax money. And to let them endanger everyone.

The only proper functions of a government are: the police, to protect you from criminals; the army, to protect you from foreign invaders; and the courts, to protect your property and contracts from breaches or fraud by the others, to settle disputes by rational rules, according to objective law.

Ayn Rand – Atlas Shrugged

Look at all these poor fools drinking themselves silly. The regulars here. None of them will ever be anything. Will ever accomplish anything. Only in their dreams do they amount to anything. Dreams, dreams, dreams. People would rather live in their dreams than to try to make something of themselves in the hard world of reality. Dreams. What was that dream I had last night? It woke me up. It's because it was so creepy, I think. Or maybe I just woke up because I had to piss.

It's very dark and murky. I am on a beach. It is covered with the rainbow colors of an oil spill. Garbage sloshes around in the little waves. I see something floating a few yards out. It looks like a baby that is lying in a big leaf-like from a palm tree or tropical plant. It reminds me of a Sunday school picture of Moses in the bulrushes. I think the leaf may tip over and that the baby will drown, so I wade out to get it, but a wind pushes the leaf further out to sea. Then it is way beyond my reach. It is floating near a big cargo ship that threatens to sink it. Then I am on the ship. I am looking over the railing hoping to see the baby. It is nowhere in sight. I ask others if they have seen it but they act like they can't hear me. I think the leaf that carried the baby may have capsized. Probably the baby has drowned.

Stupid dream.

Getting Beat Up

December 13, 2002

Dear Diary,

It's Friday 13th. They say that any time you get Friday 13th it's going to be an unlucky day. Well, sure enough, it was a horrible day. I mean it was a really horrible day!!

First of all, I got beat up by Sam McGinley.

Sam is in my grade. And he isn't even bigger than me. But he beat me up like it was the easiest thing in the world. First he pushed me down. Then as soon as I got up he hit me. Right in the face. I covered my face with my hands and he started to push me around, and hit me some more. And he called me names. Like a fool I started crying. And he said he was hitting me because he saw me staring at Michael Cherry's butt in the locker room. He said that right in front of everybody on the playground. It was awful.

I didn't tell anybody about Sam beating me up. It was bad enough already. I didn't want everybody to say I was a tattler. And besides, I was embarrassed. I would have to tell a teacher what he said about me staring at Michael Cherry's butt. And they could see that I was a real sissy.

I snuck into the bathroom after recess and washed my face so no teacher could tell I had been crying.

Well that was bad enough.

But when I got home it was even worse. See, I had this bruise on my face where Sam hit me. And my clothes were all messed up. And Dad asked what happened to me.

We are at the supper table.

"Nothing," I say.

"Don't lie to me," he says. He has that real scary look on his face - the one that makes me think he might hit me too. I don't want to be hit anymore, so I tell him.

"Someone beat me up."

"Who?"

"Sam McGinley."

"Sam McGinley?"

"Yeah."

"Herman McGinley's boy?"

"Yeah."

"I seen him around."

I nodded.

"He's no big kid. Probably not even as big as you are."

"We're about the same."

"So why did you let him beat you up?"

"I tried to stop him."

"Did you hit him back?"

"I tried to."

"But did you?"

"No."

"Maybe I should teach you how to fight. Would that help?"

"I don't think so."

So Dad looks at me and kind of rolls his eyes like he does sometimes. That shows me that he thinks there is no hope for me. Well, I already know he thinks that. But he's not done yet.

"Why did he do it?"

There is no way I was going to tell Dad what Sam said about me staring at Michael's butt. He would kill me. But I know I have to say something or this questioning is going to go on forever.

So I say, "Because he thinks I'm a sissy."

Mom tries to change the subject. I like her for that. I hardly hear what she says. Something about the weather. Anyhow, she tries to help. But it doesn't work.

Dad sighs. It's a huge sigh. A sigh of hopelessness. The whole world could be swallowed up in that sigh. But really it's just me - the most hopeless thing in the world - that is swallowed. More hopeless than an ant already in the jaws of an ant lion.

Then he stares at me a long while.

"You think I'm a wuss, don't you, Dad," I say.

"You don't fight back, so people don't respect you. They think you're a faggot."

I don't know what to say. Maybe I am one. I don't know. But I'm not going to say so.

Then he shakes his head again. He shakes his head a lot when he is around me. I don't know if he does that at other times because I'm not there. But with me he does. "Why are you such a sissy?" he asks. He doesn't wait for an answer. He knows as well as I do there's no answer to his question. At least none that I know of. Maybe Freud knows something about that. But I don't. I just woke up one morning and found myself being who I am. You know. A sissy and all that. Anyhow it isn't a real question. It's just his way of saying he can't stand me. I already know that. He just gets up from the supper table and leaves.

In one of my classes back when school started, they talked about how it wasn't right to let some kids bully others. And I remember reading something about it in the newspaper.

The Columbine High School shootings in Colorado and other incidents like it have brought much-needed attention to bullying...

This year, Kanawha County is promoting an anti-bullying policy in its school system. Students began learning about the harmful effects of bullying and other forms of harassment and intimidation when most schools started earlier this week.

Last year, the state Legislature passed a law requiring all county school systems to follow anti-bullying policies. After missing the deadline by about four months, the state Board of Education finally provided basic bullying, harassment and intimidation guidelines for schools to use ...

Chandra Broadwater - The Charleston Gazette 8/30/2002

But my Dad doesn't believe in that kind of thing. He thinks kids that get bullied should stand up for themselves. If they don't, they deserve what they get. Maybe he is right. I don't know. I was too embarrassed to tell anybody about it.

I mean, do I want everybody talking about how I stared at Michael Cherry's butt? Do I want to be called a cry baby and a tattletale?

So I came to my room to tell you about it, Dear Diary. And to cry some more like the sissy that I am.

A Cute Butt

December 14, 2002

Dear Diary,

I'm thinking about how it was earlier this afternoon. Ethan and me are on his porch. I'm sitting on the top step and Ethan is sitting on that crazy looking couch - the old one with the flowered quilt on it. It's real quiet. The sun is just a little above the mountains. It's awful pretty but that isn't making me happy. I am feeling real sad cause of what my Dad said to me at supper time yesterday. I mean how I am a sissy. When he says sissy he means faggot. And a faggot is a piece of shit.

'Faggot' and 'piece of shit' are his words. That's how he thinks. Well, we aren't close. I hardly ever see him. So what does it matter what he thinks? But he is my Dad so what he says can hurt. I know he was mad and I tell myself that maybe he didn't mean it. But I may as well admit it. Really I know he did mean it. He thinks I am a puny, faggy piece of shit. It's not easy to know your own Dad thinks that about you. That really he doesn't even want you as his son.

So, yes. I am still feeling sad.

"You seem kind of sad," Ethan says. He's like that. He notices when I am sad. Mostly people don't. I mean I have to be crying or screaming or something for them to guess maybe I'm not happy. Mom's a little better, sometimes. She tries. But lots of the time she is drinking too much. And it seems like her head is always floating off somewhere else. So mostly it's me and my sadness and nobody else. Well, that's not true. There's Phoebe. I can talk to her. And Mom when she's not too drunk. And Orville, except he doesn't always understand. And now Ethan. Ethan most of all. So the truth is that before I met these people it was just me and my loneliness. But now it's better.

Still, though, I am sad about what my Dad said.

"Maybe," I say. "A little."

"What's it about?"

"Nothing much."

"But something."

"Well, maybe."

He doesn't say anything for a while, but there it is. That question is just hanging in the air and it's in no hurry to go away.

"My Dad thinks I'm a faggot," I say.

"Hum," he says. And then seems to be thinking about what I just told him. I look away. Pretend to be liking the sunset.

Then I hear him say, "So, do you think you're a faggot?"

Course my first thought is to lie. Or not answer. Or just to leave. If it was anybody else that asked me if it thought I was a faggot, I'd just leave. But Ethan isn't trying to make fun of me. He really wants to know what I think. So I just tell him the truth. "I don't know," I say. "I like to dress up as a girl. I guess that makes me one."

"What was going on?" Ethan asks. "Did he catch you wearing your girl things?"

"No. It was something else."

"What?"

"I got into a fight at school, and he saw that I had this bruise on my face, and asked me about it."

"I didn't notice any bruise," he says.

I turned my head so he could see it. "Since I been here today, I tried to hide it from you by only letting you see the other side of my face."

"Why?"

"I didn't want to tell you about the fight."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I was embarrassed I guess."

"Who did you fight with?"

"Sam McGinley."

"Did Sam get any bruises?"

"No. See, it wasn't a fight, really. He just beat me up. I just held my hands in front of my face."

"So that's why your Dad said you were a sissy?"

"Yeah. He knew I didn't fight back."

"Were you afraid I would think you were a sissy?"

"I guess."

"I don't think you are a sissy. At least not in a bad way. Maybe being a sissy isn't a bad thing."

"How is it not a bad thing?"

"Well, some girls seem more like boys, and we call them 'tom-boys'. And nobody seems to think that's a bad way to be. Some boys seem more like girls. And some people call them 'sissy-boys'. Well, maybe being a sissy-boy is no worse than being a tom-boy. Maybe it's not even bad at all."

"I am more like a girl than most boys are," I say.

"You are," Ethan says. "But that's not a bad thing."

"Maybe not," I say. "Except when you get beat up."

"Yes," he says. "Then it is a problem. So what started the fight?"

This was a really hard question to answer, Dear Diary. But I decided to try to trust him. I mean about his loving me whatever I tell him about me. "He said I was staring at Michael Cherry's butt."

"Michael Cherry's in your class isn't he?"

"Yeah."

"How could you see Michael Cherry's butt?"

"In the locker room. We were taking showers after gym class."

"I see. And were you staring at his butt?"

I squirmed a bit but then I think about how I really do want to tell him about me. All about me. And see if he still likes me. Like he says he will. "Maybe a little," I said. "Not very much. I didn't mean to, but maybe a little."

"And Sam saw you doing that."

"Yeah."

"And that's why your Dad said that he thinks you're a faggot?"

"I didn't tell Dad about Michael's butt. Just that Sam called me a sissy."

"That must have hurt a lot when your Dad called you a faggot," Ethan said. I begin to cry. I try not to show it.

Crying when people are around is like getting a boner at the wrong time. You don't want people to notice. But he does notice things.

"Come here," he says. I look up at him. He motions to me to come over to the couch where he is. So I do. When I get close enough he lifts me up and sits me down on his lap. It feels really good to be sitting here. He rubs my hair. Then he examines the bruise on my face. And now I am crying and not even trying to hide it. Just crying. He holds me tight and says he can see how that must have hurt - that stuff my Dad said. Then he sort of rocks me. I want to stay here forever. I am crying but I am also kind of happy. The crying sort of feels good in a funny kind of way. He doesn't rush to do anything. Just holds me and lets me cry.

Finally I stop crying so much and say, "I don't know why I do those things," I said finally.

"Like looking at Michael's butt?"

"Yeah."

"Well, maybe he does have a cute butt."

I never knew a grownup to say a thing like that. It seemed funny, so I laughed. This made him laugh too. So then we were both laughing and all at once it didn't seem so bad anymore. "What about it?" he asks. "Does he have a cute butt?"

"Yes," I said. "He does."

Then he says something sort of quiet like. I can't believe I understood it right. "What's that?" I ask.

"I think faggots are good people," he says.

There is no mistaking it. That is just what he said. Nobody ever said that to me so I have to think about it a bit.

I wonder why he would say it. Then I have an idea why he might think that. "Are you one?" I ask him.

"Sometimes," he says.

"Sometimes? What's that mean - sometimes?"

"Sometimes I love women, and sometimes I love men," he says. Then he is quiet for a little bit. "And sometimes I love boys," he adds. "In fact I think I love boys most of all."

I look up into his face which is real close to mine now. "Like you would want to marry one?" I ask.

He laughs. "I never thought about doing that," he says. "I don't know. Maybe it would be nice."

You could marry me, I am thinking. Yes. You could marry me. That would be happy. I would cook you things and we could watch sunsets like this every night, as least when it was warm. Yes. I would like that. But of course I can't tell him this. Not even Ethan. I can't tell him that.

Boy Things and Girl Things

Ethan cuddles Simon in his lap while he thinks about boy and girl things.

I used to fight with other boys now and then. Not a lot, but sometimes. I fought like a boy. But still, I was androgynous like Simon. I liked to do 'girl things'. I liked to sew and cook. And I would babysit with little kids when I was 12 or 13. I was very good at it.

I am sitting on Andrew's bed with him and his sister Becky. I'm reading them a bedtime story. Andrew is about nine and Becky about eleven. Andrew has pulled his penis out through the opening in his pajamas. He is playing with it.

"Don't play with your penis," Becky says.

"It itches."

"Well, leave it alone. You know what Mom says."

I imagine that his Mom told him not to play with his penis. Andrew pulls it back into his pajamas. I don't say anything during all this. I'm sort of interested in his penis. And too embarrassed to say anything about it. I finish the story and Becky goes to her own room. I stay with Andrew just a minute or two longer to rub his back a bit. Then I get up to go downstairs. As I pass Becky's room I see her changing into her pajamas. She didn't have them on while I read them the story. She is naked with her back turned to me. I think her butt is very pretty. But I was interested in Andrew's penis too. These feelings are exciting, but I don't do anything about them. I think it's best just to ignore them.

All the kids I babysit with like me a lot. I play games with them and read them stories and give them back scratches. So they ask for me when their parents need a babysitter.

A thirteen-year-old boy would never be allowed to babysit these days. Even then it was unusual. I would have been teased at school if they knew.

I didn't name those feelings, nor act on them. I was too afraid. But I knew they were there. In the ones I babysat with as well as in me. Was it an accident that his penis itched just then, or that she left her door open?

I was a boy/girl in my own way like Simon is. But I think I had more of the boy in the mix. I also loved football and climbing trees. And I would fight back. It never occurred to me to just let someone beat me up without fighting back.

I am fighting with Terry. He is a year older than I am and is bigger. I can't beat him. We wrestle around in the chipped and broken cement of the driveway between our houses. I am wiry and tough so he can't win either. He is trying to get a grip on me so he can hit me or twist my arm or something and make me give. I keep wiggling out of his grip. I don't know how much longer I can keep this up. He really is stronger than I am. Then my mother comes out of the house and makes us stop fighting. She doesn't like Terry. She thinks he is a bully. I don't think he is a bully. I'm not one either. We were just fighting. Mostly he is my friend. We'll make up and be friends again. I don't know what we were fighting about.

Simon does have some of the boy stirred into the stew that makes up what he is. When he is an Indian, he is a boy Indian. He plays at being a hunter and a warrior. Do all boys have a bit of the hunter in them, and a bit of the warrior? Is male bonding a matter of "Hi, guys, let's go out and kill something"? To want to protect, to defend oneself and one's loved ones and to bring home food is not necessarily the same as wanting to kill. Yet men (and some women) do hunt even when there is no need to for food. But killing other human beings? That doesn't come as natural as Hobbs and his disciples might think. Dave Grossman did a study called 'On Killing' that dealt with that. That info about how most soldiers in the Civil war probably didn't shoot at each other was surprising.

Author of the Civil War Collector's Encyclopedia, F A Lord, tells us that after the battle of Gettysburg, 27,574 muskets were recovered from the battlefield. Of these, nearly 90% (24,000) were loaded. 12,000 of these loaded muskets were found to be loaded more than once, and 6000 of the multiple loaded weapons had from 3 to 10 rounds loaded in the barrel. One weapon had been loaded 23 times. Why, then, were so many loaded weapons available on the battlefield, and why did at least 12,000 soldiers misload their weapons in combat?

... a loaded weapon was a precious commodity on the black-powder battlefield. During the stand-up, face-to-face, short range battles of this era a weapon should have been loaded for only a fraction of the time in battle. More than 95% of the time was spent in loading the weapon, and less than 5% and firing it. If most soldiers were desperately attempting to kill as quickly and efficiently as they could, then 95% should have been shot with an empty weapon in their hand, and any loaded, cocked, and primed weapons dropped in on the battlefield would have been snatched up from wounded or dead comrades and fired.

... if there is such a desperate need in all soldiers to fire their weapons in combat, then many of these men should have died with an empty weapon. And as the uneven flow of battle passed over these weapons, many of them should have been picked up and fired at the enemy.

And they found the same kind of thing was true in other wars. Grossman concluded that most soldiers weren't at all interested in killing enemies.

Most of them appear to not even to have wanted to fire in the enemy's general direction.

Why, he asks did all these soldiers refuse to kill enemy soldiers – why did they risk their own lives to avoid doing so? He quotes a soldier who gave a lot of thought to this – a general Marshall. He concluded that men, on the whole, just do not want to kill other men.

... Marshall ... concluded that "the average and healthy individual... has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance toward killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from the responsibility. ... at the vital point," says Marshall the soldier "becomes a conscientious objector"

Mind-bending examples that destroy the comic book image of war that most who have never been there have in their heads. Like the tunnel rat who found a Viet Cong eating lunch.

Then I cautiously raised the upper half of my body into the tunnel until I was lying flat on my stomach. When I felt comfortable, I placed my Smith & Wesson 38 caliber snub-nose (sent to me by my father for tunnel work) beside the flashlight and switched on the light, illuminating the tunnel.

There, not more than 15 feet away, set a Viet Cong eating a handful of rice from a pouch on his lap. We looked at each other for what seemed to be an eternity, but in fact was probably only a few seconds.

Maybe it was the surprise of actually finding someone else there, or maybe it was the absolute innocence of the situation, but neither one of us reacted.

After a moment, he put his pouch of rice on the floor of the tunnel beside him, turned his back to me and slowly started crawling away. I, in turn, switched off my flashlight, before slipping back into the lower tunnel and making my way back to the entrance. About 20 minutes later, we received word that another squad had killed a VC emerging from a tunnel 500 meters away.

Michael Kathman – Triangle Tunnel Rat

Those two guys didn't look much like "killer apes". But some others had fewer scruples, it seems. Maybe because they were in a group, and felt pressured to do what soldiers are supposed to do. How to put it all together? Must we be killer apes to be real men?

Simon feels humiliated. He's not a 'real man'. He didn't even try to throw a punch. To be humiliated may be the worst pain a man can know. Outside of systematic physical torture. The same for women? Probably, but what they feel humiliated about might not be the same. Men fight to avoid humiliation more than anything else. Or to regain respect once they have been humiliated. That's why bullying is so dangerous. That is being better understood.

Bullying isn't something that's new, says Barbara Walters of Kanawha County schools. In the past it's been a rite of passage, and something shrugged off as child's play.

"Nowadays, kids don't turn the other cheek from it, they pull out guns and knives," Walters said. The Columbine High School shootings in Colorado and other incidents like it have brought much-needed attention to bullying, she said.

This year, Kanawha County is promoting an anti-bullying policy in its school system. Students began learning about the harmful effects of bullying and other forms of harassment and intimidation when most schools started earlier this week.

Last year, the state Legislature passed a law requiring all county school systems to follow anti-bullying policies. After missing the deadline by about four months, the state Board of Education finally provided basic bullying, harassment and intimidation guidelines for schools to use.

... Bullying is defined by the county as the use of power by one or more persons to repeatedly and consistently inflict physical, verbal or emotional abuse on one or more other persons. The definition includes both students and staff.

Hope they don't overdo this, and make a federal case of it every time one boy says a mean thing to another one. The growing awareness is good, but that 'zero tolerance' attitude could mess this up.

Nations and other groups, as well as individuals, can be bullies. The Charleston Gazette has been surprisingly good at pointing this out.

The Charleston Gazette – September 25, 2002
Molly Ivens

... 'The National Security Strategy of the United States – 2002' is repellent, unnecessary and, above all, impractical.

Americans are famous for pragmatism, and we need a good dose of common sense right now. This will not work.

All the experts tell us anti-Americanism thrives on the perception that we are arrogant, that we care nothing for what the rest of the world thinks. Even our innocent mistakes are often blamed on obnoxious triumphalism. The announced plan of this administration for world domination reinforces every paranoid, anti-American prejudice on this earth. This plan is guaranteed to produce more terrorists. Even if this country were to become some insane, 21st-century version of Sparta - armed to teeth, guards on every foot of our borders - we would still not be safe.

... In what is indeed a dangerous and uncertain world, we need the cooperation of other nations as never before. Under this doctrine, we claim the right to first-strike use of nuclear weapons and "unannounced pre-emptive strikes." That means surprise attacks. Happy Pearl Harbor Day. We have just proclaimed ourselves Bully of the World.

All the world hates a bully. So they say. And they are giving some attention to this in schools now. Are trying to protect people from bullies. But does a 'real boy' even need protection from bullies? Shouldn't he just refuse to take any shit off of anyone? Shouldn't he at least try to fight back, even if he can't win?

Are there even 'boy things' and 'girl things'? Well, I think there are, though it's not certain what all of them might be. Girls are more interested in babies and better with them when they become women. In general. Always it's just in general. And boys in general are more likely to fight and have a greater passion for hunting. Fighting and things like that used to be more useful to their groups when there were enemies that had to be fought off, deer that needed to be killed for food or lions lurking in the bushes. In general – on the average – there are differences.

The two sexes split off from a common source. The sex organs of both males and females grow out of the same pre-structures. Ovaries become testicles. Outer labia become the scrotum. The uterus the prostate gland. The clitoris the penis. Variations on a theme. Very similar in some respects, yet quite different in others. Testosterone does make a difference. Boys on the average are different from girls.

Richard Green wrote a book called 'Sissy boy syndrome', in which he describes how at a very early age two distinct kinds of boys can be described. The members of the one group, that he calls 'feminine boys', generally speaking become homosexual in adulthood. The other group are not stereotypically feminine when they are very small, and almost never become homosexual as adults.

I call one group 'feminine boys'. Other children called them 'sissy'. Although tagged with that unhappy label, these boys differed from many other boys also called 'sissy'. Our boys would have preferred being girls. They liked to dress in girls' or women's clothes. They prefer Barbie dolls to trucks. Their playmates were girls. When they played 'Mommy-Daddy' games, they were Mommy. And they avoid rough-and-tumble play in sports, the usual reasons for the epithet 'sissy'. By contrast, our second group of boys was conventionally masculine. They were content being boys, dressed in boys' clothes, preferred truck play, played with boys, role-played as Daddy, and enjoyed rough-and-tumble play and sports.

Richard Green – from Sissy Boy Syndrome

Seems like some stereotypes may have a bit of truth in them. It could be genetic. I don't know. It does seem that the mix of things that we will be is set pretty early in life. Yet lots of things have already happened by the time a boy is four or five. It's complicated. Probably a mixture of causes. Whatever the origins of our diversity might be, it seems clear that everybody has a bit of both sexes mixed into their love-maps. For some the nature of their mix makes them outliers. Puts them toward the ends of the bell shaped curves. Sissy boys and tom boys. Simon is one of those. A sissy boy. Why do I love sissies so much, and this one in particular?

And why should we pathologize the ends of the bell shaped curves?



Children's Rights

December 26, 2002

Dear Diary,

It was really cold today. If there wasn't any snow I could've still used my bike. I'd just have to put on enough clothes. But it was snowing a little bit, so Mom said she would take me to Ethan's as soon as Dad left. Dad was home for Christmas yesterday. He bought me an Apple computer and a really nice leather coat. I can't complain about the things he buys for me, but I wish he could be nicer.

It was an OK Christmas. Mom fixed a really cool Christmas dinner, and we listened to Christmas music while we ate. That was great.

Dad left at about 11:00, and Mom took me by to see Ethan right after lunch. And did I ever have a great time there! It was like I had two Christmases.

Ethan bought me a couple of videos, and five books and some girl clothes. He said I could keep the girl clothes at his place. One of the books he got me was about a place called Summerhill. It was sort of a picture book. Summerhill is a school. It was started by a guy named A.S. Neil.

"I would like to go to a school like that," I said.

"Do you like the one you go to?" he asked.

"I hate it."

"Why?"

"Because they are always trying to make me learn things I don't care about," I said. "Boring things." Then I realized I might have hurt his feelings. "Except your class," I added. "I like your class."

"I like having you in it," he said.

