

SOMETIME IN
THE 21st CEN-
TURY: a book for
strangers

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FOREWORD

I could never write this book now. There are elements of this book I wish I could take back, or ideas which I now consider errors. On the other hand, there are elements of this book which I can only aspire to now, which I have to approach from another angle at this age, like trying to climb to 20,000 feet and finding out the mountain you were climbing only goes to 15,000 feet (thus, you have to climb down and find another mountain and keep climbing).

Because I can't write this book now, because it belongs to the past, I have chosen to leave it unedited from its past form, except for a few low-level errors. A reader might wish to know which things I would take back, but in deference to my past self, I will let him speak without using my privileged position as an interpreter of him to make it harder for you to hear what he has to say, given that my present self might be wrong in ways that he is right.

As I prepare to release this book now, it strikes me that I wouldn't call it good, but I would call it powerful, and it's not always right, but it's true.

I'm writing this page on 28 May 2018, and what follows, is the original book:

DISCLAIMER:

!!!PLEASE READ!!!

THIS BOOK EMERGED FROM WITHIN ME AND WAS MINIMALLY EDITED. IT HAS TURNED OUT TO BE SOMETHING LIKE A CRAIGSLIST MISSED CONNECTIONS AD. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, THERE IS A MORE DIRECT WAY FOR ME TO CONTACT THIS PERSON FOR WHOM IT ADVERTISES BUT I AM CHOOSING NOT TO USE THAT METHOD BECAUSE THIS IS A MORE AWESOME METHOD.

BY READING THIS BOOK YOU (ESPECIALLY BUT NOT LIMITED TO “Missed Connections Person”) WAIVE ALL RIGHTS TO INDEMNIFY OR HOLD LIABLE THIS BOOK FOR ANY CONCLUSIONS YOU DRAW HASTILY BEFORE FINISHING THE BOOK. **IT IS STRONGLY ADVISED THAT YOU DO NOT JUMP TO ANY HASTY CONCLUSIONS.** THIS BOOK IS UNDER NO LEGAL OBLIGATION TO BE USEFUL FOR ANY PURPOSE.

DEDICATION

This book is written for and addressed to all strangers who might come across this book, but is especially intended for a particular person who was a complete stranger to me but then was not, completely, a stranger. She is designated as “S.” in this book.

I don't know if this book is any good, but it's something that at least she may benefit from reading, in order to know, or at least begin to know (through the lens of fiction and sometimes that of plain speech), the truth of how I think and feel, and where I am coming from and where I am going.

2 September 2015

“As a result of the studies and tests of modern science it has come to be recognized that phosphorus is a necessary element in human, in animal and in plant nutrition. The phosphorus content of our land, following generations of cultivation, has greatly diminished. It needs replenishing. The necessity for wider use of phosphates and the conservation of our supplies of phosphates for future generations is, therefore, a matter of great public concern. We cannot place our agriculture upon a permanent basis unless we give it heed.” —Franklin D. Roosevelt¹

1

Message to Congress on Phosphates for Soil Fertility, given May 20, 1938

METRIC EQUIVALENTS

90 degrees Fahrenheit = 32 degrees Celsius

mile = 1.6 km

16 miles = 25.75 km

26.2 miles = 42.2 km

32 miles = 51.5 km

half mile = 0.8 km

6 miles = 9.7 km

5 miles = 8.0 km

1 foot = 30 cm

15,000 feet = 4,500 to 4,600 m

8,000 feet = 2,400 to 2,500 m

30 feet = 9 m

10,000 feet = 3,000 to 3,100 m

6 foot 1 inch = 185 cm

10 feet = 3 m

“for miles around” = “for kilometers around”

“fraction of an inch” = “fraction of a centimeter”

“thousand-yard stare” is an idiom which relates to shellshock, numbness, blankness, but I mean the term with less of an emphasis on having been traumatized (although that’s an interesting angle to possibly explore in another work); and literally as well, as though there was something specific you were gazing at, 900 to 1000 m away. The literal image is where you should start in interpreting my use of the idiom.

CHAPTER 1

Every person finds themselves stuck in a rut, not from time to time, but at all times. If you were to see every movie in existence, there would be quite a variety of movies, but in the end, no matter what, those movies would only be movies. So it is with life, we always and always are living and no matter what, every new experience we seek is an instance of living. We are condemned:

What would it be like to be dead? But there is no “be like” in death. There is no “like” to “be”. There is no being. If there is an afterlife, then that too is life. We are stuck in this rut of life and there is no escape:

I watched movies a lot when I was younger. And now I have lost my taste in movies. I can watch movies and derive a certain amount of pleasure from them. I consider some of them beautiful works of art. But I have no hunger for them. They even teach me interesting and useful lessons. But I have no need for them:

What would it be like to live at the end of the world? How many people would really exist? Would your mother exist? If she is still alive, give her a call on the telephone. You have very little time left. The people on the other side of the world, they may not even ex-

ist anymore. That's how little future there is left. But your best friend exists, I take it. Give him a call on the telephone:

If you lived in a rut, you would start out as a small creature in the bottom of the rut, comforted by the line of life, how it took you somewhere. As you grew, you would become confined by the rut, but you will never grow tall enough to see outside the rut, all you can see is the sky with its clouds. The clouds are beings that you can never attain, realities you can never understand, books you cannot read, and signs that have no meaning. They are random and different — and your rut is compelling, it tells a story, rather, it is a story:

And then, when the impossible happens, and you grow tall enough to escape the rut, you find yourself in a vast, muddy, plain, with ruts everywhere. And at a certain age you will find a canyon, the greatest rut of all:

But as you pass by for many years the dazzling rock walls, even the waterfalls and natural stone arches, and the vegetation, the locusts and grasshoppers, lizards and the vegetation, all the things in the canyon bottom, and you climb the rock walls, and go beyond canyons into even mountains — you circumnavigate the globe — then it finally dawns on you: this earth is a rut, and the exploration of it is the rut:

I was walking down the street one day and I was accosted by a young woman. I don't know where she came from or where she was going. She talked to me for 15 minutes about the Republican Party and the Democrat Party and the Green Party. Was she trying to get me to join a new party? She spoke of the leaders of the parties and the trends and the new directions, so business-like, so pure. I was so polite that it was she who ended the conversation, with a handshake. I walked on, questioning the meaning of being:

One time God took me up on a mountain (in the Spirit) and showed me the real world spread out below me. He said, "If you cast yourself down from this mountain, you can have all this reality" and I said to God "Are you tempting me?" and he said "No. I do not tempt, nor am I tempted." And I told God "Do you want me to have all this reality?" And he said "It's up to you."