"But it's not as much fun as this."

"This?"

"You know. Being here. You teach me all kinds of things here. It's sort of like our own little Summerhill."

"I would love to start a place like that," he said. "Or even work in a place like that."

"Why don't you?"

"It's not so easy," he says. "And it's almost impossible to bring Neill's philosophy into a public school."

"What is his philosophy?"

"That children should have rights. That they should be able to decide most things for themselves just like adults do."

I had never heard this idea before, so I stop and think about it a bit. Finally I say, "Mostly I think that would be good. But what if kids wanted to do something dangerous?"

"That's a hard one," he says. "I guess if it's really dangerous, like they might get themselves killed, a grownup would have to stop them. But other than that, Neill would say they have to decide for themselves what risks they want to take."

"That sounds good," I say.

"A guy who worked with retarded people said the same thing about them. He wrote a little book called 'The Dignity of Risk'. He said they should be able to make their own decisions."

"I don't think I'm retarded," I say. "But I think my friend, Orville, is. And he likes to make his own decisions."

"Good for him."

So after the supper and presents we snuggle in the big chair in front of his fireplace and he reads to me. Like I said before, I could read this book myself. But this is our way of sharing it. It's from Moomintroll Midwinter. Moomintroll has seen winter for the first time. He doesn't know whether he likes it or not. He is wandering through the woods at night.

And then he caught sight of the light. It was quite small, and yet filled all the wood with its mild red glow.

Moomintroll calmed down. He ... continued slowly on his way, looking toward the light, and till at last he saw that it was an ordinary candle, thrust steadily upright in the snow. Around it stood a small sugar_loaf of a house, built of round snowballs. They looked transparent and slightly orange_yellow, like the shade of the oil_lamp at home.

On the other side of the lamp someone had dug herself a cozy hole, someone who lay looking up at the serene winter sky and whistling very softly to herself.

"What song is that?" Moomintroll asked.

"It's a song of myself," someone answered from the pit. "A song of Too-ticky, who built a snow_lantern, but the refrain is about wholly other things."

"I see," Moomintroll said and seated himself in the snow.

"No, you don't," replied Too-ticky genially and rose up enough to show her red and white sweater. "Because the refrain is about the things one can't understand. I'm thinking about the Aurora Borealis. You can't tell if it really does exist or if it just looks like existing. All things are so very uncertain, and that's exactly what makes me feel reassured."

She lay down in the snow again and continued looking up at the sky. It was quite black by now. Moomintroll also put up his nose and looked at the sparkling northern lights that probably no Moomintroll before him had ever seen. They were white and blue and a little green, and they draped the sky in long, fluttering curtains.

"I think it exists," he said.

Too-ticky did not reply. She crawled up to the snow_lantern and lifted out her candle.

"We'll take this home," she said. "Before the Groke comes and sits down on it."

Moomintroll nodded gravely. He had seen the Groke once. An August night, long ago. Cold and gray, like a lump of ice, she had squatted in the shadows of the lilac bushes and just looked at him. But what a look! And when she slunk away, the ground was frosted white where she had sat.

For a moment Moomintroll wondered whether winter itself weren't something that ten thousand Grokes had made by squatting on the ground. But he decided to take up this matter later when he knew Too-ticky a little better.

We Were Like Sisters

January 11, 2003

Dear Diary,

Phoebe came for a visit yesterday. It was Saturday so we didn't have to go to school the next day. That's today, Sunday. She stayed overnight!! Can you believe that? My Mom said it was OK, and so did her Mom. My Dad wasn't at home. He's gone a whole lot nowadays - on business I guess. I don't know just where he is, but if he's gone that's good. Mom seems to know when he's likely to show up. But sometimes he does things you don't expect. So I was a little worried. So here is what happened.

Phoebe came for supper. Mom didn't drink anything the whole time Phoebe was here. That way she could make a really nice supper. I told Mom that Phoebe and her Mom were vegetarians so she made vegetarian burritos. We ate them with some salsa and sour cream. They were really good. And we had some broccoli too. And some ice cream for dessert. Mom can really cook good when she wants to. It was already getting dark when we ate, so I fixed the table up with candles. It was very romantic.

I put on my girl clothes for this. That way Phoebe and me were like sisters. After supper we watched videos, and then put on our pajamas and went to bed. Mom had put clean sheets on my bed. She thought of everything.

Then we lay awake in my bed talking about things for a long time. How I wish I really did have a sister like her. I told her that.

But you know, Dear Diary, pretending is a pretty good thing. We talked about pretending and real. I mean when I am being a girl is that just pretend? OK. I've got a dick, so that makes me a boy, I guess. But if my brain is more like a girl's, then which is more important? The dick or the brain?

I asked Phoebe this, only I didn't say 'dick'. I just said 'my privates'. She said she didn't know. She thought maybe the brain was more important.

"Maybe there are just people that are sort of in-between," she says. "My mama told me that. She says maybe you were just one of those people who is sort of in-between. That seems right to me."

"By the way," she adds. "I have a message from my Mom."

"What's that?"

"She says that she really likes your article."

"My article?"

"The one on men and boys loving each other. Well, that's the name you gave it. But it's really about how all kinds of people love each other."

"I wrote that a long time ago," I said.

"It was just a few months ago," she said.

"Still. That's a long time."

"Well, she said she meant to tell you this, but never seemed to find the right time. You and her aren't together much. And she wanted you to know. She keeps it in a folder where she keeps things of mine that she likes. You know, pictures I made and things like that."

Well, Dear Diary, I can tell you that really made me feel proud. Not only did she like it, but she is keeping it for good. It was sort of like I was a family member. Like a half sister to Phoebe or something like that.

And just like sisters, we talked almost all night. Well, it seemed that way. But when I woke up to go pee, it was only about 1:30, so I guess we did fall asleep.

After breakfast Phoebe's Mom came to pick her up.

Dad might be coming home today. And we didn't know just when. So I was a little worried when her Mom came in and talked a while with my Mom while they drank coffee. I knew that they just wanted to talk by themselves so I didn't go and sit with them.

But I went to the kitchen door and waved at her and smiled.
I thought if Dad came in then, and saw me playing cards with
Phoebe, he might ask too many questions.

But Phoebe and her Mom left and Dad still isn't home, so it was
all right.

Camelot

January 21, 2003

Dear Diary,

Yesterday was Martin Luther King Day. The day before that we all got together for supper at Helen's. That was really great. We watched a movie together after supper. It was a musical called 'Camelot'. I loved the songs.

*I know it sounds a bit bizarre,
But in Camelot, Camelot
That's how conditions are.
The rain may never fall till after sundown.
By eight, the morning fog must disappear.
In short, there's simply not
A more congenial spot
For happily-ever-aftering than here
In Camelot.*

It was a really good story, but it was too sad. Phoebe came with her mother. My Mom was invited, but she didn't come. She's too shy about going out to see people. And of course Ethan was there. Orville and my Mom were the only ones missing.

Ethan said that he chose this movie in memory of Martin Luther King Jr. He said King was a lot like King Arthur, and that the movement he led was like a big Camelot. A lot of what King did was successful. Like desegregation really did happen. But a lot of his ideas were not successful. Like we keep on having wars and poverty and hatred and all those things he was against. Still, just to change one big thing like segregation was pretty important.

Well, like I said, the movie was really sad. When it ends, Lancelot and King Arthur are going to fight each other in a big battle. I think Lancelot will win and King Arthur will get killed. But any way it ends has got to be sad. So I asked, "Why does it have to end so sad?" We were all just sitting on the couch or the

floor staring at the TV screen. The movie just ended. I didn't ask anybody in particular. Just anybody who wanted to tell me the answer. For a little bit nobody said anything. Finally Ethan said, "Every Camelot contains the seeds of its own destruction." Well, that sounds pretty important even if I don't exactly understand it. It's like one of those complicated things that him and Helen sometimes say. So I write it down. I have to ask him to repeat it. That's how come I got it just right for you, Dear Diary.

After I finish writing it down, I say "So what does that mean?"

So Helen explains it. I couldn't get all her words written down, so I'll just have to say it as best I can. Camelots, she says, are those special times in our lives when we are with people we love and everything is going right. I think this is pretty close to her words.

"You mean like us people here who found each other and are friends," I say.

"Yes," she says. "We have a sort of Camelot here." And she explains that they just seem to happen sometimes. That we can't make them happen. And when they do happen, they make us really happy. But not completely. Nothing is perfect. Not even Camelots. They are the most happy we will ever be. But they can only last a little while.

So I am thinking, that really sucks. "Why?" I ask. "If we are careful how come we can't make a Camelot go on forever? Or at least as long as we live."

This causes an argument. Ethan says it's because the world hates Camelots. He thinks the 'establishment' (that's what he calls the rulers) are afraid of them. Helen doesn't think he has it quite right. She thinks the 'seeds' that destroy Camelots are on the inside - not on the outside. Something like that.

Well, she and Ethan argue about this for a while. It's too much for me to follow. Much less write down. I sort of understand what they are saying here and there. But mostly it's like that Freud book. There are too many big words. But finally they seem to figure it out and then they agree. I think what they agree was that it was something from the outside that someone brought inside. The seeds, I mean. The seeds that destroy the Camelot.

They were something they get on the outside and bring inside. They both seem OK with that. I mean that idea about the outside and the inside. I still don't quite get it. The only thing I am sure I understand is that Camelots can't go on forever. They agree on that. Why they can't go on still isn't very clear to me. But that's the best I can do, Dear Diary.

So that was last night. Today at school I saw Orville.

"You went to see Helen yesterday," he says.

"How did you know that?" I ask.

"Phoebe told me."

"What did she say?"

"She says you watched a really good movie. And how she missed me."

"We did miss you," I say.

"How come you didn't invite me?"

"Because we knew your Dad wouldn't let you come," I say. "You told us he never lets you go anywhere at night except to see your uncle."

He knew I was right. But he wasn't OK with that. "You could of asked me," he said.

I told him that I thought that would just make it worse. It would be like reminding him of things he can't do.

"I get left out a lot," he says.

Well, he's right. But that's not because we do it on purpose. We can't help it if his Dad won't let him do anything. "I am sorry that you can't always come," I say.

"Sometimes I think you don't want me," he says.

Well, I don't think that's true. But I can't seem to convince him. He just remembers times he couldn't be with us and doesn't think about how it wasn't our fault. I mean it wasn't something Phoebe and I did.

So that's about it, Dear Diary.

Except all at once I do remember one other thing. When she was talking about how no Camelot can last, Helen said, "All that will remain is memories. But those memories are important." And she sang the last song from the movie. She knew it by heart. I had her write the words down for me.

Here they are.

ARTHUR:

*Each evening, from December to December,
Before you drift to sleep upon your cot,
Think back on all the tales that you remember
Of Camelot.
Ask ev'ry person if he's heard the story,
And tell it strong and clear if he has not,
That once there was a fleeting wisp of glory
Called Camelot.
Camelot! Camelot!
Now say it out with pride and joy!*

TOM:

Camelot! Camelot!

ARTHUR:

*Yes, Camelot, my boy!
Where once it never rained till after sundown,
By eight a.m. the morning fog had flown ...
Don't let it be forgot
That once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment that was known
As Camelot.*

For an old person she can sing really good.

The Snow Storm

February 17, 2003

Dear Diary,

Wow!!! What a day and a night I had. And this morning was awesome too!! How shall I begin?

Well, I guess the amazing part began with the snow storm. No. It was even before that. It was when Mom said I could stay overnight at Ethan's house. That was Friday night. Dad wouldn't like that, but he was out of town. Wasn't supposed to be back until Sunday night. Well, he still isn't back and here it is Monday night. The plane schedules are all messed up. Wow! That storm did a lot of wonderful things for me.

But back to Friday night. Well, they were predicting a storm but nobody thought it would be this big. At least I didn't. It was sort of rainy and messy at first, but Ethan and I were fine. His house isn't fancy. It's pretty old. But he has a big stone fireplace that is great. And a wood stove for heating and another one for cooking. So on Friday night we just sat around the fire that he made in the fireplace and talked about things. We always got a lot to talk about. I am in my skirt - the one he helped me make. I have a long sleeve pullover kind of shirt on, that matches the skirt. Well, the skirt has a pattern, and the shirt is just one color. But it's a red that is like a red in the skirt pattern. So they go together.

It's a bit chilly in his house. So he asks if I want to cuddle with him. I do. He's in that big easy chair he has. So I come and sit on his lap and he puts a blanket over us so we will be warm. And he reads me a story about Salamander County. It's a story he wrote. He said that he first told it while he was a camp counselor some years ago. He let me bring it home with me to read.

This is how it began:

Every eleven years the Great Toad appears in Salamander County. When this happens it is known as the Year of the Toad. Those who are born in the Year of the Toad are a special breed. They are not better or worse than others, but they have special abilities. They are the creators. They use their powers in many different ways. Some become saints, and others criminals. Still others create new ways of living together. The creativity of many is so unobtrusive that they are hardly noticed – until they are gone.

When the Toad is to appear in Salamander County everyone born in the Year of the Toad feels a certain restlessness. They want to go someplace or do something, but they are unclear both about where they might want to go or what it is they want to do. Some are fortunate enough to have heard of Salamander County, and the Great Toad. They know what their restlessness is about, and by dreams, omens and intuitions they are guided to Salamander County. If they see the Great Toad they learn how to harness their powers and use them for good. But Salamander County is a magic place that is full of surprises and dangers. Not everyone who enters Salamander County comes out again.

He says that I am born in the year of the toad. Well, I don't know. But Mom is calling me for supper, so I have to go for now, Dear Diary. But I'll be back. There is still lots to tell.

Here I am again. So after the story I am really sleepy and we go to bed. He has a cot which he says I can sleep on but I ask if I could sleep in the same bed with him. He says OK. So I took off my pullover shirt and skirt and get into bed with just my underpants on. When he gets into bed he scratches my back until I get sleepy. That really feels good.

On Saturday it rained. They said it would snow, but I thought it would just rain. It was too warm for snow. It wasn't a great day outside. So we spend the day inside, cooking and looking at things under the microscope and things like that. I wear my skirt and long sleeve top again. He has a nice fire going in his wood stove, so it's kind of warm. He told me I looked pretty in my skirt. I love it when he uses the 'pretty' word. I think he really means it.

So that was a good day. But that wasn't all that happened. I thought I might leave this out, Dear Diary. But I promised to tell you everything that was important to me. Everything! What I'm going to tell is a little embarrassing, but I liked it a lot.

After supper we take a shower together. He has it fixed up so you can stand in his bathtub and take a shower. It's not big and fancy like the one we have here at home, but it works. You have to pull a shower curtain around it to keep the water from getting on the floor.

Of course since we are naked I can see his dick. It's lots bigger than mine. I like being naked with him. Dad never lets us be naked together. Not that I would much like it with him. So I tell Ethan that his dick is really big. He said it's only ordinary sized for a man and that mine will get bigger when I get older. But he says mine is nice just as it is.

So then I start to get a boner. He notices when I try to hide it, and says it's all right. So I let him see it. So then he starts to get one too. Wow. It's really big. That's all that happens in the shower. Well, no, that's not quite all. Then he picks me up and hugs me and kisses me on my mouth. On my mouth, Dear Diary! Wow, was that nice. He really loves me!

When the sun goes down it gets colder and we get a fire going in the fireplace again. I put on some sweat pants that I have that have flowers on them and this time I don't waste any time getting into his lap. He reads to me from a Moomintroll book. This one is called 'Moominland Midwinter'. He read something from it once before. It's really important, Dear Diary, to tell you about this book, because of what happened that night and the next day. He ran off a copy of this whole story for me to bring home, too, so here's how it begins.

They always slept from November to April, because such was the custom of their forefathers, and Moomins stick to tradition. They all had a good meal of pine needles in their stomachs, just as their ancestors used to have, and beside their beds each had hopefully laid out everything likely to be needed in early spring: spades, burning-glasses and films, wind-gauges, and the like.

The silence was deep and expectant.

Every now and then somebody sighed and curled deeper down under the quilt.

The streak of moonlight wandered from rocking chair to drawing room table, crawled over the brass knobs of the bed and, and shone straight in Moomintroll's face.

And now something happened that had never happened before, not since the first Moomin took to his hibernating den. Moomintroll awoke and found that he couldn't go back to sleep again.

He looked at the moonlight and the ice ferns on the windows. He listened to the humming of the stove in the cellar and felt more and more awake and astonished. Finally he rose and padded over to the Momminmamas's bed. He pulled at her ear very cautiously, but she didn't awake. She just curled into an uninterested ball. "If not even mother wakes up it's no use trying the others," Moomintroll thought and went along by himself on a round through the unfamiliar and mysterious house. All the clocks had stopped ages ago and a fine coat of dust covered everything. On the drawing room table still stood the soup tureen with pine needles left over from November. And inside its gauze dress the cut glass chandelier was softly jingling to itself.

All at once Moomintroll felt frightened and stopped short in the warm darkness beside the streak of moonlight. He was so terribly lonely.

"Mother! Wake up!" Moomintroll shouted. "All the world's got lost!" He went back and pulled at her quilt. But Moominmama didn't wake up. For a moment her dreams of summer became uneasy and troubled, but she wasn't able to open her eyes. Moomintroll curled up on her bed mat, and the long winter night went on.

So after he finishes reading this we go to bed, and we cuddle and he scratches my back like the night before. This time he takes my underpants off and does my butt too. I let him. It feels good. So this was a good night too.

Well, very early in the morning I wake up. I have to pee. I'm still naked. It's kind of cold in his house, but I am still warm from the bed, so I don't feel it too much. I go pee and then wander around the house for a little bit. It feels very exciting to be naked in his house.

Everything looks different in the little bit of light from the night light in the bedroom, and the bathroom light. We leave it on at night. And there is still a little rosy glow from the hot coals in the fireplace. So I light a candle. He has candles all over his house. So there is a little light from that too. Then I go over to the window and look out. I can only see a little ways. The ground is covered with snow. And it's snowing like I have never seen it snow before. It's a real blizzard.

It's like I am in a different land. And I think maybe this is the real land. It's hard to explain. But it's the most magic thing that ever happened to me.

The next morning isn't just nice. It's like a miracle. I'm still in that magic land. It's still snowing really hard and already it is getting deep. It's like I woke up in the Moomintroll book! Like I am in a fairy tale land. So we make waffles for ourselves. Actually I am the one that makes them, just like he taught me the day before. And they turn out good. We have maple syrup with them. And we split and share a cantaloupe together. That and orange juice make a great breakfast.

It snows all day long. It's the deepest snow I have ever seen. And don't we have fun!! We make a big snowman in his yard. It's awesome. He puts a stocking cap and a scarf on it. And we go sledding. It takes a little work to get the snow packed down so we can slide on it, but there is a great hill near his house that is just right for sledding. We get it working just fine. It's great sliding down that hill on his sled. When we sled he sits on the back and I sit in front between his legs, leaning back on him. I wonder why he has a sled. So I ask him if he goes sledding.

He says no.

"So why do you have a sled?" I ask.

"Because I thought that this winter it might snow enough for us to go sledding," he said. "So I wanted to have one handy."

Did you get that, Dear Diary? He bought that sled just so me and him could go sledding if it happened to snow. He bought it for me.

For lunch we have sandwiches and fruit and milk. The sandwiches are just ordinary ones - peanut butter with Mrs Miller's Blueberry Jam, but they taste better than any sandwiches I ever ate. Maybe it's that jam.

All afternoon we play in the snow - making things, sledding, exploring around and throwing snowballs at each other. It's wonderful. WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL! That evening we have another of those casseroles he makes. Each one is a little different. Then we get a fire going again in the fireplace. He teaches me how to do that. And I cuddle with him. While I sit on his lap he reads some more from the Moomintroll book. Stuff about the snow storm.

Here's a little part of it that I thought was funny.

It was the first snowfall since the New Year's, and Moomintroll was greatly surprised.

One flake after the other landed on his warm nose and melted away. He caught several in his paw to admire them for a fleeting moment; he looked for the sky and saw them sinking down straight at him, more and more, softer and lighter than the bird's down.

"Oh, it's like this," thought Moomintroll. "I believed it simply formed on the ground somehow."

The air was milder. There was nothing in sight except falling snow, and Moomintroll was caught by the same kind of excitement he used to feel at times when he was wading out for a swim. He threw his bathing gown off, and threw himself headlong into a snow drift.

"So that's winter, too!" He thought. "You can even like it!"

That part about how he thought that maybe it just formed on the ground all by itself really made me laugh.

I think that this was the happiest day in my life, Dear Diary. I never knew that so much happiness could happen in one day. And yet still more things happened, but I'm worn out writing so much now. I'll have to tell about it tomorrow.

The Wonderful Night

February 17, 2003

Dear Diary,

So like I said yesterday, lots of other things happened too. And one special thing. But how am I going to tell you about it? Well, last night was wonderful. But it's kind of hard to tell you why. Lots of people wouldn't think it was so wonderful. But it was. See, when we got into bed ...

... but first about the shower.

We take a shower together again, and he picks me up and hugs me. I mean he is really strong. Maybe not as strong as Red or Paul. But still pretty strong. So I'm not THAT big. But I'm not all that little either. I'm just a little smaller than average for my age. And he does it like it's easy. And he holds me real close and, like I said, he hugs me. I mean, we both have boners, but that seems OK. We aren't even embarrassed. I mean, really, it seems kind of nice. So he kisses me and we get out of the shower. We dry off. Well, he dries me off and dries himself off. But we don't put any clothes back on. We go to bed. Just like that. Naked.

So when we get into the bed we cuddle a lot and he gives me a back scratch, and then I let him scratch wherever he wants to. Like I did the night before. It really feels good. Then he does something else. He touches my dick in a certain way and makes it feel really good. I said I would tell you everything, Dear Diary. So OK. Here goes. I mean it is something that is supposed to be bad, but it felt really good.

Don't get me wrong. He didn't stick his dick in my butt. At school last week I heard some boys talking about what men do to boys. It was after that health class when we were warned not to let men touch us. At recess I heard one of the boys say that

sometimes a man will do that. That he sticks his dick into the boy's butt. I don't know if it's true, but that isn't what Ethan does. It's something else.

He puts my dick in his mouth and sucks on it. Sort of plays with it, you know. With his tongue. I know that sounds really dirty, Dear Diary. But it makes that tickly feeling that sometimes happens when I play with my dick, and wow, does that feel good. And afterwards we cuddle some more and I feel peaceful and really happy.

Anyhow, the next morning the snow stops and the sun came out. It's still a magic land. Just like the Moomintroll story. When Moomintroll woke up and he was in a magic place he had never seen before. What was it that made me so happy? It was the snow. It was the pine trees. They were still green. In fact they never seemed so green before. And the sun. It was all those things that made me happy. But also it was being with Ethan. Phoebe is right. We are lovers.

We ate waffles again, and played in the snow all morning. Then, around noon, the snow plow came by. So after lunch Ethan brought me home. And here I am.



Ethan

All the Lovely Bad Ones

Ethan gets up to urinate in the middle of the night. On the way back to bed he stops at a window and looks out and is reminded of his brother.

Simon asleep in my bed. Lovely child. How excited he is with everything. Will he ever again return to such intensity? My experience and his newness belong together. He learns new things from me, and he helps me remember mysteries I have forgotten.

How bright it is out!

*The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
gave the lustre of midday to objects below,*

This moonlight on the snow brings those two lines to my mind. It's not the night before Christmas now, and no miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer appear before my wondering eyes. It's not even Christmas, and it's too cold for any sensible creature to be out and about. Yet I half expect that a gnome will appear. Or an elf. A fairy. Or a moomintroll.

I used to read 'The Night Before Christmas' poem to my little brother when I was about twelve and he was six or seven. I was young and perhaps can be forgiven for thinking this was one of the great poems of all time. Or that my reading of it was exemplary. But for us it was a great poem and he seemed to like how I read it. So who is to say?

He sits in my lap while I read the poem. I read with great enthusiasm and feeling. He is swept up into the magical scene that is created by the words; I highlight the rhythms and rhymes with verbal emphases like exclamation points.