One time, in the Spirit, God took me down into the fakest place on earth, Fake Valley. I cannot tell you where it is, but you will discover it. In fact, every time you take a step closer to the real world, you will realize that you were always living there. In Fake Valley, the temperature is always whatever it is. People in Fake Valley say hello, but sometimes they show their emotions. People in Fake Valley say a lot of things about how they feel, when the moment is right. They play records and tell people things. They go to the

therapist. Or they don't. In Fake Valley, all of life is lived:

I would never put all my money where my mouth is. If I did that, I'd be overcommitted to my current understanding of things. I don't know everything there is. How could I? So if I committed to what I believed, then I'd get trapped in a spiral of success, succeeding and succeeding over and over at things that aren't quite right:

What is the last thing you will ever think? There's no way to know, because when you die, you will be unable to think that last thought you thought. You have to keep on living to think. When you die, all your thoughts will never have been. And the whole world you live in, including me, will never have existed. You are the measure of all reality:

I have known you since you were in grade school. We were best friends. Today, I bought a windbreaker that reminded me of you: only in that it was a windbreaker. It was a good deal at the store. I did not know how much it cost and it turned out it was on sale. This was a mercy from God. You wore a different kind of windbreaker, but we both wear windbreakers:

Do you remember me? I hope that you do, at least sometimes. I hope that in your little world, there's at least an old faded photograph of me. Do you put that

photograph up somewhere where you can see it? Do you remember the games we used to play on the playground at recess in grade school when we were best friends? I don't remember anymore. But I remember that you were my best friend. That much I remember. I couldn't tell you what I said to you when you were my best friend. But I remember your name, and I guess in my little world there's maybe even two faded photographs of you, that I have put up somewhere I can see:

I remember when I was a kid, I used to take the hose and crimp it off so that the pressure built up and then I let it open and the water came rushing out. Everybody used to do that, and now nobody does that:

Can you hear my voice inside you? That would be kind of strange. But it wouldn't be strange if you had heard me reading this aloud to you over and over. It wouldn't be strange if I had spoken to you enough, if I had gotten under your skin. You are no longer my best friend from grade school. Now you are my friend from high school. I know that you have a likeness of me in your head. You built it out of what you observed of me. Once you made it, you were satisfied with your work, and you went on and on with life. Such a being, made out of facts, has no soul, no inner life, no mystery. I took my mystery away from you, and you kept going on and on in life. I will never see you again:

Everyone knows something that they shouldn't, some fact that worms its way into their beings, which eats holes in their brains and lays eggs, and the eggs hatch and become larval facts, and whole theories and sets of assumptions are marbled into your poor, tired brain. And in my brain, all these things have eaten away at my ability to think and feel, and for all my knowledge, I now know less, even nothing:

When I grew up, I admired tired people. I didn't realize they were tired. I thought they were gentle, and wise, and loving. And so they were. But they were also tired. Now that I am becoming a man, I find myself becoming tired, just as they were tired before me. I have taken on that mantle:

What a mystery it is that I'm alive. Did I try to become alive? No, I came into being out of nothing. There is some story of becoming, a sperm fertilized an egg, the egg divided. But I came into being out of nothing. There was nothing before I existed, and now I exist. This is the mystery of sleep. When I fell asleep last night, I existed, and then I didn't. And then I awoke. What is it that I have done, to go from unconsciousness to consciousness? I do not know, and I will never know. What was the moment of falling asleep like? I can't know, and neither can I know the moment before that. In fact, I have no idea what happened yesterday, other than these strange facts and assumptions that are laid up inside me, and the fact that I know objectively that there is a past. I will ei-

ther sleep or die in the next 24 hours, and so nothing I experience right now, I will know, or ever know. Nothing is real. And I am aliḡē:

I haven't opened a can of food in a while. Why is this? I have not had occasion to do so. If you order me to cook a meal, and I have a can of food, I guess I'll use it. I will obey what you have to say, and this is life. But the can of food is left by the wayside until you, or something else, commands it. The food will sit on the shelf at the supermarket, and my life will never encompass it. Somehow there is the life that I live, and then there is the life that intrudes into it. If you split a model airplane in two and then glue that onto a model aircraft carrier, then you've made something new out of both of theiḡ:

I will rest. Today is the 7th of July, 20—.