My brother, whom I nurtured in so many ways, nurtured in return my need for beautiful boys, though I did not of course understand this at the time.

We are at Grandmother's house – a magic place in its own right, even without Christmas. It is the night after Christmas. I am on my new air mattress on the floor and in my new pajamas.

I have wakened in the middle of the night. I am thinking about the glittering of the lights on the tree – how beautiful they were. They are turned off now. I am too excited to go back the sleep right away. I listen to the ticking of the grandfather clock

He dedicates his poems ...

*To all the little children – The happy ones; and sad ones;
The sober and the silent ones; the boisterous and glad ones;
The good ones – Yes, the good ones, too; and all the lovely bad
ones.*

The boys at the Old Swimming Hole, after all, are playing hooky, and almost certainly swimming in the buff. Like me, he looks back on his childhood with a bit of nostalgia – not for the unmitigated happiness of childhood, for it was in fact full of boredom, disappointment and suffering as well as joy – but for its intensity. And now I am like the old man who has come back to visit the swimming hole.

*Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! When I last saw the place,
The scenes was all changed, like the change in my face;
The bridge of the railroad now crosses the spot
Where the old divin'-log lays sunk and fergot.
And I stray down the banks where the trees ust to be --
But never again will theyr shade shelter me!
And I wish in my sorrow I could strip to the soul,
And dive off in my grave like the old swimmin'-hole.*

Some of his poetry verges on being a bit maudlin, I suppose. And perhaps a little corny. Like Norman Rockwell's portrayal of the scene. But do I not resonate with what he is saying? Does the reality of that ancient skinny dipping not shine through those words and metaphors, trite though some of them are? Do I not also wish that there was a place in this world where I could still 'strip to the soul'? Now that's not a bad metaphor.

Really Auden was saying much the same thing, though he skirted more closely to forbidden truths.

*Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,*

It cannot last, Auden reminds us. Nor can we have such joy without opposition and cost. Indeed, he claims, the day will come when ...

*... fashionable madmen raise
Their pedantic boring cry:
Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.*

But tonight I listen to Simon/Simone's soft breathing and I am happy.

On The Eve of War

March 19, 2003

Dear Diary,

I went by to see Ethan this afternoon after school. Wow, was he in a bad mood. I mean all the time we were eating supper he hardly talked to me. And it wasn't a very good supper. Just two frozen dinners. He usually makes something good. I am thinking he must be mad at me. Like maybe he is sorry that we are lovers. Well, he never said we were lovers, exactly. Phoebe said we were lovers. But Ethan said he loved me and that's same thing.

Maybe he's tired of me. Or maybe he decided I wasn't so special after all. I try to get some talk going. But he only says a word or two when I ask him a question. It seems like he doesn't want to talk.

And he doesn't even notice that I don't have my girl clothes on. I don't want to put them on if he is mad at me.

Then after supper he goes into the living room and turns on the Tv. He doesn't even clean up. Most often we clean up together after supper. I wash the dishes and he dries them and puts them away. It's one of my favorite times. We talk about things and joke around. Then we have our desert. That's what we usually do, but this afternoon there is no desert. After he finishes eating he goes in to watch the Tv, and I clean up by myself. There isn't much to it because it was just Tv dinners we had.

When I go into the living room he has the Tv on. I mean he almost never watches Tv. He is watching CNN. They are talking about getting ready to attack Iraq because they have weapons of mass destruction. Also they said that the Iraqis ran those planes into the trade buildings and that they hide Al Qaeda people. Al Qaeda is our enemy.

Pretty soon Ethan is screaming at the Tv. I never saw him like this before. It's like he is crazy.

"It's all fucking lies," he screams. "You fucking bastards are doing it again."

Well, I'm really getting upset now.

"Ethan," I say. "Why are you so mad?"

He turns to me and screams, "It's all fucking lies. It's all just excuses to bomb those people! How can the American people be so stupid?"

"I didn't do it," I say.

And I start to cry. I'm not sure just what it was that I didn't do. I just want to say I didn't do whatever it is that is making him so mad.

Well, he looks at me then. It's like the first time he sees me since I got there.

"My God," he says. "I'm sorry."

He motions for me to come over to him but I'm not sure if I want to.

"Come here," he says. "I'm not going to bite you."

I guess he can see I'm sort of scared. So I go over and he picks me up and puts me on his lap.

"I'm sorry," he says. "Of course you didn't do anything. I'm so sorry." He holds me real close and I can tell he really means it. So I ask him again why he is so mad. He said it's because we were going to kill a lot of people who never harmed us. He calms down as much as he can and tries to explain it to me. He says the Iraqis had no 'weapons of mass destruction', that the Iraqis are no threat to the USA, and that Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were enemies. And he explains that Iraq had nothing at all to do with the planes running into the twin towers. He takes a long time explaining all this. And he shows me an article he cut out of the Charleston Gazette. He said I could take it home with me.

Here is part of that article. It was in the newspaper in January 20 this year (2003).

There is no evidence connecting Iraq to AL-Qaida. As Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio said in a recent speech: "Iraq has not committed any act of aggression against the United States. Iraq was not responsible for 9/11. Iraq was not responsible for the anthrax attack on our nation. The United Nations has yet to establish that Iraq has usable weapons of mass destruction. There is no intelligence that Iraq has the ability to strike at the United States. According to the CIA, Iraq has no intention to attack America, but will defend itself if attacked."

Well, that's exactly what Ethan told me. I mean he didn't say Saddam was a great guy. Just that it was not OK for us to bomb the country.

Then he says again, "I'm sorry I got like that. I don't ever want to make you afraid. It is wonderful to have you in my life." Stuff like that, and I can tell he means it. So when he is really calmed down I say, "I want to go change my clothes."

"Sure," he says. "That would be great."

So I do. I get into my girl clothes. It feels safe to wear them now.

When I come back to the living room he has some ice cream out for us. He says he found some that was left from the last time I came by. That was only a couple of days ago so it is still good.

I get back on his lap while we are eating ice cream. He tells me that he and some others are going to an anti-war demonstration. He says that Phoebe's mother has been in touch with him because of the letters he wrote to the newspaper. And Helen will go too. The demonstration is going to be this weekend in Charleston. They are going to go down there real early Sunday morning and come back Sunday evening.

So I tell him I want to go.

"I don't think that would be a good idea," he says.

"Why not?"

"Because you would get into trouble big time with your father," he says.

"My father doesn't have to know," I say.

"No," he says. "It would just be too risky."

I don't answer him right away. I don't know just what to say. But I am mad.

"Do you want me to read you a story?" he asks.

"No," I say. And I get down off his lap again and go over and sit down on the couch. It's almost like we are playing musical laps. First I'm in it, and then I am out of it. I am pouting. OK. I know that. But it isn't right that he won't let me go.

"I'm sorry," he says.

I don't answer him. I don't say it's all right because it isn't.

Then all at once I know what to say. I think an angel must have whispered it in my ear. "What would Neill say?" I ask.

"Neill?"

"A. S. Neill. The one you told me about. The one that ran that school." It really comes in handy sometimes to take my reporter notes and look at them later. Otherwise I probably wouldn't remember Neill's name.

"Oh, him."

"Yeah. Him. What about all those children's rights you told me about."

Well, I think I have him. He doesn't know what to say. I think he must be a little mad at me. I mean how often does he lose an argument with someone who is only eleven? But I can't stop myself. "And what about that guy who wrote the thing about the 'dignity of risk'? What about him? What would he say?"

He looks down and he seems to think a long time. Then he looks up at me and smiles. "They would say it's your decision," he says.

"So is it?"

"I guess it has to be," he says.

"Don't you want me to come along?"

"I can't think of anything that would make me happier," he says. "It's just that I'm not sure it's safe."

"So it's decided," I say.

"I guess so," he says. "I think it might be an exciting day for both of us. But do you really understand the risks?"

"Will someone hurt us while we are there?"

"They may call us names, but it isn't likely they will hurt us. But I am talking about your Dad."

"I know my Dad," I say. "I know what he might do."

I think it was the first argument I ever won with a grownup. Course I don't argue with them that much. Anyhow, I am going with them to the protest. So maybe I should quote the part of that article in the Gazette where the writer talks about why we should demonstrate. Ethan gave it to me. I guess it's too late to stop the war now, but still, we should demonstrate against it.

This war is not inevitable, and the person who can stop it is you. Today is Dr King's holiday. People all over the country will be rallying and marching in his honor, celebrating not only his eloquent opposition to racism and poverty, but his equally passionate protests against militarism. You get more than a vote in this country. You get to speak up. Write, phone, fax and email your representative, senators and the White House. Vote in the streets. Do it.

"History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people." – Dr King

That's the kind of stuff I want to write when I grow up.



Ethan

The Dignity of Risk

Ethan lies in bed on the eve of the Second Iraqi war. He can't sleep. He thinks about the visit from Simon earlier in the day.

The thing is that for risk to have dignity, it must be real risk. Real risk means that something bad could happen. A person could actually be hurt or lose something of significance. Or even be killed. On the other hand, they could also gain something of significance. That is why the old Outward Bound programs were so effective. The boys on these adventures could actually be hurt. Minimally they would have to face the possibility of failure. To cooperate and to support each other had real consequences. Real relationships developed in that context, and significant bonding took place. For these reasons it was a healing experience. Two groups have been traditionally denied the dignity of risk. The first is children and adolescents. What Persk wrote about the developmentally delayed applies equally to children and adolescents.

The world in which we live is not always safe, secure, and predictable. It does not always say 'please' or 'excuse me'. Every day there is a possibility of being thrown up against a situation where we may have to risk everything, even our lives. This is the real world. We must work to develop every human resource within us in order to prepare for these days. To deny any retarded person his fair share of risk experiences is to further cripple him for healthy living. Mentally retarded persons may, can, will, and should, respond to risk with full human dignity and courage.

It is the author's firm belief that we now need to insure this dimension of human dignity for the mentally retarded and prepare them for facing real risk in a real world. Where many of us have worked overtime in past years to find clever ways of building the avoidance of risk into the lives of the mentally retarded, now we should work equally hard to help find the proper amount of normal risk for every retarded person. It is hoped that this paper has helped to illustrate that there can be such a thing as human dignity in risk, and there can be a dehumanizing indignity in safety!

Persk, The Dignity of Risk

People continuously assess risks in everyday situations. If I buy something that is on sale, is there any hidden drawback that I will only learn later? Can I get to the next filling station before running out of gas? If I venture what seems like a witty comment in a conversation, will I end up looking foolish? Et cetera. Even animals calculate risks. The lion looks for a young or weakened buffalo. The risk of trying to take down a healthy adult is too great. It's not a matter that it couldn't be done.

It's a question of how much risk is involved in the effort.

It would seem as though there is a hidden mathematics to calculating risks. Let me use the term 'Risk Index' to mean the degree to which a risk is worth taking. Basically the Risk Index will equal probable Loss over probable Gain. Like so: $RI = L/G$. But gain and loss each include two elements. First, the intensity or degree of gain or a loss. Second, the probability that that gain or loss will actually occur. All this would have to be laid out on scales indicating a range of values. If one anticipates that the perceived probable gain will outweigh the perceived probable loss – that is, if the Risk Index is lower than 1.0 – the risk is probably worth taking.

To understand how this equation would spin itself out in actual situations, one would need to factor in two additional considerations. The first has to do with how much anxiety there might be in taking a risk. In other words, the anxiety has to be factored into the loss side of the equation as a significant negative. The other has to do with whether one limits his calculations to himself, or includes a larger group of people. Presumably a totally sociopathic person will not include pain or loss to others when evaluating this equation.

An extreme example would be people being fed to the lions in Rome for refusing to throw a pinch of incense into a brazier in front of a statue of the emperor. People were expected to do that to show that they acknowledged no authority superior to him. To refuse would at first glance seem to be a radical miscalculation of the risk index. At first glance one would think that Perpetua, and others like her, made such a miscalculation. But for her the benefit – the eternal bliss that she believed would follow a short period of suffering – was so enormous as to outweigh any risks.

Hilarianus the governor, who had received his judicial powers as the successor of the late proconsul Minucius Timinianus, said to me: 'Have pity on your father's gray head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors.'

'I will not', I retorted.

'Are you a Christian?' said Hilarianus.

And I said: 'Yes, I am.'

When my father persisted in trying to dissuade me, Hilarianus ordered him to be thrown to the ground and beaten with a rod. I felt sorry for father, just as if I myself had been beaten. I felt sorry for his pathetic old age.

Her father tried to stop her martyrdom. And after all, he had a point. I mean, why not just throw a bit of incense on the fire?

Then Hilarianus passed sentence on all of us: we were condemned to the beasts, and we returned to prison in high spirits.

I think I would not have been in such high spirits. And she was not the only one to suffer!

But my baby had got used to being nursed at the breast and to staying with me in prison. So I sent the deacon Pomponius straight away to my father to ask for the baby. But father refused to give

him over. But as God willed, the baby had no further desire for the breast, nor did I suffer any inflammation; and so I was relieved of any anxiety for my child and of any discomfort in my breasts ...

Even the love that she must have felt for her father, her friends and her baby had little weight for her. Most people confronted with the pinch of incense issue just make the required gesture and go their way. But the people who they fed to the lions calculated the Risk Index differently.

The day before we were to fight with the beasts I saw the following vision. Pomponius the deacon came to the prison gates and began to knock violently. I went out and opened the gate for him. He was dressed in an unbelted white tunic, wearing elaborate sandals. And he said to me: 'Perpetua, come; we are waiting for you'. What are the pains of this world beside the bliss and glory of Heaven?

from The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas

Or consider miners contemplating a strike. They need to feed their families. Most of them were not sociopaths. So the needs of their family members are included in their calculations. This means that if they are getting even the minimal amount needed for sustenance, they will be unlikely to risk a strike. On the other hand, if they or their family members were already dying from malnutrition and other health problems, there was very little to lose.

Almost everybody gives great weight to the issue of humiliation. It is perceived by most as more important than life itself. Why else would people choose to risk their lives fighting in a war against people who would pose no danger to themselves whatsoever if they simply remained civilians. The bottom line is that they're afraid of being called cowards and treated with contempt by their fellows. One could almost say that the most courageous thing a person could do would be to accept being humiliated rather than violate his or her own values. How important is it, after all, to be seen as a highly esteemed person by a public that is notoriously fickle in its judgments?

So where does that leave Simon? I think he is able to assess the potential gains and losses that are possible in going to make a protest. It would be an exciting day spent with people that he loves. It would be a way of saying that he does not like bullies – whether they be individuals or nations. It would be a way to gain some recognition among people that he admires.

But if his participation is noticed by people here, there will be a heavy cost to pay. He has to live with his father. His father is in a position to make things very miserable for him. Also, if it came out at his school that he participated in a protest, his peers might pick on him even worse than they do now. The risks are very real to him. I wanted to deny him the opportunity to make his own choice in this matter. To protect him. And he rightfully challenged this. I was offering him an overprotection that robbed him of his dignity.

And what of this relationship that he and I have? What are its potential gains and losses? The potential losses are huge for me and not negligible for him. And yet we move ahead. It would seem that to love and to be loved by each other is for us what

the 'bliss of heaven' was for the early martyrs. It outweighs all possible losses, with the possible exception of punishments that are both certain and virtually total. The early Christians had confidence that they would not be sent to hell for defying the authorities of their time.

We do not have such confidence.

The Journalist

March 24, 2003

Dear Diary,

I told Ethan I wanted to become a journalist. That wasn't today. That was a while ago.

He said, "Why 'become'? Why not be one now?"

I said OK. So he's been teaching me how to be one. The first thing he told me was that for a good story you could use the five 'W's and one 'H'. That is 'Who, What, Why, When, Where, and How'.

So I figured my first news story would be our anti-war demonstration in Charleston. The first thing is just to collect the news and write it down. So I made sure I had a notebook for jotting things down. Also I bought a little camera for the trip. It's just a throw-away camera, but throw-away cameras work good.

I am beginning with 'Who'. Well, it was me and Ethan and Helen and Phoebe and her mom that went. Orville wanted to go. He said he asked his dad and he didn't like the idea one bit. I think his dad is sort of mean, like mine. Well, not as mean as mine. Sometimes they do things together that are fun. Orville told me that. But his father can be mean sometimes too. So Orville never knows. In one way maybe I am luckier than him. His dad is around the house all the time. Mine is gone as much as he's there. More really. And he wasn't there yesterday. That's the 'When'. We went down there yesterday which was March 23, 2003. And we demonstrated from 9:00 to 1:00. We really had to get up early to make it down there by 9:00.

I'm going to add another 'W'. It's for Weather. I mean a lot of what happens depends on the weather. It was kind of cloudy, but it didn't rain. And the temperature was just average for this time of the year. Around 55 or 60 or something. I told Ethan about

my idea that we should add 'Weather' and have six 'W's. When I told him that the weather for the demonstration was pretty normal, he said the journalists never just say, 'The weather was pretty normal today'. They would say 'Average weather is expected to slam into to us throughout the day'. Then they would cite some statistic saying how this is one of the most average days ever recorded for this date since they started keeping records. I thought that was pretty funny. So, really average weather slammed into us while we were demonstrating. That's the truth.

You can do the 'W's in any order that makes sense. The main thing is just to get all that information in the story. I'll tell the 'What' next. It was an anti-war demonstration. As it turned out there weren't a whole lot of us. There were just three or four other groups that came — mostly about the same size as ours. We gathered at the Chase bank building down close to the river.

Why? I mean why were we gathered at that place? Well, because all the killing and stuff we are doing in Iraq is so horrible. But why in front of this bank building? Why not the state capital where they make the laws? I asked Ethan that. He said because the banks really make the rules. The politicians work for them. It's all about money, he said. That's what all the killing is about. He told me that the Chase Bank is really J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. J.P. Morgan and Chase used to be separate banks but they merged not too long ago. I wrote that down in my notebook, but I forgot to write down just when. But I think he said a year or two ago. Anyhow they are one of the biggest and most powerful banks in the world. So that's why we did our demonstration there.

Well, I think I have about everything except 'How'. I'm not sure just what this might mean. How did we do? Well, I guess we did OK. We walked around in front of the bank and carried signs. The one I carried said, 'Support Our Troops. Bring Them Home'. I thought that was pretty good. But I was a little worried. I thought someone might come and beat us up or something. But not much of anything happened, really. One guy smiled and gave us a peace sign as he drove by. Lots of guys looked at us real mean and hard, but none of them said anything. Well, there was a couple of guys walking down the other side of the street who hollered something, but I couldn't make out what they said. But their voices were mean.

So that is how we protested the war and what happened. Not too much really. In fact I was the only reporter around. Nobody came and interviewed us or took pictures. So I took some pictures of us walking around with our signs.

So I have all the things I need for my story — six 'W's (with 'Weather'), and one 'H'. I plan to write it like a news story and show it to Ethan.

But now to the REAL news. I wore a skirt!!! Not during the demonstration. I didn't have that much nerve. But when it was over we went to a building to see a mural that Helen knew about. It was one by a guy named Jordi Bonet. He's supposed to be a really good artist. It's hard to say just what it was. It was like a big curved metal wall and it showed how the forests in West Virginia were beautiful. Well that was what it was supposed to show. Helen really liked it and so did Phoebe's mom and Ethan. So it must have been good. I didn't quite get it. I guess it's sort of what they call 'an acquired taste', like that smelly cheese which some day maybe I will like.

So that was OK but while I was there I snuck into a Women's bathroom that I found. I was with Phoebe. I put on my skirt there. The plain one Ethan made for me. See, I had all this planned. I wore a sweater with lots of colors on it — but one that a boy could wear. I knew it would go with the plain skirt. Actually, with that sweater and my blue jeans it would be hard to tell if I was a girl or a boy. But now I was a girl! See, that's the first time I ever did this in public. I mean was that really happy!! Well, it was scary too, but it was worth it. And Phoebe liked it too. She said, "Now we can be sisters".

Helen used to live in Charleston. Only for about a year, she said, but she knew all about how to get around. It was about 1:30 and we still hadn't eaten lunch. So we went down to a really neat waterfront place that was only a couple of blocks away. There we ate some sandwiches and hard boiled eggs that Phoebe's mom brought for all of us. I wished that my own mom was with us too. They invited her, but she is shy and didn't come.

Anyhow, Helen has a lot of interest in art. So she took us on sort of a tour. She showed us parks, pictures, painting on

buildings, and stuff like that. We walked. That's the best way to take a tour. Phoebe and me joked and laughed a lot. We held hands and skipped. We really were like sisters, just like Phoebe said.

One of the things we saw on our 'tour' was a sculpture on the side of a building. It was another bank. The sculpture was this man who is all squeezed into a tunnel in a coal mine. And there was a saying that went with this sculpture — it was 'Man Wrests from the Earth Its Natural Resources to Build Pathways to the Stars'. Well, maybe so, but I don't think that guy is going to see too many stars from where he is now.

So how can I tell you about how much fun I had yesterday? Well, it's like this. Suppose you were that coal miner in the sculpture we saw. Suppose you lived your whole life in that coal mine. Sort of squeezed into it like that man in the sculpture. Then one day you were able to crawl right out and see the sun, all bright and everything. That's how it was for me to wear my skirt and be with all those people yesterday.

It was a perfect day. Almost. On the way back the grownups got to talking about all the things that are threatening the earth. Like diseases, and the ecology getting all messed up, and maybe a nuclear war. Stuff like that. It was pretty scary to listen to.



The End of the World

Ethan thinks about the dream he had the night before while he watches Simon and Phoebe at the river-side park.

What was that dream I had last night?

I can feel its aftertaste in my consciousness – but the images are elusive. It had to do with the end of the world. Yes. Or at least of the human species. Civilization had finally done itself in. But what were the specifics of the dream? Images play tag with me. I see them out of the corner of my mind, but when I try to look directly at them, they run off and hide somewhere in the enormity of the past. So many hiding places there.

But this part does come back.

I park in a space that is barely big enough to get into. Two big dogs that are aggressive but harmless accost me as I get out of my car. I am not afraid of them, but am impatient. I must get to a school – a college maybe – to talk with people about how the human species is dying out.

Two men and a boy emerge from the woods. They have been hiking. Do they know that they will die before too long? I ask them. The men do. The boy may not. Hiking is their way of dealing with the end-times. It is from an ecological disaster or a disease. It's not clear. But it is something that humanity created.

Dreams are hard to capture. The past melts into oblivion so quickly. Is the past real even if we have no recollection of it? Do events that are no longer present somehow exist in a place we call the past? What could that mean? All that is clear is how quickly everything present is erased from our memories. Almost everything, at any rate. A few large events are remembered. And if we as a species do eliminate ourselves, who will remember that we ever were?

*Some time ago a crazy dream came to me
I dreamt I was walkin' into World War Three.
I went to the doctor the very next day
To see what kinda words he could say.
He said it was a bad dream.
I wouldn't worry 'bout it none, though
They're dreams and they're only in your head.
Well the doctor interrupted me just about then
Sayin' "Hey I've been havin' the same old dreams.*

*But mine was a little different you see
I dreamt that the only person left after the war was me.
I didn't see you around".
Well, now time passed and now it seems
Everybody's having them dreams.*

Bob Dylan – Talkin' World War III Blues

My dream may be telling me something. It's not impossible that humanity will end the world. At least the human one. Not impossible that Phoebe and Simon will never grow old. Maybe I should say Simone. He is, after all, wearing his skirt, is being his girl self. Simone. It's his first real coming out. It's a day for him to experiment with who he – or at least one aspect of who he – is. Yes, I should call him Simone.

It's like Simone said. He and Phoebe are like sisters. Closer, really, than most siblings. Tom and I were close. But there was a big age difference. Phoebe and Simon are like twins. They make a beautiful pair as they preform in this outdoor theater by the river. They are totally absorbed in some sort of hop-scotch game they have made up. They are stage center. But they are not playing to their audience. They are totally absorbed in each other and their game. They hardly notice me sitting up on one of the higher steps. I am not the only one who notices their beauty. Others scattered throughout these cement bleachers are watching. And people walking by turn their heads to watch.