Look at those people over there who crave to be loved. They seek to be loved, they are afraid of losing love, when they don't have love, they quaḡē:

Here I am, and I crave peace. I seek rest and quiet, and caliḡ:

Look at me, I am in turmoil, and look at them: I wonder, are they ever loved? Can I, who long for peace,

ever be satisfied? My life is quiet, and calm. Can they, who long to be loved, ever be satisfied? Their lives are full of love:

Everyone knows where to put the best things: down in the cellar where no one will see them. And then years later, the next people who own the house can go down into the cellar and find the things, stacked in a corner. Then, they can enjoy them:

You were always looking at me (I'm speaking to S., right now, not to you), in the middle of the room was where I was, being looked at by everyone. And I turned and saw you and felt the blood rush through me, because you were the one woman I could fall in love with. And the reason I could fall in love with you was because that was the night of the 16th, and you were there on the night of the 16th. Does that make sense? I just hope that makes some sense to me. To me, it means that on the night of the 16th, that was the night you were supposed to be there, and you were. Why were you there? I think it was because you wanted to see something new. Well, I was there in the middle of the room, talking to the other people. I was something new to you:

I am glad that at this point I at least know how to be cool. When I was younger, I wanted to be cool. I found cool people and wanted to be them. I have no idea if I became them, but I did become cool. S., you found me on a cool night, being a cool person to

younger people. At least I know how to do that:

If I was a hammer, I'd probably be left in the shed most of the time, the hammer of a family that didn't do a lot of woodworking. I'd hang on the pegboard and slow my breathing down to almost nothing and feel the universe reverberate — it reverberates at such a low frequency that you have to practically die to feel it. Paradise:

I will rest. It is the evening of the 7th of July, 20—.

It is evening, and suffering is of two varieties. There is the suffering of misfortune, and the suffering of waterfalls. The suffering of misfortune is not where I live. Suffering is not a misfortune. I am completely happy, I suffer. Suffering is a waterfall, a great pounding sound, and a spray of water. It is there, bears witness, processes the water, I approach and walk away, and the suffering persists:

If I do not want love, do I not want God? But I want to be loving. How strange that I want to give what I do not wish to receive. In doing, I will be, and I want to be loved:

I have a spot of kindness in my heart for all the people who ask me questions on the street. I am a

stranger, and they are stranger-lovers. To be a stranger-lover, you must be a lover and a stranger, that is all. We are surrounded by people we don't know and will never know, and they are surrounded by people they don't know and will never know.

Where do people come from, and where are they going? Does anyone know? I don't know where I came from, and I don't know where I am going. We are all strangers, and strange people. The problem of weirdness: how is it that weird things happen to normal people? The problem of weirdness: how is it that normal things happen to weird people? The problem of weirdness: how is it that normal people are actually weird people, and weird people are actually normal?

The world is fraying and being sewn back together. This is perpetual motion, perpetual reality. I can see it in the relationships that fall apart and are sewn back with apologies, the wornness of the cloth, cloth doesn't stay new in this world.

There was a tree with a great heart, great heartwood, but it rotted out on the inside, and the tree was cut down and laid waste. Deep inside me, am I rotting out, or am I growing a new life? When the tree was cut down, we saw what was living inside it, in the place of the rotting heart. We saw the den of a small creature. And yet the small creature itself has run away, leaving the stump alone. And the stump is at peace, but despite itself, will new life emerge? But it

is not the sort of stump to produce new life. But will there be a miracle? Everything I want and don't get is a great tearing open of my stomach and ripping up of my capacity to want, and then when I am filled I finally know the meaning of joy, and of filling:

When everything is added up, there's nothing to do but put the result down in a book, to record the business of the day. And so it is with me, but I do not record the business of the day, I record the business of a few minutes of the day:

I am growing weary and I am hounded by the sense that I have to work. Please forgive this interruption. I may not write again until tomorrow, when everything will have changed:

It is the evening of the 7th of July, 20—.

I am skipping a stone across the bay of a lake. The stone touches the lake five times and then splashes into it. I am sitting under a tree by the lake and I see a silvery pattern in the small ripples on this day which is cloudy, under a light breeze. S. is jogging down the path in her athletic clothing and passes by and I continue to look out at the lake. The trees bend down into the lake with their branches and small fish

swim around the leaves of the trees, which have descended. S. approaches once again, time has drained out the bottom of its vessel and I know that I will only have one more chance to talk to her, and when else will I see her? So I call out to you, and you say to me, “Who are you? I know I’ve seen you before.” And I will become as smooth as glass and I will slide. And you, S., will be caught up in the moment, and you will be as smooth as I am:

Can anybody tell me what time it is? I think it is time that I got up and made myself a snack. I put some peanut butter on a piece of bread, and then put another piece of bread on top of that and I eat the sandwich. I drink a glass of milk, tall and cold. I have some almonds and grapes. I am sitting on the hillside, looking down at the farmlands, the goats and cows far off, just so I can see them, eating their own snacks, those grazers. I see their heads descend in simplicity, their mouths devoted to their purity, their quietness, tearing some grass out of the earth and chewing:

Growing up, I remember the older people telling me all kinds of stories. One of the stories involved trust. There was a man in my town who used to work in a big company. He said this story about the big company (this is as best as I can remember it): “One day we had a big workshop. A workshop is when you get together to learn something new, like a seminar. And they had me get up, and they had me put on a blindfold. And I stood on a platform. And they told me

‘Your coworkers are there for you. They’re standing behind you. Do you believe me?’ and the coworkers said ‘See, he’ll believe us, if we tell him that we’re here’ and I said ‘Yes, I hear where your voices are, you are standing behind me.’ ‘Now, to test the trustworthiness of your coworkers, fall back and they will catch you.’ So I fell back. And my coworkers caught me.’”

The sky is clouded over and there’s a wind coming out of the west. It’s a day for a storm to come, or for a storm to go. The storm will drop a pile of rain on the ground, and the ground will take in what it can. Then the storm will blow away and the sun will come out, and little weeds will set out on their journey of life, exploring the sunshine all the way up to a certain height, diligently living, diligently being themselves out in the fields. Out on the lawns, as well. The cloud comes and is full of rain, but it passes over us and leaves us dry, and we see off to the east a beautiful sheet of rain come down over the desert, and we know that on this summer’s day, it will all evaporate in an hour out there”

I build things in the back yard by myself. I built a desk, so that I could have one in my bedroom. I will sit in that room for many hours, so I thought I should build a desk. I made the desk out of mahogany wood and I think I did a good job. Or, I think I did a terrible job. What a waste of mahogany. Such a heavy desk, such a pain. Such a wonderful desk, such a beau-

tiful desk. My desk gives me great satisfaction, as I lie back in my office chair and put my feet on it and take a nap:

I am not sure, but I think that it may be time to get up from where I am writing and do other things. It is the 8th of July, 20—.

Today I went over to the pawn shop on 55th Street. That's about 6 streets away from where I am staying. Maybe that's a mile away. I have a piece of jewelry there, an old necklace, a family heirloom. I keep wanting to get it back, but I always run out of money. I have enough money to get it, and then I spend the money. But today I got it "out of hock" and I can take it back to where I am staying and put it with my belongings:

What does a man like me need with a family heirloom? I don't know. Maybe someday I'll have a family I can pass it on to, and then they can pass it down. And we'll keep it in a safe place, every generation, unless we have to sell it. And maybe I won't ever have a family. Maybe I can give it to somebody else's family, so that they can have an heirloom. Or I could be the godfather to S.'s daughter, if S. ever has a daughter. And when S.'s daughter turns 21, she can have the

necklace:

Near 55th Street, there's another north-south street called Maple Street. Over on Maple Street, there's an apartment where L. lives. L. has a major stereo system. I went over to his apartment one time and he played me some Black Sabbath. He was telling me about the time he drove over to the lake and found some boys fishing in a pond over on the backside of the lake where you're not supposed to go. How strange to see young people fishing these days, and yet they do:

I think I hear a knock at the door. Maybe it's S. Let me go see:

No, it was not S. There was a man there with a clipboard. He asked me if I was registered to vote. I said "Yes, I think so. But it has been a long time since I voted." He looked at me and said, "Okay, would you have 5 minutes to sign a petition? They're going to build something over on 50th and Garland St. It's going to cause significant traffic impacts. They're going to use eminent domain." I look at him and said "I don't know. I don't know which is better, to build or to not build. I don't know if eminent domain is a good or bad thing in the end. I'm sorry, I can't commit to signing the petition." He looked at me and then started laughing. I didn't understand why he was laughing, but I liked his laugh. He said, "Okay, that's the way things are, that's the way things will be.?"

As much as I would like to keep chatting with you on this fine, cloudy day, I really think I need to get back to some sort of chore. I don't know why it is that I need to do things. Maybe doing nothing is better than doing things. Maybe doing nothing is just being. Maybe just being has value. But I will get up and do something. I could go out and chop wood for the fire. Or I could take a drive into town and get some supplies: gas, some corn-on-the-cob and packages of meat for tonight, even some lumber for the most recent project. Or I could do the laundry. I could even do that. There are all kinds of possibilities, and I'm sure to do something today. So I can't chat with you forever. I'm glad you found your way to my porch. Come back around 6:30 and there should be some food on the grill. You're welcome to have some:

Right now it's the afternoon of the 8th of July, 20—.

I thank God for all the people who have come and gone from my life, leaving their claws in me. S., I'd like to share some of my spirits with you, like my spirit of the level gaze, and the spirit of the empathetic laugh:

The sand runs down to the bottom of the hourglass,

and I watch as two young boys play chess on a giant chessboard. I don't understand their game, just as I don't understand who I am or where I am going or what I am saying:

There's a flat place in the middle of the desert where one man crouches down, the sun on the back of his neck, and he stares down at the ants who live in the desert. He's all alone, trying to escape his real calling, which is as a man in a city, staring at people until they become uncomfortable, and speaking to them about the sadness of this world:

I am tripping my tongue trying to tell you something, S. I don't know how to say it yet, so I will try to remember to try to say it some other day:

It is night, and the crickets are going, the night of the 8th of July, 20—.

Sitting down in the chamber of the cave, in the heat of the day, in the cool of the cave, L. and S. and I sat down in there. And we saw a scorpion walk from near where we sat, out into the desert heat:

I pulled a stick out of the fire, and looked at the end, smoking and red-tipped. I mashed the end of the stick

on the rock, leaving a black mark. And I put the stick back in the fire, to burn some more. Life gives you lemons, and you make lemonade, and there's always something for you to process, something left over from the past.

Where did I put my glasses? Sometimes I have to wear glasses just in order to read, but other times I wear them to read the signs. I really do need my glasses. But the irony of the situation is, that I most need glasses in order to find objects in my cluttered-up apartment, objects that are lost and greatly needed, such as my glasses. It is not as though I do not need my glasses even more in order to cope with the world, though. Just... well, there they are.

Okay.

If I were run down by a tiger, I would look up at the tiger and I would think "Why?" in the moments before it killed me. Or perhaps it would not kill me, perhaps it would look at me for a moment and lose interest.

I am stirring the ashes of a dead fire in the middle of the day, and it is the 9th of July, 20—.

If I ever meet S. for the first time, I'll watch her carefully, and eventually show her this poem, which I

wrote on a night of terror:

Where do the suffering people go?
Do they go to church?
Can you find them at the bar?
Are they at The Pharaoh's House or the Egyptian
Coffee Room?
Do they live in my house
Or do they only live in apartments?

If I find you, can I keep you?
Can I stare into your weeping eyes
And clasp me in your shaking arms?
Can we walk out in the streets
Get somewhere lost, and just for
Once, lament?

The rest of you can go to hell
And then you'll meet me face to face
You pleasure-lovers go to hell and
Learn to be a human there

I only say that as I starve
No, I say again because I love
I love you all, now go to hell
And find the blessings only there

Blessed are the poor in spirit
Blessed are the pure in heart
Mourn and weep and wail and grieve
And you'll be comforted

But if you soothe yourself
With home-made balms
With the caresses of your own hands
Traded through a friend, perhaps

The tiniest part of you will speak
It will not be ignored
When you hear it,
It will pin you to the rock face
It will devastate you and crush your
Soul

Then,

Blessed are the poor in spirit
Blessed are the pure in heart
Mourn and weep and wail and grieve
And you'll be comforted

She will look up after reading it and say "Okay.?"