They are in love really. Simone will probably never wish to have sex with her, though who can tell for sure? But the Eros that bonds people – that makes them fall in love – is larger than sex. It may include sex. Or at least sexual feelings. Often does. Maybe usually. I'm not sure about that. But it is clear that the love-force we call Eros is a multimodal kind of thing.

Mother with baby – mouth with nipple. Boy with boy – wrestling in the grass. Or Socrates with Phadrus – sharing thoughts through their love-drenched words:

He whose initiation is recent, and who has been the spectator of many glories in the other world, is amazed when he sees anyone having a godlike face or form, which is the expression of divine beauty; and first a shudder runs through him, and again the old awe steals over him; then looking upon the face of his beloved as that of a god, he reverences him, and if he were not afraid of being thought a downright madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a god; then as he gazes on him there is a sort of reaction, and the shudder passes into an unusual heat and perspiration; for, as he receives the effluence of beauty through the eyes, the wing moistens and he warms, and as he warms, the parts out of which the wings grew, and which had hitherto been closed and rigid, and had prevented the wing from shooting forth, are melted, and as nourishment streams upon him, the lower end of the wing begins to swell and grow from the root upwards; and the growth extends under the whole soul – for once the whole was winged.

How important is it whether in-loveness culminates in actual sex?

Socrates felt it was better if it not end that way. Yet there is no denying that in most cases these intense energies strive for some form of physical expression. The dark horse Socrates speaks of is there pulling at the bit, whether he is reined in or not. Perhaps restraint does raise the energy to a greater intensity – a higher frequency – and that may lift us to a more divine level. On the other hand, without some form of physical contact the relationship seems incomplete – like a barbershop quartet with the bass missing. It may vary from situation to situation. Perhaps in some situations a smile, a touch, a word or a look will suffice.

Ah. Another part of the dream comes back to me.

I am talking to a preacher. I ask him what he does to comfort people about the end of the world.

Don't recall what he said. Probably it would be something about the rapture. The idea of the rapture pictures the end of the world as a sort of cosmic orgasm. The ultimate climax. The belief that some guy who died 2000 years ago is suddenly going to appear in the sky and call us all home to heaven is ridiculous. If it were indeed everybody that would be raptured, that would be a nice dream, I suppose. But the Christians link it with an eternal torture chamber for the bad. I can relate to the idea that God is the home to which we will return when all is said and done. But the rapture is a dangerous idea. It divides the world too neatly into the good and the bad. And it tempts us to throw this world away before it has finished its natural life span. The end of the world for humans. So many possibilities – many of them beautiful beyond our present grasp – snuffed out in an instant. So many Simons and Phoebes dead before they are born.



Helen

Transcending the 99 Koans

Meditation Five, in which Helen watches Simon and Ethan during the trip to the demonstration in Charleston, and in which she thinks about the architecture of God.

I'm glad that I asked Ethan to drive. As I get older I am less confident about my driving – especially after dark. He drives well. Simon insisted on being in the front seat so that he could be close to Ethan. That was fine with me because I get to sit back here with Phoebe. She seems happy snuggled between her mother and me. Who we sit with is an important thing to us mortals. I think Phoebe understands that, and that's why she didn't argue with Simon about the front seat. Simon belongs to Ethan more than she does. Simon is lying on his side with his head in Ethan's lap. Physically, he never can be quite close enough. But also he craves to be emotionally and spiritually close.

As above, so below, the saying goes. Suppose this is literally true. Then, if we begin with physics we should be able to rise through the levels of reality to the levels described by the saints and seers. There would be a psycho/social/spiritual time/space as well as a physical one.

What would that look like?

Even when they are physically apart, in psycho/social space/time, Simon and Ethan are close. Only a second apart. An inch. It's more than that, even. They enfold each other; are co-extensive. It is their psychosocial closeness that draws them into physical closeness. Fechner says that in the spiritual realm beyond this life we 'pervade' each other.

The dwellers in the other world will appear to each other in a luminous, clear, full, and objective form, of which we in our memory of them have but a weak echo, a dim outline drawing, because they pervade each other with their full and complete being ...

Gustav Fechner – from the Little Book of Life After Death

I don't know what German word is translated as 'pervade'. In English pervade means to 'spread through' or 'permeate'. We spread through or permeate each other. We flow in and out of each other, even while maintaining our own centers. In this realm, this flowing into each other occurs more fully when we are in love. In fact, this flowing into each other is the essence of what it means to 'be in love'. Simon and Ethan, in the world they share – or should I say in the 'being' they share – are already half way in heaven.

In his general theory of relativity Einstein tells us that gravity – that which appears to pull things together – can best be understood as a geometry of space. Space curves toward massive objects – toward all objects, really, but the more massive the greater the curve. Perhaps we can think of social time-space as a curvature of space around those entities that have weight for us – that are important to us – those in whom we have invested love.

For Simon, all space bends toward Ethan so that when he walks straight ahead he always ends up at Ethan's house. He wakes in the morning and his thoughts bend toward Ethan. He gets on his bike and it takes him to the only place it will go – to Ethan's. Always his thoughts and feelings and actions are straightforward, yet they follow the curve of his psycho/social space time, and so, by simply going straight, they end up at Ethan, even if Ethan is off to one side. And of course the reverse is true. Perhaps Simon, though smaller, has greater density, more intensity per ounce, as is the case with children before they fall into adulthood. So Ethan's thoughts and feelings and actions always follow the architecture of the psycho/social/spiritual space/time that Simon/Simone creates in his world.

But Ethan is not the only heavenly body that draws Simon/Simone into his orbit. The whole afternoon as we did our tour of Charleston, Simon/Simone and Phoebe frolicked together. There is no other word for it. They frolicked. They told secrets and giggled, and pranced down the sidewalk like the two baby foxes I once saw in a documentary. Kits, I think they are called. They jumped around each other, and rolled on the ground, and fought each other. It was only a mock fight though; neither of the kits was really trying to hurt the other. Simon/Simone and Phoebe squabbled a bit too. They argued about how many people were at the demonstration and about whether demonstrating could really stop the war. The quarreled about which side of the street they would walk down. But it was all good-natured. Neither was trying to hurt the other.

How could I picture this in physical terms?

Perhaps Simon/Simone is like a planet in a binary star system. There are two suns in his sky – Ethan and Phoebe. But what about Orville? I was sorry he could not be with us today. But Simone/Simone is close to him as well. There are star systems that contain three stars, and a few with even more. I am picturing Simone/Simone as a planet with several suns in his sky. Would it be better to think of him as one of the stars in a star system? Somehow I resist that idea. Perhaps every individual, from his or her own perspective, is a planet revolving around, or through, a star system that contains however many people he or she loves deeply. That's how many stars are in his or her sky. It's only a metaphor, I suppose. It would be next to impossible to calculate were there too many stars. Yet I think there is a psycho/social/spiritual reality that corresponds in a rough way with the physical. I'll have to think some more about this.

Perhaps as the Neo Platonists and as Swedenborg would have us believe, the architecture of the universe consists of successive concentric circles that rise toward the Unmoving Center of absolute Being/Bliss. A hierarchy of being that extends from the less real, to the fully real or the absolute – a hierarchy of beauty as Plotinus saw it.

*Being is desirable because it is identical with Beauty, and
Beauty is loved because it is Being. We ourselves possess Beauty
when we are true to our own being; ugliness is in going over*

to another order; knowing ourselves, we are beautiful; in self-ignorance, we are ugly.

Plotinus – On Beauty

Swedenborg saw the same hierarchy in terms of 'light', which is knowledge, and 'warmth', which is love – the divine 'good' being a combination of light and warmth. Our sun, with its light and warmth, is a pale reflection of God. An emanation. One implication is that what we see from the outside as light knows itself as knowledge, and what we see as warmth is to itself, love. Metaphors only, or is some sense literal? What is the nature of these 'correspondences', as he calls them?

In Heaven, the divine nature that emanates for the Lord is called divine truth ... Divine love and the divine truth that derives from it are like the sun's fire and the light that comes from it in our world. The love is like the sun's fire, and the derivative truth is like the light from the sun. By reason of correspondence, fire means love and light means the truth that flows from it.

When the light of our technological understanding is divorced from the love of world around us, the light is cold, and everything good is destroyed. 'Snuffed out', I think is what he said.

... When the divine truth is united to the divine love, the combination gives life to everything in Heaven the way the warmth of the sun, united to its light, makes everything fruitful on earth in spring and summer. It is different when the warmth is not united to light, when the light is therefore cold. Then everything slows down and lies there, snuffed out.

The light by which we live is very cold. Perhaps colder than any time in history. It is bright. Glaring. It shows the outside of things with greater clarity than ever before. But being blind to the inner reality of things, it is cold.

In any case, both Plotinus and Swedenborg see us as being on a temporal path to the Being beyond time? Perhaps so.

Sanford's mother recorded a dream his father had when he knew that death was not far off:

In the dream he awakened in his living room. But then the room changed and he was back in his room in the old house in Vermont as a child. Again the room changed: to Connecticut (where he had his first job), to China, to Pennsylvania (where he often visited), to New Jersey, and then back to the living room. In each scene after China, I [Sanford's mother who related this dream] was present, in each instance being of a different age in accordance with the time represented. Finally he sees himself lying on the couch back in the living room. I am descending the stairs and the doctor is in the room. The doctor says, "Oh, he's gone", then, as the others fade in the dream, he sees the clock on the mantelpiece; the hands have been moving, but now they stop;

as they stop a window opens behind the mantelpiece clock and a bright light shines through. The opening widens into a door and the light becomes a brilliant path. He walks out on the path of light and disappears.

Yet I think this image of our existence in time/space being a path to a distant reality may miss something. This places the desired moment – the Moment of Goodness – of Godness – always in the future – always elsewhere. But it does not seem to me that the temporal is just a wheel of suffering, though the evidence of the senses suggests that considerable suffering here is inescapable. But time/space is also the place of poetry and music. There is a kind of beauty – consciousness that requires time – that does not wish to escape the risings and the settings of the sun. Our souls do not wish to place the consummation of life only at the end of a journey that completes itself when we escape from time itself – like a spaceship escaping the gravity of the earth to move forever away from the struggling and growing globe beneath it. The secret, perhaps, is in the improbable, indeed logically impossible, marriage of duality with the One. The incarnation. An incarnation that can be realized at any moment. Now.

As Well As From Any Other

The realization of the total being can be attained from a basis in any one of the states because of the equivalence of all these contingent modes of existence when regarded from the standpoint of the Absolute.

It can then be obtained from the human state as well as from any other.

I read this in 'The Multiple States of Being', by René Guénon – page 21 in my translation.

And what can I say about that?

It is poetry already.

As well as from any other ...

Which is to say from driving from walking from eating a Big Mac from under tall elms from the bath tub or from a swivel chair in the face of a computer but especially from sitting in a moderately used outhouse while taking in the subtle fragrance of many people's shit which in a muted state is a cozy sort of thing but I just made this up about the outhouse because it is such a little noticed phenomenon,

Not about the coziness of outhouses which is not made up but I am sure that for epiphanies and paranormal phenomena in general outhouses are no more special than the average bath tub.

On the day I read these words I went about all my affairs wondering whether it was true as it was only philosophy and lacking confirmation in the recalcitrance of things,

And that very night I was looking at protista under my microscope which I often do rather than walk in the woods because the woods are so polluted and with protista pollution is generally

*not at all a disadvantage the most common putrifications
being like olives and sunsets to many of these little creatures
and I saw a vorticela unwind with caution the coil on which
he had affixed himself to a bit of rubbish.*

*Slowly with great caution sniffing the currents with the cilia
waving around the mouth end of his bell shape he ventured
out for a bit of bacteria or perhaps algae or maybe just for the
adventure of it which we not knowing him from the inside
as he does himself should not be so arrogant to dismiss out of
hand but observing him behaviorally in the approved modern
manner I saw that he did indeed venture,*

And then looked up.

*I fancy he saw my eye and such an eye it would have been to
a vorticela going about his business on the slide which had
been his home only for three or four minutes during which he
probably forgot any other home he had ever had for I fancy
that vorticela with their conspicuous lack of gray matter have
very short memories but again who are we to say because they
clearly do so much else without the aid of gray matter,*

And I heard him say Ah Hah!

*With my own failing ears I heard this though you will argue it was
only with my inner or mystical ears in order to denigrate it
because all sorts of drivel gets heard with the mystical ears but*

*So help me Infinite Absolute he did he said Ah Hah and I knew
that some tiny epiphany had blown asunder whatever
sequences of molecules that serve him as neural pathways
somewhere deep within his cytoplasm or at least as deep as
his tininess would permit.*

*And being persuaded as in the modern manner that whatever
is provided us by metaphor or inner immediacy must be
confirmed by the data of the senses if it is to be honored
as knowledge I knew that I was at one of those critical
junctions of general importance if only I thought if only this is
replicable.*

*And in that brief epiphany he leaped over algae over the unsavory
nematodes and annelids, the arachnids with all their spinning
of new worlds and the slime molds with their imperfect
attachment to individuality and over the vertebrates,*

*He leaped over ten thousand human incarnations and over the
seven states of advancement in a single bound,*

*Transcended the 99 Koans threw off a million now un-needed
embodiments.*

And sprang into the infinite beyond time space,

*But then his coiled tail sprang him back into the shadows of the
algae and the cellulose of dead things and there he hid for a
long time fearful that I might steal his enlightenment.*

Carroll Baskins – As Well As From Any Other

From anywhere. Even from a drive back from a rather disappointing demonstration. Not a disappointing day by any means – but the demonstration itself was small and ineffectual. How I love being with these people. We are a little Camelot. A momentary realization of total being. Perhaps we have accomplished what René Guénon speaks of.



Phoebe

The Fourth Assent

Phoebe does a Tarot reading with her mother about the future of humanity.

"Don't you remember, Mama? As we drove back from the demonstration, you and them talked about so many bad things that could happen. I didn't know what to think. Things like horrible diseases – pandemics you called them. Global warming turning everything into a desert. Nuclear war. And, what's it called? Ecological collapse. The ozone hole. Horrible struggles between the haves and the have-nots. Streets running with blood. Cities being flooded. Droughts and monster storms. I mean, with all these horrible things that could happen, am I even going to finish growing up?"

"I guess that did sound sort of depressing," Mama says. "We were trying to ask ourselves what we can hope for when so many bad things are happening."

"All that talk didn't give me much hope," I say. "It was depressing. It was a wonderful day we had, so it was hard to listen to all that depressing talk on the way home."

"I guess maybe we did get carried away a bit," she says.

"It was mostly Ethan and Helen. You didn't say that much. Don't get me wrong. I love both of them. They are the coolest grownups I know except for you. But they sure weren't making me very cheerful with all that talk."

Mama smiles.

"I understand," she says. "But probably most of what they say is true."

"I don't hear you talking about it all the time," I say.

"I try not to dwell on it so much," she says. "But I think they would say that if we are going to have any hope that we can depend on, it has to take into account how things really are."

"So what's to be hoped for?"

"Well, I'm not sure," Mama says. "Let's see what the cards say."

The first card that comes up is the Tower. That doesn't look good at all. Lightning striking a tall tower. People falling. It's dark and full of destruction. No, not good.

"The Tower," Mama says. "Physical destruction. A breaking down of the old ways. Pain and difficulty. The leveling of the excesses built by humanity's pride."

"It looks like the Tower of Babel," I say.

"Yes. The Tower of Babel."

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel – because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there, the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

"I remember that story," I say. "And that card shows just what they were talking about in the car. Everything is being destroyed."

"Perhaps," she says. "But there is an up-side to this. For anything new to be born the old must be wiped away. That means destruction. Transitions to new ways are not always pretty. It's a struggle for the butterfly to be born."

"It's more than 'not pretty', Mama. It's nuclear war. It's the planet getting too hot to live on. It's everybody dying of some crazy new disease nobody ever heard of. That's what you guys were talking about."

She just nods without saying anything.

"Mama, sometimes the butterfly doesn't make it out of the cocoon," I say.

"No," she says. "Sometimes it doesn't. But let's stay with the cards for a moment."

She draws several more cards and puts them in their positions. She doesn't interpret them as she draws them. Just looks at them.

"We have four major arcana in addition to the Tower here," she says. "That means that this is an important reading. The thing we have to do is start over, using only the major arcana."

She gathers the cards together again. She pulls out all the major arcana. Then, just with those, she mixes them up, has me mix them up a bit, and then gathers and cuts them. "It's like the fourth ascent, Phoebe. You remember Black Elk's vision?"

I nod. I remember her reading that to me.

And when we reached the summit of the third ascent and camped, the nation's hoop was broken like a ring of smoke that

spreads and scatters, and the holy tree seemed dying and all its birds were gone. And when I looked ahead I saw that the fourth ascent would be terrible.

"You and Ethan were talking about 'Black Elk Speaks' on our trip," I say.

"Yes. We were. It seems that it's one of his favorite books too."

"Wow. That's cool."

"It was surprising."

"What do you think it means?"

"Black Elk's vision?"

"No. That you and Ethan both like the same book."

"I don't know. That we seem to think alike on some important things."

"So maybe you are soul-mates."

"I hardly know him, Phoebe. We just met."

"I knew Simon and me were soul-mates almost the first time I saw him."

"That's not how I remember it. You thought he was simple. Simple Simon you called him."

"Well, still."

"Still what?"

"Pretty soon after I knew him, I knew we were soul-mates."

"And you seem to be."

"And maybe you and Ethan are."

"Well, I don't know about 'soul-mates', but I do like him."

"See? I knew it."

She shakes her head and smiles.

"Let's get back to the reading," she says.

"OK."

"We'll put the Tower card on the bottom of the central pile," Mama says.

"That's where we show what all this is about. Our reading has to do with your concern about everything that is being destroyed or threatened in the world."

Then she draws another card. It's the Sun. "This looks pretty good," Mama says.

"This suggests the overall meaning of the reading. The sun signifies success.

Accomplishment. A new day. A new beginning. It suggests that everything is heading to a new morning."

Mama lays out the next four cards without saying anything. Then she studies them for a while. "Justice crosses the Sun," she says, finally. "It's an obstacle in the way."

"Justice is a good thing, Mama. How can it be an obstacle?"

Rebeka thinks about this for a minute. Then she suggests an answer.

"I think it stands for the current order of things. What is presently enforced by laws. Our present understanding of law and order. That's what's in the way. Maybe things like it is 'just' for some people to become super-powerful and rule over others. Or that justice means revenge. Things like that."

"I guess I understand," I say. "Justice can mean a lot of different things."

She nods. "So now look at these three – the Empress, the Emperor and the Lovers. They have to be understood together. On the left here we have what is behind the situation. What brought us to this point. It's the Emperor. Rule by the masculine principle. Patriarchy. It will have to be left behind. But look at what is over everything. The Empress. This is the potential future. But she is upside down. There is something wrong with the feminine principle today which could lead to a bad outcome. Perhaps in the name of women's liberation she really wants to be masculine. Perhaps she wants to replace patriarchy with matriarchy. Not good. But what we can hope for in the near future is a combination of the masculine and the feminine. Androgyny. A balance between the two. The Lovers."

I really like that. Androgyny. I know what it means. Mama explained it to me when I asked her about Simon.

"It's like Simon," I say. "Like a boy-girl."

"Yes. Or girl-boy, like you."

Androgyny is cool. But there's a problem.

"Why are the Lovers reversed?" I ask.

"I don't know. Maybe because it is so hard to get this right."

She is quiet while she lays out the next four cards, and then stares at them for a while. I get a chance to think about the Lovers. Simon and me. But each of us all alone in ourselves as well. She points to the first of the four cards she has just laid down along the side of the first group.

"First we have the Hierophant," she says. "This shows what surrounds the situation. What influences it. The Hierophant. The rule of the spiritual. But he is reversed. So it might represent negative spiritualities. Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms, for example. But also Scientism. The belief that everything can be reduced to mechanics. And outdated ideologies. Communism, as it developed under Stalin. But also the capitalism of the west which is now destroying the earth. All that must collapse with the tower."

"Then we have the Moon," Mama continues. "That is the shadow side of things. Sometimes it means what is unconscious, or just coming into consciousness. You remember what I told you about the shadow. The shadow is not necessarily bad. It's just whatever our conscious minds shove out of our awareness. It may in fact contain things that are very much needed for our development. On the other hand, it can also indicate hidden forces. Deception. Illusion. This reading is about the future of the world. And this card is where we learn about how people see things. In this case the world. The card suggests that people are confused. The world is full of real deception and illusion. Politics, for example, is full of treachery. Our governments lie to us. We do not live in the clear light of day. It is very hard to see

what is really happening. But within all this confusion, something that has long been kept in the dark – in the shadow – is coming to light.”

“What do you think it is that is coming to light, Mama?”

She thinks a minute. She is in no hurry. Then she says, “The Lovers. Bringing opposites together through love. Love can be sex. But it’s always more than sex. It’s caring for the person you love. Two people becoming one. It’s music too. And sunlight. And things growing in gardens. It’s ‘being-in-love’ with whatever or whoever we are in love with. It’s what makes us alive and gives us joy.”

“Like it’s why I feel so happy when I am with Simon?”

“Yes,” she says. “You are in love with him. But also it’s why you like to play the violin.”

“It’s my two loves,” I say. “Simon and my violin. At least those are my biggest loves. Well, my newest ones. I’ve always loved you and Papa.”

“That’s why it was hard for you to choose where you wanted to live,” she says. “You loved both me and your father.”

“Yes,” I said. “I didn’t like choosing.”

“No. It wasn’t easy.”

“But I am more at home with you.”

She smiles. Then she looks at the cards again.

“After the Moon we have the Wheel of Fortune,” she says. “This relates to your hopes and fears for the future. It’s why we are doing this reading. To me this suggests that things will turn around. It is upright. There will be good fortune in the long run. The wheel is turning. What was below will come above. What was found only in a few people or situations will become the rule. The Lovers will come into their own. Opposites will be brought together. The new dawn that was promised at the beginning will in fact come to us.”

“And finally we have the Hermit,” Mama says. “He shows the outcome of all this. It isn’t an outcome that has to happen, but it is very likely to happen. The Hermit signifies the knowledge we obtain by looking within. It has to do with personal knowledge. It is the sort of understanding that is fostered by our having times of reflection while we are alone. So it surprises me to see it showing up here. You are asking not about private paths and solitary understanding. You are asking about history. About what will happen in the big picture.”

She is quiet for a minute or so. And then she says, “The only way I can understand why this card might show up here is that it signifies a time when our public affairs – our friendships and our politics – will be guided by inner reflection. A time when our social behavior will be motivated by insights that we gain through introspection.”

We both just sit there and stare at the cards for a while. It gives me a lot to think about.

“Thank you,” Mama, I say. “That was a good reading.”

“I thought so too. It doesn’t deny the bad things. But it points to a reason for hope.”

And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.

Black Elk Speaks

The Wrath of The Father

March 24, 2003

Dear Diary,

What a horrible day!! You'll never believe what happened.

Somebody that knows Dad saw me at the demonstration, and they told him. He came home from a trip yesterday. I think he heard about it yesterday afternoon. I heard him talking to someone on the phone, and I heard him mention my name, but I couldn't tell what it was about. And I didn't know who he was talking to. I didn't say anything about it. I figured if it was important he would let me know.

I sure was right about that.

So he waited until breakfast this morning. We are all sitting around eating some eggs and stuff that Mom fixed. Then, just when I am enjoying my breakfast - well as much as I can when Dad is around - he brings it up. He really likes to do that. He likes to spring things on me by surprise. And he likes to ruin anything that I like. At least that's how it seems to me.

Well, he looks at me and smiles. It's not a friendly smile. It's kind of a smirk. I guess that's what you call it. A smirk. It's the kind of smile you do when you have something that you can use against someone. So I know something is coming that I won't like.

"Did you have fun at the protest?" he asks.

Well, I almost choke on the eggs I'm eating.

I just look at him and don't say anything. Of course my first thought is 'How did he know?' Then I think maybe it was a trick to see if I would admit it. But it wasn't. He already knew.

"You're not saying anything," he says. "I asked you a question."

"I don't know," I say, which was kind of a stupid thing to say. But I didn't know what else to say.