I thank God for my past self, that poor, ignorant man-child, slaving away at the soup-pots, saving up money to buy clothes, getting dressed to go to church to listen to the sermons which inspired him to give to the needy, who put in a good word for him with the neighbor girl, who looked at him with admiration, which raised his spirits when he finally learned of it, and then he went to university and got his degree in law on the buoyancy of her smile, and now he prac-

tices law in a well-to-do town in a beautiful part of the country;

And there are piles and piles of old things I have to throw away, but that is the way of everything, every good thing comes at the expense of some bad things;

It is night and darkness comes up out of the ground, midnight tolls and it is the 10th of July, 20—.

There are three sisters (I know not how many belong to their family), who sit on my shoulders and tangle my hair as they struggle. Their names are Prudence, Adventure, and Mission. Mission has a stony face and fixed eyes. She is beyond beauty. Adventure has a ruddy complexion and merry eyes. She looks like a tumbleweed. Prudence looks just as she should, wears a hat on sunny days;

I am a spiraling shape in a pond, where there's an opening that allows the water to sink down into an underwater cave. Down in the cave there is an old button that I lost from my coat, a brass button. I could see that old button as it went down, falling off of me as I sat in that boat, watched the old button get sucked down in this strange pond, watched it go

down into the underwater cave, which can be accessed, as I accessed it, with a lungful of air and some sort of sense of determination. Did I get the button? No, I let it go. There are more buttons at home:

I am a turkey wandering the forest with my fellow turkeys. A group of humans approaches, with guns. Do they want to shoot us? Should we wait around to find out? However, we are turkeys and we do not understand the meaning of guns. So we simply pass by, without thinking either which way, and the men do not shoot us, because they have come to this forest to shoot deer:

I am a postmaster in a small town, knowing who gets what letters at all times. I carry this knowledge around in my head and try not to act on it, so as not to turn this town both claustrophobic and agoraphobic, that combination where the crowd is too close, and everyone runs away from each other:

Prudence tells me I shouldn't write to S., as she is far away, in India. Adventure tells me to write to S., as she is far away, in India. Mission is silent, so busy doing her thing. I look on her from over here and my heart is full. I want to just run up to her and build a church around her:

The morning is awake, on the 10th of July, 20—.

I have a problem. Whenever I have a problem, I try to focus on it. Then, I focus too much on it. But if I focus a lot on it, I become stronger, able to solve every other problem because I focused too much on the one. But then I never solve the one problem, which may be just as well, because it helps me to solve all the other problems. However, the one problem that I want to solve most, and thus focus the most on, is the one that breaks me and tears me apart, which is why it is the one that I want to solve the most.

It's the time of day when I typically feel like taking a siesta. I am afraid that some day I'll fall asleep right in the middle of a business meeting, and I'll be called on, and wake up with some sort of statement to make to everyone else that I will later regret.

If you put your mind to it, you can do just about anything. One day I had a boulder to push up a hill. Now, mind you, I'm a big, strong man. I can bench-press my own weight. But this was a really big boulder and a fairly steep hill I was trying to reconcile. So I pushed the boulder with all of my strength, but I only got it up halfway before I got too tired. There, I stopped. But I knew that if I just put my mind to it, I could push the boulder all the way up the hill. Because if you put your mind to it, you can do just about anything. So, I took a break for a week, and

worked out some, but also just went for a walk around the lake a few times, and went for a swim with S., and walked the dogs, and pulled some weeds, and lay around a whole day watching television, and did my usual occupational hazard on my laptop at the laundromat and coffeeshop and then I came back to that hill at the back of the property, back to the boulder, and visualized getting to the top. And I pushed it about another quarter the way up. The next weekend I got some friends to come with me and we got it the rest of the way up, because that last part is steeper than the first part.

One time when I was little, I visited my great-aunt U., who was in a coma at the time. We sat in her room and prayed for her, and sang some songs, in the hopes that she could hear. At least, we could hear ourselves, and maybe our spirits touched her spirit directly. I wouldn't be surprised if that's how things work.

Great-aunt U. never did recover from that coma. So we had a funeral service for her, and talked about her life. She was a tall woman, who had had three husbands, two of whom preceded her in death, and the last who left her when her illness got too bad, 20 years before her death. One good Great-aunt U. story was the time she caught a man stealing from the store where Great-great-uncle H. had his business. She told him he should be ashamed of himself, then told him he needed to get in shape, because he was overweight. He felt very self-conscious and sad about this. He was

just a poor man. But she couldn't pick up on this, because she wasn't too good at reading minds. So she had him doing push-ups on the floor of the store, and more importantly had him move a bunch of boxes, in exchange for not telling the cops about hiññ:

I tend to move on in life. Hello, how are you? What is your name? Good. Now I know your name. Oh, you're moving to Kansas? Kansas... now that's a place. Well, goodbye! See you later, I'm suñé:

If you talk to me long enough, you'll realize that every so often I have a lisp. It's something that comes and goes with me. I don't know why. When I was younger, I tried to stop it, but nowadays I just kind of let it happen. When you get older, people get more polite and you kind of just don't care about anything anymore. You don't care about getting ahead in life, you don't care about impressing people, you don't care about your reputation, so you certainly don't care about some lisp of youññ:

I'm doing the laundry. I'm doing the stupid laundry, S. You know what that's like. The tide of birds flying over your car, defecating all over it. Time to go the car wash. The earthquake that tears down your house, leaving the foundations. The moon, illuminating the path at night that leads you to a new place on the beach, where everyone is dancing and singiññ:

It takes a certain amount of guts to bicycle down the

hill by my house. It's a pretty formidable slope, I'll allow, and the dirt on the hill is powdery when it's dry, as it always is, mixed with cobbles. I have never had the guts to ride down that hill on a bicycle. However, I have walked up and down it numerous times, and even that was chancy. I've skinned my knee on that hill, and worn a hole in the seat of my pants, the time I slid down it, caught up in the wonder of the moment:

Can you count all the mosquitos that have ever bit you in your life? There are a few places on earth where a person can grow up to the age of 18 and count their mosquito bites on the fingers of one hand. I had a cousin who lived in one of those places. One time she went camping with us and howled in the morning, to see herself covered with the bites. We laughed and threw water balloons at her:

Have you ever had Thai basil? I think I have, since I've been to a Thai restaurant, and ordered something that said it had basil in it. You never know though, they could have used regular basil. I don't know that I would know the difference, although I certainly like all kinds of herbs. I like basil, but I don't know if I could distinguish between the Thai kind and the regular kind. Do you know what I'm talking about? Sometimes you'll meet someone and then everyone else who's kind of like them, is the same person to you:

Pulling teeth must be a difficult line of work. At least,

it would be hard for me. I would tend to pull too slowly, too gently, in the fear that if I just ripped the tooth out, I would cause extra damage. It's like, there's a certain amount of damage in life, and then there's extra damage. But if you pull too slowly, it just hurts and takes a long time. There could be some poor guy in the waiting room who has really been looking forward to getting his teeth looked at, getting his problem tooth pulled, if necessary, and he's got to go out and do his business out there in the world, and life is a big pile of hassles and he's looking at his watch and feeling angry and sorry for himself at the same time, both a raging lion and a whining little kid simultaneously (let such spirits migrate to a different region of the atmosphere, away from poor mortals such as us!) Well, anyway, I suppose if I went to school to be a dentist, I would either learn how to pull teeth in a timely fashion, or not:

I'm really relaxing here as I wait for the train to come. Oh, now I can hear the crossing gates coming down, off in the distance. I suppose I will have to get my briefcase together and get ready to get on the train. I guess I'll have to pick up the thread another time. It is just after work on the afternoon of the 10th of July, 20—.

How is it that at 1PM, all the people are starving in Africa, at 2PM dying of AIDS, at 3PM being shot, at 4PM digging the graves of their children, and at 5PM we get off work and go home, as free as a kid? I don't want you to feel bad, S. I mean, maybe I kind of do. I don't know. No, I don't want you to feel angry or disgusted at yourself. Or at other people. But there's something here that calls to me. Can you feel sad with me? And can you become focused, alongside me? And just keep on going? That's basically all I ask of you:

I don't know if anybody really knows me, which is fine, I guess. I didn't always want to be known, and nowadays it's just so hard to communicate all the material to other people. It can be freeing to just go off on a tangent whenever you want, with whatever group of people you meet, and not necessarily reconcile yourself with yourself. But I long to be gathered together and straightened out. And I'm getting older:

Until I was 14 years old, I had a major, undiagnosed problem with resentment. I don't know how it was that I would resent people so much. It was just natural to me. Anger, envy, being wronged, it all came together with me. Especially how it was that everyone could do whatever it was that they would do, and in various ways this would set me up for failure. My goodness, I had to succeed, and I was fine if I failed of my own essence, but boy howdy, if you were to get in the way of my success, I could hate you like no other. Then, when I was 14 years old, I read a classic of our

religion, *God Wants You*, by Zacharias Xavier Smith. In that work, I read that resentment was a grave sin, the worst of all, almost. And so from that day forward, I strove to not be resentful. I figured out all the ways I tended to become resentful, and all the situations where I was safe. I understood it all, but what really changed me was the time when my parents died, and I started dating (not S., somebody else), and my life was being pulled apart as well by the fact that my brother had gotten drafted in the Army and there were riots in the streets of Detroit, Chicago, L.A. and even somewhere on the other side of the city where we lived. After that I didn't resent very much anymore:

I can tell you stories all night long, S., and you'll tell them to L. when you see him. And L. will come back to me and I'll say to L., "How has your life changed?" And he'll be confused, because the stories you'll remember, this is my fear, are the ones that leave everything the same:

But you are stronger than all that. I know it. The consequence of being the way that we are is that we can be so much better. There is a joy that perhaps you know, but which I did not know until now, realizing who you really are, and therefore who I can really be:

I want to apologize a million times for this, S. I really do. For saying so many heavy things, I feel as though

I've said a million heavy things. But I can't apologize, because there's nothing to be apologetic about:

Come, look out at the world in all its sadness and decay, and love it:

The cicadas are singing up in the trees by the backlot and I see you looking away, trying to process what I've just said. I know that there are times that are critical in a person's life, and I want you to know that I love you, although I have never even met you, and you have already disappointed me and left me for someone else. It is afternoon of the 10th of July, 20—.

S. laughed at me one time and told me I was funny. I accepted the compliment, because everything is funny, and so, I know that I exist. Not everyone exists to everyone else:

There's a crack in the floor of my room where the bugs can crawl in and out, from outside to inside, and from inside to outside. A kissing bug used to come inside and bite my face. Oh, the kisses of the kissing bug! This was when I lived in South America. The kissing bug told me a story, the story of Chagas' disease, and now I am in America. This is how I know you people in America, because I was sick and some-

one took pity on me, and now I speak your language,
as my heart fails:

There's a smooth cover to my heart, and I say whatever I feel like I have to say, and underneath it all, everything is funny, there is nothing that is not funny. We're laughing with God, which is a form of laughing at God, but not the irreverent kind. This is where I begin, and why I am so eager to run away from myself, if only someone would run with me. And I can hardly explain myself:

I read a book all night long, a tale of a village in England that I once lived in, and there, many generations before my time, there lived a girl who sewed and sang and went for rides in the garden. And then she met a man who proposed marriage to her, and she would have accepted except that her parents refused, and the thing that was unaccountable was their reasoning: they had none. And over time he kept coming back to try to reason with them, but they had no reason. And he kept coming back to try to court her, but she rejected him, because she was tired of him, though she had been charmed for the first few years she knew him. And this reason he accepted, because nothing really matters:

I dropped a coin down into a vending machine and it was the last coin I needed to drop and the machine went "clunk" and down came a bottle of soda. A bottle of lemon-lime soda, very low sodium, complete

with 38 grams of sugar. I drank the soda, and regretted it, for I was far from home and knew that it would be a long time before I could brush my teeth:

I am at the convenience store down on 48th and Grasslands St. and it is getting on in the afternoon, headed toward evening. It is the 10th of July, 20—.