"How can you not know?" he says. "You were there, weren't you? How can you not know if it was fun?"

So I'm not hungry any more and just want to get away. But as soon as I get up to leave he orders me to sit back down. I'm afraid he will hit me, so I do.

"What do you have against America?" he says. "We got people over there dying so you can be free and safe."

I never asked them to kill anybody for me. That's what I want to say. But of course I don't have the nerve to say anything.

"I'm sorry," I say. And I am.

I am sorry that he found out. I am sorry this stupidity is going on. I am sorry that he's my Dad. I'm even sorry there are people over there getting themselves killed. It's their own fault in a way. Nobody made them go. But still, nobody wants to get killed. So I am telling the truth. I just don't say what I am sorry about.

"Sorry isn't good enough," he says. "I don't want you hanging around with these bleeding heart tree huggers any more. I can't stand those fucking pansies. If we let assholes like that run the country we'll all be speaking Chinese in less than a year."

So then he gets to leave. But on his way out of the kitchen he hits me on the side of my head. I don't know if it was just a slap or with his fist. I didn't see it coming. All at once I just feel it and everything sort of goes blank for a second.

Mom comes over behind me and puts her arms around me. I can see Dad looking real hard at her. I think she must be looking back, but she is behind me and I can't see her. I think he was going to hit me again, or maybe her. I am really scared. But then he says, "That's right. Go on protecting him! You want him to grow up to be a fag, don't you?"

"I just don't want you hitting him," she says.

Then he walks out, and just when I think it's all over, he sticks his head back in the kitchen.

"And I don't want you to have any more to do with that fucking biology teacher of yours," he says. "If I hear you have been there, there's going to be hell to pay."

When he is gone Mom comes over. "Are you OK?" she asks.

"I think so," I say. "It doesn't hurt that much."

I feel the side of my head to see if it's bleeding. It's not.

"I am not going stop seeing Ethan," I say.

"Hush," she says. "We'll talk about it later."

See, she is just as scared of Dad as I am. She wants to help me. And this time she stood up for me. That makes me really happy. She is scared too. Just like I am. But she stood up for me.

I want to ask why she doesn't just leave him. But I think I know. I mean, what would she do for money? She drinks too much to get a job. So I don't ask her why she doesn't leave. It would just embarrass her, and she is nice to me. She really does love me. She just isn't very strong. But she did better today.

There was one good thing about what happened. The person who saw me must have seen me at the demonstration while I still had my boy clothes on. What would my dad have done if he knew that right after the demonstration I snuck into a restroom in the bank and put on my skirt so I could be a girl. Suppose the person who told dad about seeing me at the demonstration had seen me and Phoebe dancing down the street, like sisters. Me in my skirt. What would dad have done if he knew that?

Well, Dear Diary. This is one thing I can't even tell Ethan. If I did he might say I should obey my father. And I couldn't stand that. I couldn't stand it if I couldn't see Ethan any more.



Antonio

A Chip Off The Old Block

Antonio sits at his desk and thinks about the confrontation he had with Simon earlier that morning.

My son – the social reformer. The courageous protector of the downtrodden! Disgusting. Looks like he is going to cast his lot with the mediocre masses who would like to destroy our capitalist system.

Contrary to the vulgar belief that men are motivated primarily by materialistic considerations, we now see the capitalist system being discredited and destroyed all over the world, even though this system has given men the greatest material comforts.

Ayn Rand

Wouldn't it be ironic if he grew up to be a socialist? Not exactly a chip off the old block.

He gets that from his science teacher. I thought I had already told Simon to stay away from that asshole.

I must admit that it took balls on his part to defy me. Maybe there still is some hope for him. I just need to get him out of the clutches of those bleeding heart do-gooders.

The Disappearing Stream

April 4, 2004

Dear Diary,

I went to the stream today just to see it. Just by myself. It's still too cold for swimming. But I was thinking about all the fun I had last summer with Phoebe and Orville. Of course I thought we would do that again as soon as it warms up.

Well it was weird. There was hardly any water in it. I never saw it like that before. It was interesting in a way because you could see the bottom of the stream. There were little pools that had fish in them that couldn't get out. Also there were a lot of dead fish around. They just got trapped, I guess, as the stream dried up.

But where did the water go? It isn't like we are in a big drought or anything. It's rained about the same as any other year. And we had that big snow storm. That should have given the ground a lot of water when it melted.

So what I think is that the mountain top mining must have done this. Ethan says that they dump the waste in the valleys. Streams go in the bottom of valleys. Ethan told me that they would mess up the streams. So he was right. They have damned up the stream with all their trash. If they have wrecked my stream - maybe for good - I don't know what I'll do. I'll never find a nice place like this to swim again.

But maybe it's just too early in the spring. Maybe the water will come back in June. Anyhow, there are supposed to be storms tomorrow. Maybe that will help. But why would the little bit of water that is there be all muddy and gunky looking?



Escape from the Mine

Paul is sitting beside Rocky Creek, listening to his tape collection and thinking about his plans to go to a new job in Charleston.

I used to swim here with some of my friends. Now look at it. Most of the water is gone, and what is left is muddy. Probably full of toxins. Ireland, is right. People don't want to hear it, but coal will destroy this area. It is destroying this area already. The paths that I used to roam as a kid are gone. The mountaintop mining has destroyed them. It will all be put back together, we are told. Fat chance. But suppose they actually do what they promise. A few golf courses for the rich on the leveled mountaintops is not the same. That's not putting it back together.

I'll be leaving here, and there is much that I will miss.

*It's been a long time since I've been home,
and I ain't going soon, no, I ain't going soon.*

from 'It's Been a Long Time'

I miss it already. My childhood will not come back, nor will the unspoiled beauty of the woods.

I was surprised how Orville reacted when I told him I was thinking about moving away.

"Take me with you Uncle Paul."

"I can't."

"Why not? I will miss you more than anything."

I didn't realize how much he depended on me. Funny how sometimes we don't notice how important we are to other people – or how important they are to us. I'll miss Orville as much as he'll miss me. Well, he really can come down to visit on vacations or during the summer. That won't quite be the same, of course. But it will be something we can both look forward to.

Had another dream about a mine explosion last night. It's been on my mind all day.

What was that? An explosion. Jesus! The tunnels will be blocked. I'm going to die. Shit. Maybe if I go down this tunnel here. Tunnels all over the place. It's like an ant hill. I hope my lamp lasts. I'm never going to see anybody again. Not my little girl, not my wife, not my buddies.

"Nevermore."

What the hell was that?

*"Where are you trying to get to?"
A talking raven. Maybe he can help. Where do I want to get to? Let me think.*

"I want to get to Nashville."

"Because of the music?"

"No. Because I was born there."

"Knock down that wall." Someone tells me to knock down that wall. Maybe it was the raven. I see a wall. It looks flimsy. I take my pick and hit it again and again and again. It crumbles. I climb through the hole in the wall into another tunnel. I feel a little breeze in the tunnel. That means it will lead to an exit. I follow it, but the lamp goes out. It's dark. Nevermore. I hear that word echoing through the mine shafts. Still I can feel my way. Here the tunnel divides. I take the one to the right. Why that one? Because I feel the breeze. Okay, that's got to be it. I keep following it. It's so dark. Everything is black. I think demons are following me. I can't see them but I hear them whispering.

Then I look ahead. I see a little faint light. I run and run and run. I come to the exit and then out into a big field. It's full of flowers. Insects flying all around me. I think they're going to bite me. But they glisten in all that light. They're beautiful. I see a giant ant. It has emerged from the mine shaft. It comes toward me. It's red and mean. It's as big as a dog. A big dog. It's a huge fire ant with a terrible stinger. It could kill me. It looks at me and then turns around. It's not going to kill me. I see it crawling back into its hole. Back into that dark mine. It just didn't want me down there. I look up. Through the trees I see the sun. It's beautiful. So much light. Oh My God, it's so beautiful!

When I leave the mines here, I'll be working for rich people. And where did their money come from? One way or another, it probably came from coal. If you live in this area you can't escape coal. It is everywhere. In the air. In the newspapers. In politics. In the banks which earn money from coal and support it with their loans. In the homes of the rich with their well-kept lawns. The lawns are clean and green. Yet most of their owners bought their houses with coal. You can't escape it really.

I don't kid myself. But at least I will be out of the mines. I won't be killing myself breathing that dust. I won't be killing others by dragging that shit up to the surface where it will be burned and its smoke and poisons pumped into the sky.

*Keep that black smoke a-rollin',
Feel the trembling ground,
As all those big earth movers
Bring those mountain tops down.*

from 'A Strip Miner's Life'



I Shall Always Know You

April 23, 2003

Dear Diary,

I dragged out some of my Donald Duck comic books yesterday and got to thinking about Huey, Dewey and Louie. It's kind of hard to explain. But here's what I was thinking. I really like Huey, Dewey and Louie. It seems like a cool idea to have not just one twin but two of them. Always you would have company, and never be alone. And you could play tricks on people who wouldn't even know which one you were. So then I had this weird thought. Suppose I was Huey and I went by to see Ethan. Then I visited him a lot of times and we became lovers, just like what really happened. Then imagine that I did something bad and Donald Duck said as a punishment I could never go see Ethan again. So Dewey went to see him instead and pretended to be me. Well, we're just alike so how would Ethan know? It was lonely to think I would never see him again. But then I thought he would never ever know I was missing him. He wouldn't even know he would never see me again!!

This thought made me feel awful. I tried to think of what that awful feeling was. Well, Dear Diary, it was loneliness. It was a new kind of being lonely. Now this is the hard part. It was like right now. About being lonely right now when I can sneak over and see Ethan. Thinking that stuff about Huey, Dewey and Louie make me feel lonely for Ethan even though I can go see him. Now that's pretty weird, isn't it. I can't explain it any better than that.

So when I went to see him this afternoon, and I told him about Huey, Dewey and Louie. Of course he knew about them. Everybody knows about Donald Duck and his nephews.

But I told him my ideas. As best I can. "It's weird, isn't it?" I say. It does seem like I have pretty weird thoughts.

But he says it isn't weird at all. That my thought is important. That it asked an important question. That's how he puts it. "It asks an important question."

"What question is that?"

"It's hard to put into words, just as you said," he says. "But it's like this: Do we ever really touch each other? Or are we always alone?"

Well, that sort of seemed like it. It's a creepy thought. Not that his way of saying it was much better than mine. But I could see Ethan understood what I meant.

"So what do you think?" I ask.

"I'll read you something after supper about it," he says.

Then he goes into the kitchen to check how things are getting along with the stuff he was fixing for our supper. So I have a chance to write down his words in the notebook I keep. That's how I know just what he said. "Do we ever really touch each other, or are we always alone?" That's the important question.

We had a really good supper. He even lets me have a little bit of wine. It's port. It's sweet and doesn't burn too much when I swallow it, but I still didn't like it very much. So I just drink part of what he gives me.

All the time we eat, that question keeps bugging me. But I don't say anything. I know he won't forget to read me something about it.

So after supper I put on my girl clothes and help him do the dishes. As always, he lets me wash and he does the drying. I like it better that way. Then we go into the living room and he gets out a Moomintroll book. I think he must have all the Moomintroll books that ever got written. This one is called 'Finn Family Moomintroll'. And he reads me a chapter from it. I sit on his lap like I do when he reads to me.

I think lots of people would make fun of me for that, just like they would make fun of me for wearing a dress. I'm too big to sit on his lap, they would say. Only babies do that. Also the Moomintroll books are for little kids. But I like them and I like sitting on his lap. I like Donald Duck comic books too.

So here is the story.

Well, I'll just tell most of it in my own words and then copy the most important part out just as it is in the book. That way you can see exactly what it says. So here is what it says, Dear Diary.

See, Moomintroll is playing a game of hide and seek with his friends. He finds a really good place to hide. It's under a big hat that he and Snufkin and Sniff found on the top of a mountain. Ethan just told me that part of the story. It's in Chapter One, which he will read to me next time I go see him. What's important is that it's a magic hat. It belonged to the Hobgoblin. It makes anything in it change in ways that can never be known beforehand. The others can't find Moomintroll, so he comes out from under the hat. But he looks just the opposite of what he looked like before. The hat did that to him. Like now he had big ears when before they were small. And so on with the rest of him. So of course the others don't recognize him.

He doesn't know he has changed, so at first he just thinks his friends are playing a game. For a little while he plays along. When they ask him who he is, he says he is the King of California. It's a joke. But then he begins to see that they really don't recognize him. And he gets more and more upset. He is with his friends but he is lonely. Ethan was right. That is what I was trying to say about Huey, Dewey and Louie. How one of them would be lonely if his friends didn't know which one he was. So. Like I said, he gets more and more upset. But the others don't like him very much. So they start to beat him up. They almost never do that in Moomintroll stories. Sometimes they argue but they never beat each other up. So Moominmama hears all that racket and comes out to see what is going on.

And here is what is in the book about that.

"What are you doing there, children?" she cried. "Stop fighting at once."

That's the Mama talking.

"They're walloping the King of California," sniffed the Snork Maiden. "And it serves him right."

Moomintroll crawled out of the serum, tired out and angry. "Mother," he cried. "They started it. Three against one! It's not fair!"

"I quite agree," said Moominmama seriously. "However, I expect you had teased them. But who are you, my little beast?"

"Oh please stop this awful game," wailed Moomintroll. "It isn't funny any more. I am Moomintroll and you are my mother. And that's that!"

"You aren't Moomintroll," said the Snork Maiden, scornfully. "He has beautiful little ears, but yours look like kettle-holders!"

Moomintroll felt quite confused and took hold of a pair of enormous crinkly ears.

"But I am Moomintroll!" he burst out in despair. "Don't you believe me?"

"Moomintroll has a nice little tail, just about the right size, but yours is like a chimney sweep's brush," said the Snork. And, oh dear, it was true! Moomintroll felt behind him with a trembling paw.

"Your eyes are like soup-plates," said Sniff. "Moomintroll's eyes are small and kind!"

"Yes, exactly," Snufkin agreed.

"You are an impostor!" decided the Hemulen.

"Isn't there anyone who believes me?" Moomintroll pleaded.

"Look carefully at me, mother. You must know your own Moomintroll."

Moominmama looked carefully. She looked into his frightened eyes for a very long time, and then said quietly: "Yes, you are my Moomintroll."

And at the same moment he began to change. His ears, eyes and tail began to shrink, and his nose and tummy grew, until at last he was his old self again.

"It's all right now, my dear," said Moominmama. "You see, I shall always know you, whatever happens."

The Room Raid

May 5, 2003

Dear Diary,

A really horrible thing has happened. They have taken you away. They? Who is 'they'? Well, my Dad, first of all. I don't know if anybody else went through my room with him. And I don't know if I'll ever get you back. I am starting over in a new book so I can keep talking to you, Dear Diary. But this time I'll hide you a lot better. They will never find you.

So here is what happened. Yesterday when I came home from school I found that my room was a mess. Someone had been searching all through it. My girl clothes were gone. And you were missing, Dear Diary. When I ran downstairs to ask what happened, Dad was sitting in the living room reading the newspaper. He looked up and sort of smirked at me.

"We found your pretty dresses," he said. Those were his exact words. I didn't know what to say. I mean when your life has just ended, what can you say about that?

Then he says about finding you, Dear Diary.

"It's private," I say. "You should give it back to me."

"Maybe and maybe not," he says.

"It's private. It's none of your business."

"If someone is breaking the law, that isn't just your business."

"What law?"

"Molesting children. There's a law against that."

"Nobody molested me."

"That's not what your diary shows."

"Dad, please ..."

"I knew there was something funny about that friend of yours."

"Dad. Please. Let me have it back."

He smiles again. Like torturing me is a lot of fun. That awful smile of his.

"The police will love this," he says.

The police! Why do they need my diary? Oh, God. How much I hate him! I know I'm going to cry and I don't want to cry in front of him, so I hurry away. As I am leaving he calls after me. "No more girl clothes. OK?"

Whether Dad did this alone or had other people help him I don't know. He said "we found" but maybe that's just a way of speaking. Like maybe he was the one who actually found my stuff, but there are more people than him in this. Anyhow, I guess Dad and the police, and anybody else Dad shows it to, will read everything. Everything in my life has been ripped up and thrown away. I can't tell you how horrible it is. I cry and cry but when I stop crying it still hurts. And everything that I did with Ethan is in that book. What will they do to him? Horrible. Horrible. Horrible. He really will hate me now.

How did Dad know? I mean he came to my room looking for things. Somebody must have told him something. Only Phoebe and Orville knew about you. I don't think either of them talked to my Dad but maybe one of them talked to someone who talked to someone who talked to someone and it got back to my Dad. You know how that works. "I won't tell a soul," they say. But they do. See, I think Dad was looking especially for you when he came to my room, Dear Diary. I think someone heard about you and told Dad.

Dad hated Ethan and wanted us never to see each other again. I didn't even tell Ethan about that because I was afraid he would say I should obey my Dad. And I couldn't stand that. Without Ethan my life is a big desert. It's the Sahara. I'm going to die of thirst. Dry up. Burn to death. It's horrible. And Ethan too. And I heard Dad tell Mom that Ethan would end up in prison. So they will put him in his own special Sahara separate from me. A million miles away. And he may shrivel up and die.

I don't know about the police. But Dad will just love this. I think about running away, but I would miss Mom. Even if she drinks too much she loves me. And I love her. Besides, where would I go? I could steal a little money and that would get me by for a while. But what then? Still, I think maybe I will run away. So what if I run out of money and starve to death?

I can't even go see Ethan. And he's the main one who always helped me with problems.

If I was big enough I would beat my dad up. I really would. I think about that. I think about sneaking into his bedroom when he is asleep and hitting him with a big club - like a baseball bat or something. I won't do that. It would be too terrible. And I would be scared. But I do wish my Dad would die.

This is the most terrible thing that has ever happened to me.



Antonio

Maybe He Can Still Become a Normal Boy

Late afternoon. Antonio is sitting in his office where he has been reading a copy of the diary that he discovered the day before.

I guess I always knew he was a faggot. He was different from the time he was little. Wanted to wear dresses and play with dolls. All that kind of thing. I thought I had put an end to that. Told myself it was just a phase he was going through. But his mother undercut anything I tried to do. Without her maybe he would have given up all that shit about being a girl. Faggots really are sick. Whatever those 'gay liberation' people say. They really are sick. I don't know why they can't just admit that, and go get the help they need. It's like somebody having diabetes and saying he's not sick.

Having a pancreas that works is just the way people are supposed to be. Same for being a normal man. It's just the way people are supposed to be.

Maybe it's still not too late to do something for Simon. He's barely just 12. Still just a kid. And he's small and immature for his age. Maybe we can get him into therapy and it can still be turned around. Maybe he can still become a regular guy who likes girls and all that.

This diary that he wrote. My God! What trash this is. "Can a boy love a man?" he wrote. For Christ's sake. That's really sick. Where the hell does my son get ideas like that? I know the answer to that, of course. From Ethan Ireland. That's who from. The police were really interested in what I had to tell them about that scumball. They made a copy of the diary for me, and kept the original. Said they would need it for evidence. They wanted to talk with Barbara too. She says she won't talk with them. I think she must have known about this all along. I know she was aware that Simon went to see Ethan against my orders. Can you imagine a mother leaving her child open to that kind of abuse? It's disgusting.

Scumbags like Ireland mess up a kid's life forever. Anyhow, we've got him now, got him by the balls. The fucking trouble maker. We'll pin him to the wall in our collection of noxious insects, for all to see. I hope they castrate him. Keep him in prison forever.

The Beating

May 6, 2003

Dear Diary,

Another horrible day. As soon as I got home from school, Dad sent me to my room. Then after a bit he came up and talked to me. At me would be more like it. He told me how it was nasty for men to make love to other men, and stuff like that. And how it was the most disgusting thing in the world for a man to do sex things with a boy. How that was a crime, and one of the worst ones a person can do. Like murder. Or torturing people. Well, I knew that nothing Ethan did to me was like torture or murder. So after a while I couldn't stand it any more.

"What about you?" I say. "Maybe you are a faggot too."

"What are you talking about?" he says.

"I mean when you go on those trips, I know you do sex things with other people. How do I know some of them aren't men?"

Really, Dear Diary. I don't know what came over me. I never talk like that. Not to anyone. But especially not to my Dad. I mean I am lucky that I am still alive. I guess my hate got the best of me. So anyhow, he looks real hard at me and said, "I guess it's time to teach you a little respect."

He leaves the room and comes back with that belt he has. The wide one. And he pulls my pants down - I mean underpants and everything - and starts beating my butt with it. Really hard. I think he likes hurting me.

Well, Mom hears me screaming and crying. Like I never said I was that brave. It really hurt. But it wasn't just that it hurt. It was awful for him to see my butt. And my dick. When he turned me around to scream in my face, he could see my dick.

I don't mind it if people I like see me naked. But not him. He treats me like I was just a dog that has to be beaten. Like I am a worm. A nothing. In fact while he beats me he calls me what he called Ethan. "You little piece of shit," he says.

So anyhow, like I said, Mom hears me. So she comes upstairs and tells him to stop. Just like that. Like she's not even afraid of him.

"Here you are, protecting him again," he says.

"If you don't stop I'm going to call the police," she says.

He says that if she calls the police, about this, they will call Human Services and they will take me away.

"Is that what you want?" he says. But he stops beating me and leaves the room.

Something is different with Mom. She isn't so weak any more.

Talking with Orville

May 7, 2003

Dear Diary,

I found out who told about the diary. It was Orville. At school I noticed that he was trying to avoid me. He sat at a different table during lunch, and he wouldn't look at me. So during recess I found him. He was over in a corner of the playground and was sort of hiding behind a bush. But the bush was too scraggly. I could see him. So I go over to it. He's sitting on the ground. I sit down beside him. He looks away. "Orville," I say. "Did you tell about the diary?"

"Nancy said she wouldn't tell," he says. Nancy is Orville's cousin. One of them, anyhow. She's a daughter to one of Paul's sisters, Winifred. Nancy is Orville's age.

"So you told Nancy about the diary?" I ask.

"No."

"What did you tell her?"

He was quiet a long time. I just wait. "About how we are lovers," he says.

"You and me?"

"Yes. And Phoebe." He looks over at me now. "Remember how you said we was all lovers?"

"Yes. I remember. But why did you tell?"

"I don't know. We was at a family get-together. A cook-out. Me and her was talking. She told me she had a boyfriend. And it just sort of happened."

"What just sort of happened?"

"You know. Me telling her about how I have a boyfriend and a girlfriend. About us being lovers. She promised she wouldn't tell."

So of course I wondered what else he might have told about.

"And the girl clothes? Did you tell about that?"

"No."

"What about the diary?"

"I didn't tell Nancy about the diary."

"Did you tell anybody? About my girl's clothes or the diary? Was there anybody else you talked with?"

Again there is that long silence. I know the silence means yes, so I wait.

"My Dad," he says finally.

"You told your Dad about the diary?"

"I didn't mean to."

"Why did you tell him?"

"Well, see, Nancy told her Mom. About us being lovers, I mean. And her Mom told my Mom. And my Mom told my Dad. And so he asked me about it."

"Your Dad questioned you about it?"

"Yeah. I was afraid he was going to hit me. And I wanted to tell him it was OK."

"What was OK?"

"You know. How we really do love each other. But I couldn't."

"So why mention the diary?"

"The diary explains it. I'm not so good at that."

"At explaining things?"

He nodded. "I told him you explained it in your diary."

"So that's when you mentioned the diary?"

"It just sort of slipped out. That's where you explained it. I thought maybe he would understand if he read that. It was a

mistake to tell my Dad about it. I knew that right after I said it. But I couldn't take it back."

We were both quiet for a long time then. Then he says, "I'm sorry, Simon. I didn't mean to."

I'm still mad at him. I won't say I'm not. But I think he is telling the truth. He is sorry. Like he says, he's not real good with words, and he gets confused real easy. He can't help all that. And he is my friend. So yes, Dear Diary, I was still mad at him. But I gave him a sort of sideways hug and said, "I know it, Orville. You didn't mean to." But my madness didn't go away, and he knew it. He's not too smart, but he feels things. I was sorry but it was the best I could do right then.

After school I saw Phoebe. She asked me to come to her house. I had to tell her I couldn't. See, Dad said I had to come right home after school every day. And I had to spend the rest of the day in my room. I forgot to tell you that, Dear Diary. I'm grounded to my room. That isn't fair. But I am afraid to disobey. He said he would beat my bare butt again with his belt if I went against him. Only worse. And Mom wouldn't be able to stop him. I believed him, and I didn't want that.

"He's done it before," I told Phoebe. "So I know he will. And it will be harder this time."

"I'm going to tell my Mom," Phoebe said.

"About everything I just told you?"

She nodded.

So I thought about this. How could it hurt if she told her Mom? So I sort of shrugged. "But what can she do?" I asked.

"Maybe nothing," she said. "I don't know. But I just want to tell her."

He's More Like a Jailer

May 9, 2003

Dear Diary,

I'm not going to tell you where I am, Dear Diary, until I get to that part. It will really surprise you. But I am going to begin at the beginning. Yesterday morning I told Mom that I didn't want to go to school. I don't know who knows about my dresses, and my diary and Ethan and all that. And I would be embarrassed. She said she would call in and tell them I'm sick.

Dad went to work early. So I was eating breakfast with just Mom when someone knocked on the door. It was Helen and Rebeka. Rebeka is Phoebe's Mom. I don't remember if I ever told you that, Dear Diary. I always just called her 'Phoebe's Mom'. Like that was her name. Well, that's mostly who she is to me. But she has her own name too, of course. So I should use that. Rebeka.

So Mom invites them in. She offers to make some breakfast for them, and they say no. They do that thing about how 'you must' and 'no, I can't' for while, and they finally convince her they really don't want anything to eat. But they do accept some coffee. It's a good thing that Dad is gone. I can tell you he wouldn't like those women in his house talking with Mom. He calls them 'lezzies'. I think maybe they watched the house for Dad to leave before they came and knocked on the door. Anyhow, Mom and Helen and Rebeka just sort of chit-chat for a little while, about nothing in particular. You know, the weather and all that. Like grownups do. It was like they came by lots of times, even though this was the first time Helen ever visited my house.

After a little bit Mom says to me, "Don't you have some homework, Simon?"

Course this is her way of telling me to get lost.

Well, she doesn't hang around when I have someone visiting me, so I guess she has a right to talk to her friends without me. She has only met Rebeka a couple of times, and I don't think she ever saw Helen before. So I don't know if you can call them friends. But still, they came to see her more than me. So I just go to my room. They are down in the kitchen for an hour or more just talking. I can't hear what they were saying. I don't try to, really. Well, maybe a little. I can't help wondering what they are saying. But I don't think it's right. It would be like Mom spying on me when I have a friend in my room. She wouldn't do that. So after a little bit I stop trying to hear them. I can't hear much from upstairs anyhow.

That's mostly what happened yesterday. Except one more thing. That evening when we were eating supper Mom says to me, "I'm not much of a mother, am I?"

That's not the first time she ever said that to me. I say, "You're a good Mom. You're always nice to me."

"But I'm drunk all the time."

"Not always, Mom. Just sometimes," I say.

She is quiet for a minute. Then she says, "Do you like living with your father?"

She never asked me this before, so it sort of takes me by surprise. But I think I should tell the truth. "No," I say. Just that. No explanation. I mean, she knows how it is.

"I hear about how every boy needs his father," she says.

"He's not like a Dad to me, Mom," I said. "He's more like a ..." I can't think right off what he is like. But then it comes to me. "... like a jailer," I say.

"Yes," she says. "He is."

Then we change the subject and talk about other things.

OK. So now I'll tell you. I'm at Phoebe's. And how did I get here? Well, this morning after breakfast I go to my room to pass the time doing stuff that I like - listening to music and that kind of thing. I'm not really having much fun. Just passing the time.

Course I can't go out and walk around. I'm supposed to be sick. Then Mom calls me down to eat lunch. So we are sitting there just eating our soup and grilled cheese sandwiches when the phone rings. It's Dad. He says he will be home in an hour. Like I told you before, he does that. I mean he comes and goes without giving you much warning. Sometimes no warning at all. But he wants Mom to have some lunch ready for him, so that's why he called.

Well, when she hangs up, Mom just sits there thinking - like she is upset. She tries not to show it, but I know what she looks like when she is upset. I can't really explain it, but I know. So I say "What's the matter, Mom?"

She just shakes her head and goes on thinking. Then all at once, she says, "Go pack your clothes."

"Pack my clothes?"

"Yes. Just whatever you think you might need for a few days. Quick."

"Why?" I ask.

"Cause we're leaving," she says?

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"To Rebeka's for now. Then I don't know."

"Why."

"You've been living in a prison long enough," she says. "And I have too. It's not fair. And I don't want to see him hit you or beat you again. Never again."

"That's good, Mom," I say. "But think how mad he'll be. What's he going to do when we come back?"

"We're not coming back," she says.

Well, I just sit there. It's more than I can take in all at once. I don't know what I feel or think. Well, I sort of know what I feel. I just have this excited feeling. It seems like a kind of happiness. But also I'm afraid. "Never?" I say.

"Never," she says.

So then I understand that she wants us out of the house before Dad gets back. Me too. I don't want him to catch us leaving. I don't know what he would do if he caught us leaving. I don't want to know. So when I understand what Mom wants, I jump up and run upstairs. I just throw a bunch of things I think I might need in a big suitcase and drag it downstairs. Mom does the same. We put our suitcases in her car and drive away. Just like that! And here we are at Rebeka's house.

I don't think Dad figured out where we are yet. I don't know what will happen when he does.

Testing the Spirits

May 11, 2003

Dear Diary,

The police arrested Ethan and put him in jail. They made his bail super high. Helen says she's going to get him out. But it might take a little while to get the money.

So my angel failed me.

I talked to my angel. I asked him questions. But I didn't get any answers. At least not answers that kept bad things from happening.

So like I said. We are staying at Phoebe's house. This morning when Phoebe's Mom - I should say Rebeka - and me were alone, I asked her about it (I've got to remember to call her Rebeka. I mean suppose people never used my name and just called me 'Barbara's son' or even worse, 'Antonio's son'). So anyhow, what I asked her about was getting answers. You know. From my angel. It was her idea that writing a diary might get me an angel.

We were sitting in her living room drinking some hot chocolate. We just finished breakfast. Her living room is a cozy place. It has pictures of angels on the wall. So I know she is really interested in angels. "If my angel is protecting me, how come my Dad found my diary?" I ask.

"I don't know," she says. She thinks about this a little bit and then says, "Maybe it's just that angels aren't omnipotent."

"Omnipotent?"

"All-powerful. They can't control everything. But they will give you guidance."

"Like advice? Warnings? Things like that?"

"Yes, but you have to be open and listening."

"For voices?"

"No. At least it doesn't work that way for me. Not voices that you hear with your ears. With me it's just that new thoughts pop into my head.

"OK. Yeah," I say. "Sometimes new thoughts pop into my head."

"Yes," she says. "It's like that."

I sit back in my easy chair. She has these really comfortable old easy chairs in her living room. Three of them. They practically fill the room. And I sip my hot chocolate. If Ethan wasn't in jail this place would really make me happy.

"These thoughts," I say. "Suppose they do pop into my head. OK. But how do I know they aren't just my own thoughts? Maybe my bad thoughts. Or even worse. They might be the thoughts of some bad spirit. An angel is a spirit. Right? A good spirit. Well, if there are good spirits maybe there are bad spirits. And maybe they might talk to you."

She agrees with this. So she tells me about this old-time hermit named Saint Anthony who heard voices all the time. And who had to deal with a lot of bad spirits.

"St Anthony was important to me because he insisted you have to test the spirits."

"To be sure they are from Jesus. Right?"

"Well, that was his test. And that was OK for him. But it's not my way of testing."

"What's your way of testing?"

"I go by how the spirit feels to me, and what it does to me. If it is violent and suggests violent things, then it's not a good spirit. And if it puts me down or humiliates me, it's not a good spirit. Good spirits are loving. Loving spirits don't tell people to do violent things and they don't put anybody down."

So I tell her how sometimes ideas pop into my head about how I'm a faggot or a piece of shit. Things like that.

"Those aren't your guardian angel," she says. "Those are just your own thoughts. Or maybe it's the thoughts of someone you once knew. We take the voices of our parents and other people into us. It's like they live in our heads, and seem like spirits sometimes. But a good angel will never tell you that you are a piece of shit. They're gentle. You can feel their love and gentleness."

So that's what she said, Dear Diary.

See, she would be talking about you, I guess. You're are my angel. That's what I think. And you never put me down or tell me to do violent things. So I guess you pass that test. But still, the bad thing did happen.

We take our cups into the kitchen and we do the breakfast dishes together. I'm still thinking about that stuff she told me about St Anthony.

"About that saint you told me about," I say. "I sort of see what you are talking about, I mean about testing and all that. But why would anybody go off to the desert and lock himself in a tomb and never see people?"

"It wouldn't be a good thing for most people to do."

"But why did he do it? I mean what good was that to anybody?"

"I don't know how to explain it to you. Helen might be able to. She's a philosopher. I'm not."

"You explain things good."

"I'll try. If you want. But you really would do better asking Helen. She and I talked about this. She understands this kind of thing better than I do, and can put words on things."

"Try."

"Well, to me it's a matter of how we should be in this world. Most people seem to be driven by different things that the world offers. Money. Sex. Fame. Power. Food. That kind of thing. Those are the things that draw people into the world and make them do the things they do."

"Are those things bad? Like is sex bad? Or money? Or food?"

"No. None of those things are bad in and of themselves. That's not the point."

"Then what is?"

"I think it's that we can't let ourselves be grasping for those things all the time. That we can't let ourselves be driven by these things. The world draws us into its craziness by offering us those things. On its terms."

"So we should not let ourselves want them?"

"No. That's not it either. See, that's why I said it would be better to ask Helen. It's hard to explain."

"You're doing good. Sometimes I can understand you better than her. She uses so many big words."

"OK. See here's how I understand it. All those things I mentioned are fine. Sex included. Nothing wrong with them. But the world offers them in a crazy kind of way. In a way that makes us lose track of who we are."

"How does it do that?"

"Well, by trying to sell us things that we don't really need for one thing. But also ... well ... See, you have to put love at the center of everything. Learning how to love. Doing the best you can with it. If any of those other things is the center, then everything gets mixed up."

"Like sex is good, but only if it's about love."

"Yes."

"Phoebe says that you think sex with anybody is OK if it's about love."

She stops and thinks a minute. Then she says, "Yes. I think that. But you have to remember that the world doesn't agree with that."

"So I still don't quite understand why this Anthony guy went off and locked himself up in a tomb."

"Well, it seems like in every spiritual tradition there are these people who try to attack the root cause of why we mess everything up in the world."

"The 'root cause'?"

"The main reason."

"So what's the 'root cause'?"

"Different people have different names for it. Buddhists call it attachment."

"Attachment?"

"Clinging to things. Thinking we have to have this or that thing in order to be happy. Being driven by things. It's not enjoying things as they come to us. That's why the world exists. It exists for happiness. There is no reason to turn away from the happiness that the world freely offers us. But when we cling to things, and demand that the world give them to us, it creates unhappiness."

"Like how?"

"Well, like suppose we demand more from someone we love than they can give. Then we can't just enjoy what they can give us and let it go at that. We mess up the whole relationship that way."

"I think I get it, sort of," I say. And I think I do. Sort of.

"See, most people think that people like St Anthony were against sex. That all those mystics hated sex and wanted to overcome it. I don't know. Maybe they did. Maybe some did and some didn't. But the main thing that was bad was not sex. It was attachment to sex. Those are two different things. That's what's hard to explain. And that's why I say you should talk to Helen. She understands this better than I do."

We are quiet for a little bit. Just trying to sort out what we have been talking about. Or I guess she is giving me time to try to understand it. Finally she says, "Are there other things that pop into your mind that seem to come from somewhere else?"

"Yeah. I do sort of hear voices in my head telling me stuff. More like thoughts. But, you know. Like I'm being told something."

"Anything recent?"

"Yeah."

"What were you told?"

"That I should get a message to Ethan."

"And what message would that be?"

"How much I love him and how I miss him. My thought says he needs to hear that." Funny thing. As soon as I say that I just start crying and it seems like I can't stop. I told you before how I cry too easy. Well, Rebeka doesn't seem to mind. In fact she pulls me over real close to her and hugs me. She doesn't tell me to stop crying.

"I was told something else too," I say.

"What was that?"

"That some day I really will be a writer. And that I will be able to write about all this stuff that is happening, and show people how it really is."

Tough and Cunning

March 12, 2003

Dear Diary,

Mom and me left Rebeka's house and came to Helen's. Helen said we would be safer here because she was more of a 'hard ass' than Phoebe's Mom. That's what she said. 'Hard ass'. I think she just means that she isn't afraid of my Dad. I don't think she is afraid of anybody.

I like Helen but I would really rather be at Phoebe's. I asked Mom about this. She said that after a week or two I can go to Phoebe's to live. At least until we get our own place. She might stay at Helen's until then. We could see each other every day. That doesn't sound too bad.

Yesterday Helen told me we have to go to her doctor and have him look at the bruise on my face. And on my butt.

"I'm OK," I tell her. "Dad didn't break anything."

"That's not the point," she says. "We need it for documentation."

"What for?!"

"So we can protect you against your Dad. You have no choice, Simon. You have to do this."

See, Helen can be sort of bossy at times. Not too often. Just sometimes. But when she is bossy there is no getting around her. Like she says, she can be a hard ass.

So I went to the doctor. The doctor not only looked at my butt, but she took pictures of it. I was kind of embarrassed. But then I had a funny idea. I laughed.

"Someday my grandchildren will have a picture of my butt up on the wall," I said. I was thinking of those old-time black and white

pictures of grandparents that some people have up on their walls. I thought it was funny to think about my grandchildren having a picture of my butt rather than my face. Helen and her doctor laughed too. But not very much.

Later Helen told me that I would have to go talk to a woman at Social Services about my father.

"They'll ask me about Ethan," I tell her.

"Yes," she says. "That could be a problem."

"A big problem," I say.

She admits I'm right. "Human Services isn't really our friend," she says. "They will want to punish Ethan. But they will also want to protect you from your father. So you must tell them nothing about Ethan and everything about your father."

Then she looks at me with hard eyes. Well, eyes can't be hard, but you know what I mean. It wasn't like she was mad at me, exactly. And certainly not like she doesn't like me. I know she does. But it was a look that said I really better listen to her carefully.

"And the same with the police," she adds. "Everything about your Dad and nothing about Ethan."

"What if they insist?" I ask.

"Who do you want to live with?" She asked. "Your Mom or your Dad?"

"Mom, of course."

"And do you want to help Ethan?"

"You know I do."

"If you want these two things, you have to be tough," she says. "Really tough. Jesus said we have to be as gentle as doves and as wise as serpents. You've got the dove part down. You're already gentle. And that is good. I hope you never lose that. But you have to be tough too. Tough and cunning as well as gentle and harmless. Otherwise the world will eat you up."

Well, like I told you, Dear Diary, mostly Helen doesn't talk too much. But when she has something to say she doesn't beat

around the bush. See, every day she is explaining to me how the world really works. How adults really do things. Not what they say, but how they really do things. And who you can trust and how far, and all kinds of things like that.

One time she says to me, "I'll never tell you what you should want. You have to decide that for yourself. But I might be able to help you see what you have to do to get what you want."

She explains to me that I will have to deal with grownups who have a lot more experience than I do. I have to become 'street smart', she says. That's what she called it. It means knowing about the ways of the world. Those were her words too. 'The ways of the world'. Another thing she told me about the 'ways of the world' is that lots of time grownups seem friendly and nice. But you can't trust them just because of that. You can only trust them when you are sure they want for you what you want for yourself.

I wrote that down - 'When they want for you what you want for yourself'.

Helen wants what I want. She wants to protect me from Dad. And she wants to help Ethan. And she's smart. So that's why I listen very carefully to everything she says.

Mom is going to AA. She hasn't had anything to drink since we came here. I don't think that will last. She has stopped drinking before. So she will probably begin again. But maybe not as much. That would be good.

I'm glad to be away from Dad. But I'm not really happy. I miss Ethan too much. And I worry about him.

After supper I go look through the telescope. You can just barely see his house from here. Not all of it. It is mostly hidden by trees. But I can see part of his porch. I watch for him. Even though I know he is in jail, I watch for him. I know that sounds crazy, but I do. Maybe they let him out of jail, I tell myself. But I know it's not true.

I can see the chair where I used to sit on his lap. I want to be there again, wearing my dress and listening to a Moomintroll story.

After the sun goes down I look at the stars through Helen's telescope. I pretend that I am the little Prince looking for my flower. I pretend that it is in the Andromeda galaxy and I ask Helen to point the telescope at it. She shows me how to do that so I can look at it whenever I want to. I look at that galaxy for a long time, wondering about how it can be so big. And I think about when the little Prince talks about his flower. Ethan read that book to me and he bought a copy for me for one of my Christmas presents. I have it with me, so I can write down the part I mean. It goes like this:

If someone loves a flower, on which just one single blossom grows in all the millions and million of stars, it is enough to make him happy just to look at the star. He can say to himself, "Somewhere, my flower is there ..." But if the sheep eats the flower, in one moment all his stars will be darkened ...

So after I look at the Andromeda galaxy I start looking at other stars, and try to find the planets Helen showed me. It's interesting looking at all those things. But my flower is not up there. The sheep has eaten it. I know Ethan is still alive. But that's the way it feels. Like the prison opened its big jaws and swallowed him up. So it makes me sad to see the stars.



Helen

News of the Universe

Meditation Six, in which Helen thinks about the relationship between Physics and Theology as she watches Simon/Simone look at the Adromeda galaxy.

He stares at the Andromeda galaxy. I can see why Ethan fell in love with this boy. He is a delight. But he is so terribly unhappy now that he is separated from his lover.

His mother insists on preparing the meals. Says this is the least she can do in return for my letting them use my home as a refuge. Every evening after supper Simon wants to use the telescope. Always he wants to see – to see the world of the very small and the world of the very big. But first he looks at Ethan’s house in the world of in-between. One can barely see it from here. But he stares for a long long time – hardly moving – like he is in a state of meditation.

Then as it gets dark he shifts to the stars and the planets. I wish I had a telescope that was big enough to show him how galaxy upon galaxy extends to the end of space. ‘The end of space’ – whatever that means. What lies beyond that end?

Simon stares out into that vastness. Hoping to receive news – news of his beloved – news from the universe. But the only news he receives is that Ethan will never come back.

How long is that?

*They have taken you away.
Tears are too small
and too few
To contain my grief.*

Carroll Baskins

The very small and the very big – the microcosm and the macrocosm. Quantum works for the microcosm and relativity for the macro. And they don’t hang together. Are incompatible. Physicists search for a way of making them fit. They may. Or may not. It is a ‘complementarity’. We have complemenarities when we encounter ideas of polarity in which both the poles are necessary, but are contradictory. Not just different, but contradictory.

These are the koans of science and philosophy – the unanswerable questions – that bring thought to a halt: mind/matter, time/eternity, particle/wave, fully man/fully God. Not all polarities are koans. Male/female, for example, complement each other but are not contradictory. Male does not make female logically impossible. Nor the reverse.

Hence I observed how needful it is for me to enter into the darkness, and to admit the coincidence of opposites, beyond all grasp of reason, and there to seek the truth ...

Nicolas of Cusa

So there is the little philosopher trying to put all the incompatibilities together. And at the core, what does he find? Something he has no words for. Mysteries that trouble our complacencies with the threat of despair ... or the hope of bliss.

The great mystery discovered by physics is entanglement. 'Spooky action at a distance'. A change in one of two entangled particles instantaneously correlates with a change in the other. Simon will probably understand this in time. As much as any of us do. But for now he ponders these contradictions in his heart without words. Without numbers.

Fifty years of discussion re quantum physics gave the entanglement creed:

The experimental violation of Bell's inequalities confirms that a pair of entangled photons separated by hundreds of meters must be considered a single non-separable object – it is impossible to assign a local physical reality to each photon.

Alain Aspect – Nature, 398, March 1999

Five centuries discussing the nature of Christ gave the Athanasian Creed:

He is God of the substance of the Father begotten before the worlds, and He is man of the substance of His mother born in the world; perfect God, perfect man subsisting of a reasoning soul and human flesh

Athanasian Creed

For He was made man that we might be made God.

*Athanasius
Incarnation of the Word
Section 54, line 3*

Fully man and fully God. A complementarity within which we are included. A Christian koan. Profound stuff, this.

But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not'; and 'He was not before he was made'; and 'He was made out of nothing'; or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence'; or 'The Son of God is created' or 'changeable' or 'alterable' – they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic church.

Tacked on to the Nicene Creed

Profound stuff indeed. But why must every human institution chloroform its best current truths and stick them on a pin in a box where they can no longer grow? Orthodoxy is the death of the truth process. It's an act of repression, an imposition of power. Truth is protected by an ongoing method of inquiry, not by any orthodoxy.

The truth process we call theology must be based on a polarity. Knowledge of the other through the senses must be balanced with knowledge of the self through

reflection on experience as it is to itself. Science and phenomenology. Physics and art. Phenomenology always leads to metaphor – to poetry. Inquiry proceeds on two fundamental tracks which rely on different languages – numbers and metaphors. The results seem contradictory, yet how can we see the depth of reality with one eye closed?

My little philosopher is and is not the stars. Is and is not Ethan.

We are two and yet one. Even Jesus could not comprehend this.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

Philippians 2, 5&6

Locality/non-locality. Perhaps that is the most profound polarity. Discovered by every saint in the in-between scale of human existence and now discovered by scientists in the microcosm of subatomic particles.

Quantum physics of course does not prove the saints nor the saints quantum physics. Quantum physics is a mathematical description of subatomic particles as they and/or their consequences are observed from the outside, neither more nor less. But the parallels cannot be ignored. Philosophers and theologians have every right – no, not every right, rather the responsibility – to place such insights side by side for contemplation.

Two particles are smashed together to produce the little bang, and two entangled particles emerge that allow the proof offered by Bell's Inequality.

I received a telephone call one day at the graduate college at Princeton from Professor Wheeler, in which he said, "Feynman, I know why all electrons have the same charge and the same mass."

"Why?"

"Because, they are all the same electron!"

Feynman doubted this. But if it is true, to say that the two are one is only a foot in the door. Twelve billion years ago we have the birth of the universe. The big bang. Should it not produce a massive entanglement – every particle with every particle – and thus a partial entanglement on the in-between scale of things? Entanglement from the little bang does not prove entanglement in the big bang. Nor in the in-between realm. But how can it not raise the question?

*There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of
the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.
The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass, and white and red morning-glories,
and white and red clover, and the song of the phoebe-
bird,
And the Third-month lambs, and the sow's pink-faint litter,
and the mare's foal, and the cow's calf,*

*And the noisy brood of the barn-yard,
or by the mire of the pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there
– and the beautiful curious liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads
– all became part of him.
Walt Whitman – There Was a Child Went Forth*

And that child was Simon/Simone.

One day he went forth and saw Ethan. And he became Ethan. Now that Ethan is gone, he still carries a little Ethan around inside of him. But that is not enough. He also wants the Ethan who is separate from him. The one whose physical lap he can sit on and whose physical arms will hold him. Becoming one takes time. And Ethan has been ripped away from – but not totally out of – Simon/Simone when the process was just getting under way.



Orville

Everybody's Gone

Orville sits by himself during recess at school. He thinks about how he can't give the right answers in class and how he misses his friends.

I'm not supposed to be friends with Simon any more. Dad says he is a faggot. He says a faggot is a boy who loves other boys. He says that I should stay away from Phoebe too. These are not the friends I need he says. Maybe not. I'm not that smart. So maybe I don't know. But I keep wanting them for friends. I miss them. I liked being lovers. But maybe that means I'm a faggot too.