One thing that I have learned over the years is to never say “yes” when you mean to say “no”. But the greater lesson has been to never say “no” when you mean to say “yes”:

There is a crust forming over the coast of the nation, where the particulars of our nation meet the particulars of the ocean floor. There, on the edge of the continental shelf, there’s a broken place, where magma extrudes, and forms this new crust. There was a coral reef there, but it has been destroyed, and all the fish have swum away. Where did they swim to? Surely no to a place that they can understand:

There is only enough phosphorus for us to live another 100 years. Or maybe another 50. And then many of us will starve from lack of water, since we’re pumping it out of depleted aquifers, and then a lot of us will kill each other over oil. But the earth always

had an expiration date, and we can at least love each other in the coming times of trial:

A truck broke down in front of our apartment right out on Ulysses Grant Avenue in the middle of the night and I went out to help the driver. We pushed it over to the side and he said "Thank you, so much." and I stood there awkwardly, for no reason apparent to myself, and he said "I don't have any money to give you" and like an idiot I said "Pay it forward."

There was a cat who I used to take care of when I was a kid, who leapt from the fence down into the yard. That guy was a real bruiser, and so we named him Rocky. He actually killed a raccoon. We were in awe. My brother saw it start to happen, and I got over there in time to watch it finish happening. This was the last time I really knew the fear of God:

I have a garden, a nice garden, a pure garden, of pretty weeds, and I go stamping into it with my heavy shoes, and tear up the weeds, and put in ugly vegetables, and I will have my harvest, but the wild plants were so much more beautiful. Ah, God, please come down and take me! I smash up my own garden, and compact the soil, and nothing ever really uncompact soil, not in the long-run. I can never go back to the garden of weeds. Or, I can. Yes. I can. Do I dare? I may dare. Perhaps I dare. We will see if I dare. If I dare, though, my vegetables will be cut off in the middle of the growing season. And perhaps they will con-

tinue to grow. All you will see are pretty weeds, but the real use of the land has gone underground:

Have you ever had banh mi? It's a kind of Vietnamese sandwich. It is quite delicious. The first place I had banh mi, I thought was the most amazing place in the world. And then I learned that it was just another banh mi place. There are many places that serve banh mi. If I ever get ahold of S. again, our first date won't be at a banh mi place, instead, it'll be somewhere nicer than that:

S. looks across the table at me at a restaurant and says "So, we haven't really talked in a while." and I say "Yes, you're right. Well, I've been having issues at work with an attractive female coworker, want to hear about it?" "Okay yeah sure" she says thinking "Not again." "Well, you know, I don't know it's just like..." "Really?" she interrupts. "Really?" See the subtext is that I keep being attracted to my attractive female coworkers. That's what's running through this conversation. And since S. is my wife, it's her job to keep me on track. And since S. is not my wife and this is isn't even threatening, this conversation is kind of boring. And since S. is not my wife but wishes I were attracted to her, this is kind of tired:

The light in the sky is getting a little less intense, but the air still holds heat. It's late in the afternoon of the 10th of July, 20—.

The thing that I try to remember is that though I'm inadequate, insincere and unworthy... well... OK, so, given that...

One time I was humiliated but I don't really want to talk about that, but it kept on happening so I had to be bullied, and now I'm against bullying although it's a cliché to be against bullying but I realized that everything good is a cliché, so... given that...

And finally, I once took a hike in the woods and found a snake, so I killed it out in the woods, and I took its rattle home and it didn't seem all that great. I was sad but I had to keep the rattle, sad because of what it cost, and I had to keep it because of how much it cost. What a strange thing to carry around with me until that time the house flooded and I had to throw away everything.

I remember one time L. threw me a curve when we were playing baseball and I hit it, but the ball went foul and so that was my closest to getting to first base in a long time and for a long time after. I'm okay with that, it was P.E. class anyway.

The evening beckons, with all the fierce clouds of the 10th of July, 20—.

Will anyone listen to me? Probably not. When people read books, there are some things they don't read. I've given up writing books, but maybe you will listen. If I talk to you, S., I mean really talk, I mean not like I am now with this book, but really, face-to-face talking, maybe I can warm something in you that hasn't died.

I sewed a bag together which I had let get torn. And I didn't do that great a job, so the poor bag opened up and dumped out all of its contents, which were some things I had purchased at the general store, some new blades for my axe collection. I paused a moment to try to figure out what to do. I decided that I would wrap the blades in the canvas bag, and try to carry it under my arm, with my other arm holding my other bag of supplies. And then S. came riding by on her horse, her eyes piercing all the dust between me and her. And she said "Oh, I see that you have a broken bag. Let me help you." And with great kindness she got off her horse and sewed the bag back together, just like that. A legend in her own time.

I've built a few things in my time. One time I built a marriage. Her name was O. or maybe Q. It was a very long time ago, 500 years ago. We met at a senior cen-

ter, and it was clear to both of us that we were immortals. We knew what it was like, all the comments people would make about how it would be terrible to live past 80 years, all your friends would be gone, then what would you do, with all this future, the endless weight of years. But I tell you the truth, for us immortals, the way we cope is by living in the moment. It is very hard for me to remember the past, in fact, the fact that I even barely remember that I have ever been married is due to the fact that I work hard to keep certain memories alive. Another memory that I work to retain is the last thing my father said before he died, which was “Keep the faith.”