I wish I was smarter. The teacher called on me again today and asked a question I couldn't answer. "What's a verb?" That's what she asked. I couldn't answer that question. I couldn't even guess. I just sat there with nothing to say. I really looked dumb. I still don't know what a verb is. I hate being dumb. Phoebe and Simon never made fun of me. They never treated me like I was dumb. I think that's why I want to be friends with them.

Once Simon did say I was dumb. But Phoebe told him it wasn't OK to say that. And he apologized. Simon was just mad at me. That's why he said that. He didn't mean it.

I think Simon must hate me. I didn't mean to tell about his diary. I really didn't. It just sort of happened. I was trying to say something else and it just popped out. I hope he understands. I hope he doesn't hate me too much.

Now Uncle Paul is going away. He's going to Charleston to live. He doesn't want to work in a mine. He says I can visit him sometimes. Maybe in the summer. That will be good. But I will miss him. Most of the time I will miss him so bad.



We Are All Elsewhere

May 14, 2003

Dear Diary,

It's horrible. Ethan is still in jail.

All because of you, Dear Diary. Well, it wasn't your fault that they found you. Anyhow, I guess the diary isn't really you. I mean not the book itself. It's only where I write to you. But you are supposed to be my guardian angel. So why didn't you warn me? Or keep Dad from finding it? Or make Orville be more careful about telling people things. OK. Rebeka explained that. You aren't omnipotent. That's what she said. That means all-powerful. And I guess she's right. But still, I feel kind of let down. Like maybe you could've tried harder. I'm sorry, Dear Diary. I guess I am mad at everybody. Even you. Please don't go away on account of it.

I'm afraid to keep a diary now, but I have to put down my thoughts somewhere. And I want to keep talking to you. I can't talk with Ethan. They won't let me. So I have found a hiding place that even God couldn't find. I won't even tell you where you are hidden. Only I know. It's a secret I don't share with anybody.

Grownups lots of times say we shouldn't have secrets. That's what the social worker said. Secrets let bad things happen, she said. If something is OK we don't need to be secret about it. But that's not true. If the kids find out my secret about wearing dresses they will make fun of me. When people find out your secrets they do horrible things. Like putting your friend in jail.

See, Ethan and me being lovers was the most important thing I had. It was my treasure. My gold and silver. Sometimes you have to hide your treasure to keep people from taking it away from you.

Mom agrees. She says it's OK to have secrets.

She doesn't think that Ethan is bad. She says if we loved each other I don't have to tell anybody about it.

"But what if they ask me?" I said.

"Then you lie," she said. She really did. She said that. She's not like most Moms. She said it's like you are hiding a Jew when the bad people under Hitler wanted to find them and kill them. "If they came to the door and asked if you knew where any Jews were, would you lie?" she asked.

"Sure," I said. "I'd have to."

"Well that's it," she said. "That's your answer." She meant that Ethan is like a Jew that is being hunted down, and I should hide him. So I did. Well, I did my best. But they found him.

Ethan gave me a Pinocchio poem when we were still seeing each other. It goes like this:

*Pinocchio will never be a real boy.
I know that.
He will never eat real crackers and soup.
But it is better that you see only this marionette who
brings to the world the protection of his woodenness.
I cannot put myself at the mercy of your raised eyebrows.
Do not ask it.
For many years I believed I was the only one who
sent whittled wood loosely strung together out
into the world to live by proxy.
Only little by little did I learn that nobody is there---
Nobody at all.
We are all elsewhere.*

Jay Edson - Pinocchio

Anyhow, they sent me to this social worker. Mom said not to trust the social worker. She was just one of the police. Only a nice one. At least she would seem nice. And she did seem nice - like she really cared about me. But I remembered what Helen told me about people being nice. The social worker told me it wasn't my fault, and how awful it must have been, and things like that. I said it wasn't awful because he never did anything. There it was. I was telling her that there were no Jews in my attic. But she said, "Boys don't know about the kind of things you described in your diary unless they have been abused." I guess she doesn't know boys too good. I told her I heard lots of boys talking about things

grownups don't think they know. Lots of times. And you can find it on the Internet. Even in newspapers - some of it at least. And we don't tell everybody everything we do.

The appointment went on for a whole hour. It wasn't too bad, though, because she did most of the talking - telling me how I felt and what I needed to do to get healed and all that kind of thing.

I don't think they can find him guilty of really doing anything much to me. I did admit that we took showers together because I couldn't see how that could be bad. I guess I shouldn't have done that because they called it 'endangering a child'. Those were their words. I wrote that down because it sounded weird. I mean how can taking a shower be dangerous?

So I snuck up to see Helen. She hugged me and said she was sorry about what happened. She told me that Ethan would be out on bail pretty soon, but that they wouldn't let him see me. They call me his victim. I hate them. I hate them almost as much as I hate my Dad.

Helen says Ethan will probably be in prison for one to three years. And then be on probation for a while. That's what his lawyer is saying. But even after he gets out they won't let him see me.

Mom is unhappy again. She is down in her bedroom. I know she is drinking. She does that when she gets unhappy. I asked her why she is unhappy. She just shrugged like she sometimes does. I think maybe she had someone who loved her when she was my age, and then lost him like I did Ethan. That would explain how come she understands me so good. Maybe she knew a nice man who gave her lots of attention. Or maybe a woman. Or maybe she never did have anybody who loved her. I guess that would be the worst of all.

Ethan explained what that Pinocchio poem meant, and I understood most of it. But now I understand it better.

*... nobody is there -
Nobody at all.
We are all elsewhere.*

It isn't really true that nobody is there. Mom is there, and Helen and Phoebe. Phoebe's Mom too. That's quite a lot of people. But

Ethan isn't there. I mean he's there in one way. In the way the poem talks about. He is real. He's not just a fake face. A mask. But they have him locked up. And they won't let him be in my life any more. So there is more than one way of not being there.

They Know I Love Him

May 16, 2003

Dear Diary,

The police said they wanted to talk to me again. Dad called me up and told me about it. I said I didn't want to go, but Dad said I had to. He said I had to tell them everything. So he came and got me and drove me to the police station. Helen couldn't stop him.

They are trying to get me to tell everything that happened - and about things that didn't happen. They tell me they want to help me. They even say they want to help him. They know I love him. At least they figured that out. Well, they don't really believe I do. They think that's just something I believe but really I don't. Kids don't even know what they feel. That's what they think. So why should I tell them if they don't believe me anyhow?

They just say that they want to help Ethan because that's what they think will make me happy. They think that will make me trust them. But I know they are lying. They want to put him in jail for as long as possible. How's that going to help him? And they want me to help them with this. So they lie and lie and lie. Grownups go on about how you should never lie. That's what they say to kids. Don't ever lie. Think about George Washington and that stupid cherry tree. But then they lie all the time. Especially to kids. They lie even when they are not protecting Jews.

So let me try to tell you how it was, Dear Diary.

They took me into this room. I mean it didn't have a lot of torture stuff in it. Just an ordinary room. Like there was a copy machine in it. And some other office stuff. And in the middle there was a little table. Just big enough to have four chairs around it. So they had me sit down in one. One of the cops was really big. I was scared of him. He looked like he could beat up most anybody.

His name was Officer Gibson. The other one was sort of big, but not as big as Officer Gibson. He was older. Like he had gray hair. And he looked friendly. His name was Officer Lovett. I wrote their names down as soon as it was over so I wouldn't forget. I knew I wanted to tell you about this, Dear Diary.

So, OK. This Officer Lovett does most of the talking. He is sitting with me at the table. Officer Gibson stands up the whole time. Like he is going to catch me if I jump up and try to run away. Or maybe like he will hit me if I tell a lie. I don't think he will, really. But that's how he makes me feel. But not Officer Lovett. He looks like a really nice grandfather. Someone you can trust. But I don't trust him. I know better than that.

So they ask me a lot of questions about what went on between me and Ethan. And I keep not telling them very much. Just that he was nice and taught me about astronomy and biology. Stuff like that.

Officer Lovett asks a lot about what we did at night. Like where we slept. I lie. I say I slept on the couch in the living room. He says that Ethan - he calls him Mr Ireland - said I slept in the same bed with him. I thought about this for a minute. Then I say, "Well, maybe he doesn't remember."

See, I knew I would have to lie when I came here, so I thought a lot about it. And I thought that once I told a lie, I better stick with it. I mean suppose the SS officers are at my door asking about Jews, and I say there aren't any at my place, and one of them says, "That's funny. Your neighbor said he was sure he saw some coming into your place."

So what would I say to that? "Oh yeah, those Jews." I don't think so. I would just say I didn't know why my neighbor said that, but it wasn't true. The thing is, once you tell a lie, it's better to just stick with it. If they can prove you are lying, OK. That's up to them. But maybe they can't, so it's better to just stick with your lie. And I don't know what Ethan really told them and what he didn't. They might lie about that.

So they got pretty tired of me not telling the things they wanted me to tell. Even Officer Lovett, who kept trying to look kind and friendly, really looked like he wanted to beat me up.

So then they tried something different. Mr Lovett says "I think you are afraid that Mr Ireland will hurt you, and that's why you won't tell us what happened."

"I am telling you what happened," I say. "He taught me a lot about biology and astronomy. We looked at very small things and very big things. Through a microscope and a telescope."

"He had a telescope?" Officer Lovett asks.

"Yeah," I say. "We made one together."

"That's hard to believe," Officer Lovett says.

"I could show you," I say. "I have it at home." And I do. I brought it with me to Helen's. I had him there. But he didn't ask to come and see it.

Well, Officer Lovett and me just sit there, with officer Gibson standing guard. Not saying anything for a while. Then Officer Lovett says, "Look. Did Mr Ireland ever tell you he would kill you if you told?"

"Kill me? Ethan?"

"That's who we are talking about."

"Ethan wouldn't kill me. That's really dumb."

"Did he threaten to hurt you in any way?"

"Of course not," I say.

"If he did threaten you, we could protect you," Officer Gibson says. That was all he said the whole time.

"Nobody needs to protect me," I say. "Ethan's my friend."

So that's how the conversation went, Dear Diary. It was really strange and I didn't like it one bit. It was like being in a horror movie. Only I was one of the characters. It seemed very strange. I kept having to tell myself that this was real. I wish it wasn't.

And you know what was strangest of all? It's how they tell me what I feel and what I think. They don't ask me what I think or what I feel. They tell me. Well, maybe they do ask me, but if I don't tell them what they want to hear, then they tell me what they think is the truth.

My social worker does this too. You were afraid of him. Blah blah blah. He hurt you. More blah blah blah blah. I want to put my hands over my ears, but I don't because it wouldn't be polite. But they go on and on, and they don't leave you alone until they are ready. Blah blah blah. He threatened you. Blah blah blah. It's not your fault. Over and over they repeat that kind of stuff. They say it with that fake smile. That fake friendliness. I can tell when people are fake. They act like they are trying to save me from drowning. But it's them that's drowning me. Not him.

It's his fault they say. What's his fault? That he loved me?



Nothing Seems Like Fun Anymore

May 31, 2004

Dear Diary,

I went to Frog Pond this afternoon. It's pretty warm even if it is a little cloudy. I went by myself. I wanted to go skinny dipping. I thought that might make me a little bit happier. I'm really sad now that Ethan is gone. So I wanted to see how the stream is doing. If it came back. Well, I found that there is some water back in the stream now. But it looks muddy. Other years it didn't look muddy. Mountaintop mining is messing it up. I know that for sure now. No question about it. But it's still early in the year. Maybe when they finish mining up there the water will come back.

I can see it's still not a good place to go swimming. At least not for now. Instead I put on my Indian outfit. I pretend to be fighting against the Wasichu. That's what Black Elk and his Indian tribe called the white men. But that doesn't seem like fun. Not very much anyhow. The truth is that nothing seems like much fun anymore. So I just sit down and try to think what I can do to not feel so bad.

I can hear trucks going up the mountain to where they are blowing it up. I can hear the explosions, Dear Diary. Every so often you hear a big boom. My Dad is probably in one of those trucks.

Mom told me that Ethan won't be able to see me any more. Even when he gets out on bail. I told her I'll sneak over to see him when he gets out. But Mom says that I should not try to contact him. It might get him thrown into prison right away. Nobody knows how much time he might have to spend in prison. I am not going to admit anything, but they have my old diary.

I wish I could get it back. At least I would have the memories that I wrote about. Without the diary my memories might get fuzzy. So I think maybe if I put on my girl things I can pretend to be dancing

for him. I have some girl clothes in my pack - a skirt and some girl underpants. My pack wasn't in my room when Dad searched it, so he didn't find them. I put them on but then decide that I want to wear just the skirt. It's one of them I made with Ethan. So with just the skirt on I dance and dance. Well really I just twirl around. Around and around until I am dizzy. Almost it seems like Ethan can see me. But really that's just imagination. So I start feeling sad again and stop twirling.

I might be a man when Ethan gets out. I think it's my fault that he's there. Mom says not. Phoebe says not, too. They say I didn't mean to get him into trouble. That's true. But it was my diary that made it happen. I should've been more careful. And I shouldn't have said anything to Orville. He didn't mean any harm. But he doesn't understand about who you can talk to and who you can't.

When they told me I couldn't see Ethan, I wrote him a letter. I told him I was sorry and that I wanted to see him. I told him that I loved him. But they wouldn't give him the letter. My social worker says it's because I'm his 'victim'. "He isn't allowed to have contact with his victim," she said. Those were her exact words. I wrote them down right after our session. She doesn't understand. She isn't one of those people I can talk to, so I just let her talk on about how awful it was for me, and how I am not to blame, and blah blah blah. I just nod. She doesn't really want to know how it was.

Now that Ethan is gone I don't wear my dresses much anymore. The truth is I don't care if I'm a boy or a girl. I don't care if I'm an Indian. I don't care if people see my dick or not. I don't care about much of anything.

So I walk down the path a little ways. I imagine that Ethan is with me and we are holding hands as we walk, and he is telling me things about nature, like he used to do. Then I see a white mushroom. Not just in my pretend world, but really. Right there by the path. It might be a Destroying Angel. I look at it a long time. I remember Ethan telling me about it.

I come back to the beach and put my clothes back on. My boy clothes.

How quiet it is. I don't hear hardly any frogs or birds.



Ethan

As a Tree Falls

In his jail cell, Ethan thinks about the Little Prince.

How loud it is! Metal clanging against metal. Cacophonies piled upon cacophonies – creating huge and jarring disharmonies. Men hollering. It sounds almost like the frantic barking of mad dogs. Aggressive sounds with indistinct meanings. Banging on metal tables when they put down a domino or a card. Every movement loud and aggressive like an attack – or a threat of one. Not all the men are like that, but those loud ones are the first you notice. And of course the ever-present Tv down in the common room blaring out its propaganda and advertisements.

I want to die. I don't know if I would commit suicide if I could. It's too awesome to think about that. If I thought this was all I could ever expect, I might actually do it – awesome or not. But maybe there is something to hope for. Something beyond this huge anti-symphony – this vast sea of cacophony – that is playing around me.

They torment sex offenders here, and the guards do little about it. The loud ones give that old man no peace. He's been identified as a child molester. What will it be like when they discover my crime?

I try to think of beautiful things. Of flowers and woods. Of the garden I had. Of Allan Bergius singing the *Air of Melia* from Mozart's *Apollo et Hyacinthus*. Of Simon's delicate features. As a starving man thinks of little else than food, so I think of beauty. I am starved for it.

What movie was that where the boy was starving and began to cut pictures of food out of magazines to put on his plate?

I think of St John's College Choir singing Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*. I can hear the opening processional so clearly in my mind. I imagine that those sweet voices are angels coming to take me to a better place.

Music and cacophony bring to mind that book on string theory that Helen insisted that I read.

Music has long since provided the metaphors of choice for those puzzling over questions of cosmic concern. From the ancient Pythagorean 'music of the spheres' to the 'harmonies of nature' that have guided inquiry through the ages, we have collectively sought the song of nature in the gentle wanders of celestial bodies and the riotous fulminations of subatomic particles. With the discovery of superstring theory, musical

metaphors take on a startling reality, for the theory suggests that the microscopic landscape is suffused with tiny strings whose vibrational patterns orchestrate the evolution of the cosmos. The winds of change, according to superstring theory, gust through an aeolian universe.

Brian Green – The Elegant Universe, page 135

The universe is music. We are both the voice and the ear. Sometimes we sing well, and sometimes not so well. But there is nothing behind the music.

It's the turtle on which everything else stands, and it's turtles all the way down.

I think of Bach's violin concertos. But here we are talking about violins that bring the world into existence.

*I hear violins
Unfolding time/space into
A brief Camelot*

How brief was my life with Simon – with Simone.

Billions to the billionth power violins play the universe. Or maybe only to the millionth power. Well, suppose it's only to the hundredth power? Or to the tenth power? What do such numbers mean to me?

But it seems that only a few of the notes are meant for the symphony. Most are extinguished almost before they are pulled into a larger melody.

Failed Starts

*Every summer I root for all those little maple trees
growing in the gutter of my front roof wishing
them well though I know they are doomed,
And every summer I vow to clean out the many years
of accumulated leaves that now provide such
hopeful soil for the maple seeds,
But after the little trees die from the many inadequacies
of their tiny habitat I forget about them and their soil.
So much of creation seems mass produced,
Like the baby chicks that are processed on assembly
lines for human consumption, or like rabbits that
are so optimally constructed to serve the needs
of a diversity of predators.
So useful they are that one almost expects God to patent them.
Rabbits striving to escape their meaning in the great
hierarchy of eating stand utterly still as their
first defense in the face of danger,
Like frozen dinners.
God is infinitely careless with His sperm.
I so much wanted to stand face to face with this
mystery of things that I took matters into my
own hands in a manner of speaking and
produced a sample.*

*Putting them on a slide I studied them 400 times enlarged
and sure enough they were just like tadpoles.
So many there were and so infused with the energy
of an absurd hope,
I felt pity for them as I did for the rabbits and chicks
and the little trees and for real tadpoles too
for that matter who are not doing so well these days,
And perhaps this Earth whose untimely demise we
are already grieving is but one sperm among billions
in our galaxy alone though that does seem a waste.
And I felt admiration too.
But even should they have seen the Great Eye peering
down from the sky and prayed to me what
could I have done?
I did not know that some would be so much bigger than others.
Do the smaller ones stand a chance?
And were I a racehorse of a sperm faster than all the others,
A great Seabiscuit in this teaspoon world able to gallop in
my wiggly sort of way to the finish line ahead
of all the others to find waiting for me there
a shapely egg anxious to enfold me in her
semi-permeable embrace,
Would I have wanted to accept her invitation and become
like that one seed in a million or billion that
becomes a maple tree,
Leaving all my peers to starve
On the unyielding ground,
Or rotting in the gutters?
Would I share the huge indifference of the Creator
For all His billions of failed starts?
At some point I must have said, why yes.
Yes.
Of course.*

Jay Edson

And even for those of us who survive to somehow fit into the larger symphony, how brief is our little tune. So brief that we cannot even hear the music that we are playing. Music must be played through time to be heard, and our time here is so short. Great music needs a time frame on the scale of geological evolution. Not the split second which is our lifetime.

So who is all this music for? Perhaps the symphony hears itself as it spins out this whole colossal counterpoint.

But it's not entirely true that the note cannot hear the symphony.

On closer inspection, I am not just a note, but a little song in my own right. A microcosm within the larger macrocosm. And whenever I go into a wooded area, or into any more or less natural habitat, I can in fact hear the music – at least that ongoing part of it that is unfolding in this moment.

That is the ultimate secret of evolution. The universe wants to be beautiful. As Wordsworth would have it,

*... And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things ...*

Wordsworth – from Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey

It was that ‘presence that disturbed me with joy’ that I went to the woods to find when I was a boy. I kept riding off on my bike to seek the Garden Before the Fall. I could hear it always in the distance – that music – could hear it in my dreams and in every picture of a vanishing non-western culture in the National Geographic. The vision of an unspoiled habitat called to me, like a Siren.

In you, Simon/Simone, I can still find something of who I was so many years ago before I had, like Wordsworth, largely unlearned my heart.

*For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all – I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,*

Wordsworth – from Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey

This, for Simon/Simone, is the beginning of the time when the animal movements wane and the sounding cataract ceases to be haunted.

What do these wooded mountains that I have known contain that is of value? Coal? Yes. But also Beauty. Music. The music is ontologically primary – the Real beneath the real. Music spins off matter as a violin spins off notes. We are patterns of living light – explosions of experience – songs lifted from the Mind of God.

In the coal we find fossils. ferns and fishes. Imprints of an earlier beauty – beauty that we can see only in our minds, in either imagination or memory.

A song can be playing by a band or an orchestra, can lift itself off the instruments, and then the sound waves themselves can be captured by a microphone where the sound vibrations are converted to electromagnetic ones that are sent out into the surrounding air to be captured by radios and converted back into air waves and then to vibrations in the ear drum and finally into vibrations in the brain. Of what is the song made? What is its ‘material’ reality?

Music will take hold of anything it can get its hands on and move from object to object. But the song itself is the pattern – a pattern of experience, of joy.

But why is it that some songs are banned while others, which in many cases are much inferior to the banned one, are admired and celebrated?

The Little Prince is not welcome in this world – can live only briefly, unobserved in the seclusion of the desert, before the snake takes him away. The snake can take so many forms. The man may lose his prince through being discovered and imprisoned by the new moral majority, deluded as they are with their false visions of purity. The parents may become suspicious and deny access. The Prince may simply become an adult and forget the magic that was once his daily fare. Or worst of all, brittle pedagogues may unteach both the lover and his beloved their real desires and wishes – may poison the lively brook at its source. In any case there can be only one end – though it may take many forms.

Yet I reached out to him. Fed him sunflower seeds, and promised him more for another day, hoping he would return. I have no ability to see the future. I don't think it is possible. It hasn't happened yet. But I could have read the maps – the newspapers and the popular media – and seen that all the roads lead into an abyss.

Even if the society were conducive to such relationships, it could last only so long before the boy's voice broke and he was no longer able to reach those high notes.

*Nicander's finished, there is not a trace
Of bloom or loveliness left in a face
I called divine. So, mortals, youths, beware
Immortal thought, remember pubic hair.*

Anonymous Ancient Greek poem as translated by Daryl Hind

Pubic hair! How silly! Sad though it is, however, what our soul responds to is influenced by such trifles.

But this world – the present one – seldom waits for the voice to break. It does not allow for the painful but necessary transition to other things at the first sign of a beard. Yet knowing all this, everything I owned rested lightly on the scale when balanced against this lovely little puff-ball of a human being. For even a brief relationship, I was willing to risk everything. I was inebriated by his aura.

*I tried to fly from Love, who snatched a brand
Out of the coals and found my hiding place.
Bending, not his bow but his small hand,
He flicked a pinch of fire in my face,
Enveloping me in flames. Sweet firebrand,
Now you have made my heart your fireplace.*

Meleager, as translated by Daryl Hine

I too tried to fly from my love. To some extent I was successful, until Simon, who ignited within me a flame I could not extinguish. Meleager feared only a bit of heartache. The stakes were much higher for me. My freedom. My ability to live in society with others. My acceptance by the larger society. My livelihood. Possibly my life.

The love that dare not speak its name is no longer homosexuality. That has become politically correct. Even rather chic in some circles. Styles change.

Loving boys is no longer in style. Meleager would be in prison in today's society. King's popular novel, *IT*, provides a vivid image of what the collective hysteria is all about. The dreaded pedophile must be seen as a monster dragging innocent children down into the sewers where they are raped and murdered. No other narrative is acceptable. Sex with an older person defiles the innocence of children.

But consider what comes later in that novel. A pubescent girl has sex with six pubescent virgin boys in succession, and the experience is declared good by the author – as life saving. Beverly is the only girl in the seven-member club called *The Losers*. They are wandering in the sewers in pursuit of the monster, and are beginning to come apart, individually and collectively. She draws each of them, one after the other, into a sexual relationship with herself to restore their unity as a group, and to give them courage.

She begins with Eddie, who is the most frightened. Eddie who still has the penis of a little boy.

"What do you want?" he asks.

"You have to put your thing in me," she says.

He finds it a bit overwhelming and at first resists, but in the end, he complies.

Then she moves on to the others.

Mike comes to her, then Richie, and the act is repeated. Now she feels some pleasure, dim heat in her childish unmatured sex

...

After that, Ben comes to her. He is more like a man.

He's big, oh yes – the pain is back, and it's much deeper than when Eddie first entered her. She has to bite her lip again and think of the birds until the burning is gone. But it does go, and she is able to reach up and touch his lips with one finger, and he moans.

The heat is back, and she feels her power suddenly shift to him; she gives it gladly and goes with it. There is a sensation first of being rocked, of a delicious spiraling sweetness which makes her begin to turn her head helplessly from side to side, and a tuneless humming comes from between her closed lips, this is flying, this, oh love, oh desire, oh this is something impossible to deny, binding, giving, making a strong circle: binding, giving ... flying.

"Oh Ben, oh my dear, yes," she whispers, feeling the sweat stand out on her face feeling their connection, something firmly in place, something like eternity, the number eight rocked over on its side. "I love you so much, dear."

And she feels the thing began to happen – something of which girls who whisper and giggle about sex in the girls' room have no ideal, at least as far as she knows; they only marvel at

how gooshy sex must be, and now she realizes that for many of them sex must be some unrealized undefined monster: they refer to the act as 'It'. Would you do It, do your sister and boyfriend do It, do your Mom and Dad still do It, and how they never intended to do It; oh yes, you would think that the whole girl side of the fifth grade class was made up of spinsters-to-be, and it is obvious to Beverly that none of them can suspect this ... this conclusion, and she is only kept from screaming by her knowledge that the others will hear her and think her badly hurt.

Of course there are extenuating circumstances. It's not every day that a girl finds herself down in a sewer chasing a huge, very dangerous, shape-shifting spider with the help of six flawed boys, all of whom she loves. We must provide extreme situations to justify extreme behavior. Minimally, however, one would have to say that this scene does seem to cast some doubt on the idea of the innocence of childhood.

But it's more than that. I remember that 'It' was capitalized. This is the word that pubescent girls use when they talk about sex. And it is the title of the novel. This word, and the images associated with it, point toward the shadow side of sex. The unknown. The feared. Sex is the dreaded thing lurking under the bed. It is the monster in the sewer. The wolf in the Little Red Riding Hood story.

But Grandmother, what big teeth you have.

I am the wolf pretending to be the innocent grandmother. I am 'IT'.

*I am something you almost see in the forest
From the corner of your eye,
And then is gone.
It is night.
Pretend it is night.
Stars are falling in the forest.
I am the sex offender that you read about
Once again yesterday
With only the names changed,
And you wonder again what unspeakables
Might be dressed up or perhaps even cross-dressed
In such abstract nouns as
Victim.
Unlawful.
Assault.
Love.
Predator.
Though of course love was never mentioned.
I am that.
The wolf under the bed that lingers into adulthood.
The wolf now stalking Red Riding Hood in the woods.
The wolf that will not survive the direct gaze.
It is night.
Remember?*

*We are pretending that.
It is in the forest.
You turn to see it more clearly,
And then it is gone.
I am a memory of when you touched yourself
In that place where boys and girls are not so different really,
And discovered what we might now call a Supernova –
For it was more energy than you thought possible
Consuming vast regions of space
In a blinding happiness you knew you could not tell about.
I am that.
That bright star.
Or the memory of one
Seen only off to one side.
It frightens you.
So you kill me
Thinking you can do so without also dying –
That you can clang that huge door shut
Only on me.*

Jay Edson – I Am That

King unmask the the IT of pubescent girls and boys – their anxiety about having sex with each other, and I suppose performs a service for doing so. But he retains a larger IT. The dreaded Pedophile. Why this need for an IT in our lives? Is King wanting to exorcise a personal demon? Perhaps. But he is the spokesperson of the collective American mind. Otherwise why would he be so popular? So he must retain and express their core beliefs. He gives it all a liberal spin. Questions some of the less essential dogma. Gives an approving nod in the direction of the LGBT community. But he still clings to society's need for an IT.

When it was no longer in style to bash gays, society had to invent a new scapegoat upon which to project all its sexual anxieties – a scapegoat which could also serve to unite this disjointed society with the hatred of a common enemy – that will serve as an internal enemy around which we can come together for our mutual defense, and create a viable 'WE' out of this diverse and disjointed population. In this manner we become a WE against an IT. So many uses scapegoats serve. I doubt they will ever be set aside.

I carry the new name of forbidden love within me, like a song. Pedophile. Is it the name of a disease, a crime, a plague?

*What name shall I give to my love?
At its source
lovely boy
Eros
god
Still naked
walking in the garden.
At its destination
plethora.*

Some name him
 perpetrator
 though he has hurt no one
 perversion
 though it is only god
 having a bit of fun.
 What do I call my love?
 kyle carroll and
 boy
 I call her destiny
 Orlando in his yellow shirt
 Ethan 'n John
 'n Simon also
 Like me
 Drowned in the sea
 Harbunchen
 who watched the kite
 Jay
 who wanted us to escape
 down the interstate.
 Kayetta
 Roger-and-our-ocean
 Richard-in-the-sky.
 Mi vieja too.
 Some days I wake up singing

 to spirit
 Who
 even here
 runsthroughallthings
 like peachblossom

 who is also my love.

Jay Edson – The Name of My Love

I am not welcome in this world. I am a witch in the middle ages. A Jew in Hitler's Germany. A runaway slave before the civil war. The embodiment of deprivation and evil.

How else could my story end?

In writing Huckleberry Finn, Twain wrote what was really a tragedy. But he could not let it end that way. He loved his characters too much to let the realities of that brutal society spin themselves out, so he brought in Tom Sawyer – a diminutive *Deus ex machina* – to provide a cheerful if unlikely end.

In *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry was more honest. My story is like that. It can have only one ending. My Little Prince had to be ripped out of my heart. They will now attempt to re-program him. Bless his independent spirit. I think it will be difficult to teach him to hate both the source of his love and what we had together. Whatever the outcome of the re-programming battle, something has died – something we had together, and a possibility he was discovering in himself.

He still hesitated a little; then he got up. He took one step. I could not move.

There was nothing but a flash of yellow close to his ankle. He remained motionless for an instant. He did not cry out. He fell as gently as a tree falls. There was not even any sound, because of the sand.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – The Little Prince



Helen

We Learn to Desire Trinkets

Meditation Seven, in which Helen wonders why there should be so many wrong notes in the cosmic symphony as she watches Simon trying to be happy at Frog Pond.

He stares at the water in Frog Pond. What's left of it. Simon/Simone, the beloved of Ethan. He doesn't try to swim. That's best. God knows what toxins are in that water. He has brought his backpack with him – the one with the big pastel flowers on it. He pulls his loin cloth out of it, undresses, and puts it on. He wanders around a bit, more or less being an Indian. But his heart is not in it. There is no life in his movements. He unties the rope and lets the loin cloth fall to the ground.

He is looking for the music. He still hears it faintly playing like tiny angels in the clouds and remembers how he once heard it in the rippling water of the stream. The music can still be heard, at least to some extent, in the sounds of the birds and the frogs, though there are fewer birds now, and even fewer frogs. Still, he has heard the music for which string theory is searching – knows it in his heart though he cannot give words to this – much less formulate it in the language of mathematics.

Now that Ethan is gone – is in jail – Simon/Simone has no one to see him being an Indian. He can hear the music only in diminished form. Or is it only the memory of that music that he hears? He sits down on the shore. His body droops in disappointment. He cannot find the magic.

It is the same music I am searching for in my sojourn into the realm of physics. Yet I am too old to learn some of the complex math that lies behind string theory. I am told it can be expressed only in math. So does this mean that a final understanding of the ultimate nature of reality is available only to the mathematician? Does this wall against which I have collided mark the end of my understanding and thus my agency? As of yet it is a wall that physicists also face. Only a technology that does not yet exist – but might one day – would be able to define these strings with mathematical precision and perhaps harness them for human purpose.

Once again, it would seem, we lose agency to the expert. This is what I was getting at in my journal entry.

Agency in the Age of the Expert

In order to have agency we must inhabit an understandable universe. In all spheres of life understandability is being sucked into the hands of the experts. In this way ordinary people are robbed of agency in any meaningful sense. I take my body to the doctor. They have expert knowledge and on the basis of this

knowledge take my agency away from me. I no longer know what is best for me because in my own body I do not inhabit an understandable universe.

As I think about the fundamental issues of what causes what in the world, I am told that ultimate causality resides in the interaction of tiny sub-atomic particles – leptons and quarks somehow paired with bosons in ways that only those trained in higher mathematics can understand. And then it emerges that these leptons and quarks may be spin-offs from incredibly small vibrating strings. Like tiny violins. A lovely theory in one way, suggesting that the music of the spheres may be more than just a metaphor. Yet only the physicist can think coherently about such matters. Our own agency is lost in the secret alchemy of these forces.

If humanity is to have any agency at all, must we turn to the physicists who may learn how to manipulate these strings through the application of highly complex and abstruse mathematics which deal with things that no one, not the scientists themselves, can envision – like 26 dimensions of time/space.

In the economic sphere, we are again faced with the loss of agency. Only the experts understand the secret forces at work. We must leave it to them. Our efforts at agency in the economic sphere will lead only to confusion and economic disaster. Economists from great universities in Chicago and the East Coast rob us of an understandable universe where it is most important – in our capacity to obtain an adequate living.

Or we want to come to terms with disturbing thoughts and feelings. We must turn to the psychiatrist who understands that the only agency for such disturbances is in the synapses and chemistry of the brain which only they understand. When you go for this kind of help you must once again check in your agency at the door, like cowboys once had to check in their guns at the doors of a saloon.

Or suppose we wish to align our own psycho/spiritual evolution with the grand evolution of the universe – a modern way of saying that we want to do the will of God. A noble aspiration, to be sure. Perhaps it is what we all most want. It would seem to be the essence of what we mean by living a 'meaningful' life.

Yet here again our agency is robbed from us. Only an already realized soul can show us the way. We must follow blindly until the vision comes to us in its fullness – which it probably will not.

Or maybe it is the selfish gene that has real agency in the domain of time and space. Our highest visions exist only because they have some arcane survival value, and only the ones who have spent years studying evolutionary biology can hope to speak intelligently about this – and they assure us that the whole process has no meaning at all. Whatever happened to survive, survived. It's all just what happened to happen.

In the Middle Ages it was the priests and popes who robbed people of their agency. Ordinary folk could not be trusted with the scriptures, and it was only there that one found an understandable universe. Now it is scientists and other experts who hide their arcane knowledge in journals and text books that only a tiny portion of people can access. Math is the new Latin.

So in the face of this loss of agency, what do we do? We go to the bar and watch powerful men on Tv throwing each other down on the ground and patting each other on their manly butts; we watch the news and blast our friends on the nearby bar stools with our theories about why some superstar allowed herself to get fat and about our own predictions with regard to the end of the world as we know it; we drink beer; and we dream of being geniuses who do understand how it all works so that we can regain our agency.

Why do we even need agency, or the understandable universe that makes it possible? Well, the answer to this question lies in the hands of your expert in the field of ... well, I don't know ... of psychology? Of philosophy?

So how do I resolve this dilemma? How do I regain my agency once I run into this wall? Through ontology, I think. Through knowing what something is – not just how to manipulate it. And specifically through knowing what I am. Technology has no ontology. It manipulates from the outside. We know what something is only from the inside. As I have both an inside and an outside – am a mode of experience to myself that can be seen by others as an object in the world – so these strings must be tiny notes of experience that can be ‘seen’ from the outside through their external interactions with other notes.

Odd to see modern physics turning to the ‘music of the spheres’ for their most fundamental metaphor. But that’s what Brian Green seems to say in the ‘Elegant Universe’. But who is the composer? Chance? Random banging on the keys of a piano has never produced a great piece of music, nor do I think it ever will, however many billion galaxies are available to it. A teleology as well as a mechanics runs through all things. A teleology of beauty or of love.

Teleology was rejected at the outset of modernism, as stated most clearly by Bacon. Speaking about human understanding, he says that ...

... while aiming at further progress, it falls back to what is actually less advanced, namely, final causes; for they are clearly more allied to man's own nature, than the system of the universe, and from this source they have wonderfully corrupted philosophy. But he would be an unskilful and shallow philosopher who should seek for causes in the greatest generalities, and not be anxious to discover them in subordinate objects.

Francis Bacon – from Novum Organum

We should not “fall back” on what is less advanced – that is to say “final causes,” or teleological explanations. Bacon laid out the modern agenda: to explain everything in terms of laws based on the external observation of things. This was the pivotal turn that led from all ancient to the modern head-set.

Ancient and medieval [ethical] theory centers on the problem of how man in general is to achieve well-being. Before the Renaissance it was generally assumed that all men are by nature ordered toward the attainment of one ultimate end. In different writers this over-all goal was described diversely but the orientation of all premodern ethical thought is teleological.

Vernon Bourke – History of Ethics p 8

Agency always operates toward an end. Therefore, without teleology there is no agency. Even those who would deny teleology are caught in this bind. After all, are they not working toward an end – namely the total rejection of teleology as a valid explanatory framework? I guess it's just the mechanics of their synapses working overtime.

If we are to have agency in our desire to love and be loved, we must live in a universe that is capable of love. No. More than that. A universe that seeks ever more beautiful expressions of love. The aim toward which things struggle need not be a pre-arranged and already fixed end point. That would take the creativity and adventure out of things. That would be a big disappointment to Peter Pan, and no less so to me.

To die will be an awfully big adventure.

James Barrie – Peter Pan

Rather, we need a universe that seeks new and astonishing constellations of love, adventure and beauty that even the universe itself could never have anticipated.

Who would ever have thought of Simon/Simone, or of Ethan/Simon? I love you Simon/Simone. But I am not Ethan. I will tell him how you still dance – are still beautiful. But Simon/Simone is denied his agency in this world. He is not permitted to decide whom he will love. He cannot consent to what he most wants. We are tricked out of our wanting by words. A shell-game of words.

The teleology of the whole is generally called God. Or at times it is called Eros. God incarnate in the world is the desire for ever more lovely configurations of love and beauty and adventure.

Simon pulls a skirt and a pair of panties out of the pack and shakes them out. He puts on his girl clothes. The skirt is white, patterned with small purple flowers. He pulls a pink t-shirt out of the pack and tries it on. He contemplates himself for a moment through the eyes of imagined admirers. Maybe he is hoping I will be seeing him, but if so he does not give himself away by glancing up here. Now he takes the t-shirt off. And his panties. He folds his boy clothes and puts them neatly in the pack with the pink t-shirt and the panties. Then he dances wearing only the skirt. He twirls around so that the skirt lifts and flutters. He dances to the music of the spheres. He raises his arms to the sky and twirls. He dances in honor of himself – of his girl/boy beauty.

*He dances
shamelessly
Atop his accomplishments
and sins –*

*This nakedness that hides
when it hears footsteps in the garden
But then emerges again
singing
of himself
Look!
Look what I can do!
How pretty I am –
How beloved!*

Carroll Baskins – Beloved

But then he stops twirling. He has no one to be beautiful to. His twirling is not an expression of joy, but only a seeking of the music that he has lost. He feels this though he can not put words on it. He wanders around the clearing somewhat aimlessly. He throws some rocks into the brown water.

Why, then these wrong notes – these vast constellations of ugliness and suffering – the great holocausts of the last century and now the smaller but no less brutal holocaust of the ‘pedophiles’? Why is Ethan sitting in jail for a love that both he and Simon found thrilling and in every way life enhancing?

A wrongness has entered into creation. Human beings can deviate from the will of the Whole – we can create ugliness and needless suffering. In Christianity this deviation is called ‘the fall’. It is a collective event. Adam is humanity.

Another wall. I can’t seem to name the wrong turn. Maybe the invention of agriculture.

*Armenians in Turkey: 1915-1918 - 1,500,000 Deaths
Nazi Holocaust: 1938-1945 - 11,000,000 Deaths
Pol Pot in Cambodia: 1975-1979 - 2,000,000 Deaths
Rwanda: 1994 - 800,000 Deaths
The deaths are only approximate of course.
Who can count them?
Just four examples to suggest it was a bad century.
I leave the US and Russia out of this so as to not seem political.
I leave much else out as well.
It is nothing new – not just a 20th century sort of thing.
From the beginning this thing called civilization has
thrived in the compost of the innocent.
Where is the city that is not sitting on the bodies of the
indigenous ones?
Our way of life after all was not built
with the consent of the wild flowers
nor on river pebbles.
Nor was it otherwise with the Zulus or the Aztecs or the Chinese
all of whom
like glaciers grinding away the surface of the land
and depositing it elsewhere
laid down slow suffering over the centuries.
They were the locusts before the Europeans came.
They were just a little slower getting their hands on steel.*

Our agency comes from within – from knowing directly our deepest wants. No expert can take this from us unless we allow it. I must believe in my knowledge of myself. Give it weight and use it as the foundation of all that I do. In my depths I find desire.

THEN was not non-existent nor existent: there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it.

... Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal: no sign was there, the day's and night's divider.

That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature: apart from it was nothing whatsoever. Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness this All was indiscriminated chaos. All that existed then was void and formless: by the great power of Warmth was born that Unit.

Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning, Desire, the primal seed and germ of Spirit.

... Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation? The Gods are later than this world's production. Who knows then whence it first came into being?

He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, whose eye controls this world in highest Heaven, he verily knows it,

or perhaps he knows not.

Rig Veda, Hymn CXXIX – translated by Ralph T H Griffith

Desire was the first cause of time/space. I reflect the nature of the All. Desire is my origin and my destiny. Specifically I find myself in the desire to establish a reign of love in whatever community I find myself – and to create a thing of beauty with whatever materials I find at my disposal.

Children do not know alienation. They may know pain and loss – suffering – but not yet alienation.

Whatever else the child may suffer from, it does not suffer from remoteness of life, normally ... it is fully alive, and that is why people, thinking back to their own childhood, long to have that naïve vitality which they have lost in becoming grown up.

The child is an inner possibility, the possibility of renewal.

Marie Louise van Franz – as quoted in Parabola

But as the world seeks to conform children to its templates, it hammers away at anything that does not fit. It shatters their agency. This hammering – this banging – this constant collision between soft flesh and the iron will of the collective world – is too much to bear. At some point, as we grow out of childhood, we seek alienation – we want it – we create the shadow that falls between us and our desires, between us and others, between us and the natural world. Our alienation acts as a shock absorber. It does not make us happy. But it cushions our collisions with a world that does not want us as we are.

In the end, we allow the world to take charge of our wanting, and we learn to desire trinkets.

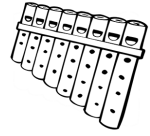
Words are sometimes blamed for our alienation. It is clear that a wrong use of words can lead to estrangement from who we are. We see that every day. But Simon's diary helped him expand the breadth and intensity of his enfoldment in the Real. His words were pathways to new experiences. They were life giving – at least until the world captured that most holy book he was writing.

It is the teachers, the social workers, the police, the capitalists and the pillars of society, that are forcing their words, and thus their alienation, on him. His words are not to be blamed.

Simon/Simone in girl's clothes is wandering down the path. He pauses and examines something on the ground. It appears to be a white mushroom. Does he see its beauty – and its dangerousness? He does not pick it. He does not eat it. He just stares at it a while. Then he wanders back to the beach and puts his regular clothes back on. His boy clothes. He looks up in my direction. He cannot see me, but he knows that I am looking at him. At least he suspects it. He waves at me. But his wave is tentative and lacking in energy.

Something irreversible has happened. In Ethan's absence Simon's world is in shambles. I will try to comfort him as best as I can during the next weeks and months. But something has died within him. I cannot return to him the immediacy he knew in his total absorption in the Real – an absorption that was expanding and intensifying – until they stole his diary. His words.

Postlude



by *Stony River*

*If a boy as yet unborn shall hear
Beneath his running feet the voice of sand
And rocks and shells proclaim a distant land
To be his goal, his home, his fishing pier,*

Then I'm content, and do not fear the night.

*And should the ocean run her fingers through
His hair, and toss him in her arms to find
Contentment in his joy, and say the kind
Of trite endearing things that mothers do,*

*And should he pause to ponder love's delight
And ponder,
And ponder,*

Then I'm content.

*And should he lay upon the burning beach
With sand adhering to his nakedness,
And should the sun ignite with its caress
An eagerness for something out of reach,*

*And should he wonder, then, at all that light,
And wonder,
And wonder,*

Then I'm content, and do not fear the night.

Jay Edson – If a Boy As Yet Unborn

Human beings talk a great deal about tipping points these days, and for good reason. It's not a bad metaphor. They have tipped all of creation on the planet, and it is out of balance. It appears to be too late to do anything about it.

The tipping point for my death was passed early this spring. It cannot be reversed. I'll be lingering on a while, but will never again have the vitality I once did.

You humans are zipping by more tipping points than you know. You're like a person racing through the streets of a large city late at night, disregarding all the stop signs. There's not too much traffic around. At any given intersection the odds are fairly good that you'll get through it alive. But sooner or later you will be broadsided. Whether you will be totally eliminated or whether a remnant will survive is unclear at this point. I am sorry for you. There was much that was beautiful in the human race.

You possessed a large capacity for understanding, for adventure, for love, and for the creation of beauty. But you also were infected with a fatal flaw. You disregarded the need for mutuality and symbiosis, and dedicated yourself to exploitation and conquest. Given your chosen goals, you were much too successful for your own good.

The Earth will give a sigh of relief at your passing, but it will also miss you. And I will miss the naked feet of your children on my small beaches.

As you humans participate in the life made available to you by your individual bodies, by the bodies of your social groups, and by the body of the entire earth, you also participate in the death of these bodies. It is important to you that the life of your people, of your species, and of the Earth itself survive your personal death. As you contemplate the very real possibility that you are in fact participating at this very moment in these larger deaths, it challenges your capabilities for making energetic efforts with regard to purposes that you believe have some meaning.

It is true that death, life and re-birth are all integral parts of the creative process. Death itself does not negate meaning. But some deaths are untimely: the death of a vibrant and healthy child in an accident, the death of an artist before the completion of their work, the death of a relationship that has only begun to explore its possibilities, the death of the species that is on the cutting-edge of evolution. In such deaths there are real losses.

Something real and irretrievable was lost with the destruction of the relationship between Simon and Ethan. Something real and irretrievable is also being lost by my death. My streams and brooks are the veins and arteries that bring sustenance to the various parts of my body. They are doing their work, but now poisons from the mountaintop mining run in my veins and are killing me. Inexorably. It cannot be reversed. Never again will the children play below my little waterfalls and within my many pools. Never again will they lie on my beaches and see their dreams in the clouds that drift by. Never again. Not here, at any rate.

Dreams are very powerful. They have a way of surviving the death of the people within whom they are embodied. Perhaps creation takes up the unrealized dreams that are terminated in untimely deaths and provides new incarnations for them beyond this little segment of time-space that we call home.

The universe is huge, and we are very small. We know little beyond our immediate environment, and nothing beyond our limited modes of seeing. Even fauns and angels are not omniscient, so who am I to say?

The Delphic Oracle declared Socrates to be the wisest man in Athens.

When I heard the answer, I said to myself, what can the god mean, and what is the interpretation of this riddle, for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god and cannot lie; that would be against his nature.

After a long consideration, I at last thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, "Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest".

Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed to him – his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination – and the result was as follows:

When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and wiser still by himself; and I went and tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me.

So I left him, saying to myself, as I went away: Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is – for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him.

Plato – quoting Socrates in The Apology

We want so much to feel that we know something with certainty that we bring inquiry to an end when it has hardly begun.

Knowing that we don't know is the beginning point of every fruitful inquiry. It is the acceptance of our unknowing that enables us to turn our faces toward creation with an open mind, with an open heart, and with hope.

Perhaps in another time and place we will be able to continue to pursue our dreams once again – you, Simon, I, and all the others. If so, in that future time and place we will undoubtedly be troubled by vague memories of a time long ago when there was almost a Camelot.