As the rooster said to the chicken once, “Hey there, fine lady.” That’s what I said to S.’s sister once by mistake, thinking she was S. That was a funny night, the night of the masquerade. I was wearing a Robin Hood mask, and I can’t remember which of them was wearing a dragon mask and which of them was wearing a moon mask. We ran around that masquerade grounds, that great banqueting hall of mirrors and chandeliers, that pleasure garden of set-up lanterns and outdoor heaters, all the coals in braziers, the well-dressed people, the violinists and cellists, there was even an order of monks who visited, who stared at each of us in the eyes, and chanted prayers as they passed through, and as we ran, the color came to our cheeks, and we dashed off the grounds, S., and S.’s sister, and I, and we found the last store open in town, and were going to buy something, but we realized we

had left our money back at the masquerade, and nobody was scared by those girls' masks, nor were they scared by mine:

I've been running all my life, leaving everything behind. It's like that car race I was on, the one where I drove my buggy across the desert. The key thing in that race is to keep going, and to never give up, and when you break down, you'd better be able to fix yourself, or else you're going to lose the race for sure and maybe even lose your life:

I think the tide is going to come in soon, and cut off my retreat from this darkened beach, so I will begin the long process of going home to go to bed. It is, just barely, the 10th of July, 20—.

S., remember back when we lived on Mars, and we would go out, you and L. and I, and L. would push you into the dry icicles and you would throw sand at his space-helmeted face, and I would be all worried something would break through your suits and let the carbon dioxide in, or the bitter cold?

And L., remember the time you and I and S. were beings of pure elemental light and we found a cave full of humanoids and we decided to enlighten them, you

know, back when you were red, and S. was blue, and I was green? Remember how they started to believe in God?

I don't want you to feel guilt, I want you to feel compassion. Nor do I want you to feel guilt over whatever lack of compassion, unless that leads you to grow:

Processing all of the iron ore in this mine will take a really long time, and I don't know if I really will get to see the end of all of it. I've been working here for 35 years, and honestly, my back really aches and I've been trying not to complain, but here you are, you who always draw out my complaints, so I'll tell you all about my poor back. But it's been a good run, me and this mine, and I think I'm actually going to just work at it another 35 years, until I'm 72 years old:

If cartons of milk had pictures of missing presidents on them, I suppose there would just be a picture of our current President Mitchell, who has been running away these past few weeks, leaving Vice President O'Connell at the helm. And what a wild ride it's been! But President Mitchell must be enjoying the beach, down in whatever South American country he's in, just relaxing. I remember one time I was really sick and S. did all the work around the house and even those spacey little kids of ours pitched in, got stuff done. Oh how delicious that cough syrup was, how wonderful that fever! I can still remember it. My carpal tunnel throbs a little less to think of that

week:

Everyone I know has kids. Little kids, big kids, book projects, dogs, friendships, romances, cars. This is part of what it means to be, that we take care of things and wish they were more adult. And that we get proud of them when they grow. And sad when they don't grow, or even when we lose them. I remember when my horse got sick, as I was riding the Pacific Crest Trail, and we had to put her down, that's how sick she was. There will never be another mare like her:

I ran a marathon once. The first 16 miles were a breeze, but then the second 16 were pretty tough, and nobody told me that it was just a 26.2 mile race, but I was fine with that. I ran somebody else's race, some 32-miler's race. And that's interesting, running somebody else's race. I must have had that guy's fans, his family, rooting for me. And I must have had his aches and pains, his fears. I must have used his visualizations instead of my own. The real reality was somewhere else, in the land of 32-mile races. But the apparent reality was that I somehow didn't notice that I'd crossed the finish, and nobody continued to run alongside me. In my apparent reality, I was ahead of everyone else, when nobody ran with me, and maybe in the real reality, I was winning the race:

A windmill once stood on the brow of a hill, drinking in the wind, grinding grain, you know, being a wind-

mill. I rode up on my steed to the windmill and asked for the windmiller, who had a daughter I was interested in, named S. And he came out and we chatted about the state of the wind, all casual-like, and then the windmill spoke out in a grumbly voice: “Cease your chattering, you little people. Stop talking about what you do not care about. I will smack you for your idle talk.” And we looked up at it and looked at each other, and it was then that I asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage:

Corn grows in the rich black soil of Iowa, and it was there that I was taught my ABCs. “A is for Apple, B is for Barn, C is for Corn, D is for Dog, E is for Elevator...” Our schoolmaster knew that the roots of our education had to be in the soil of Iowa, so that we would understand that the nature of life is to grow food, that this was our society, our local reality. But I grew up and left Iowa, somehow the 20th century happened, and things changed, and somehow, though we all eat, very little is about agriculture in my life. S. wants to grow a garden, but we just don’t have time, what with all that’s going on in our lives. But when she teaches the children their ABCs, she goes back to her Iowa roots: “A is for Apple, B is for Barn, C is for Corn, D is for Dog, E is for Elevator...” Why not? Agriculture will always be important:

As the day progresses, I question my use of time. And then I realize that questioning that isn’t always a good thing. And that realizing that that isn’t a good

thing isn't always a good thing. And then I have to pull this move, that's like focusing but it's not focusing. And then somewhere on earth somebody bakes a loaf of bread, and takes it out of the oven, and serves it to his or her family:

It is the bustling city night of the 11th of July, 20—. I duck into an alcove, the entrance to a store that closed several hours ago, and relax a little and think what to do next.

The good guys need to be determined, to be cut off from reality in some sense. Because the bad guys, they're sociopaths. And one of the traits of sociopaths is that they don't learn from experience. And by not living in reality, they are able to amass considerable riches:

I wish that I could live in the ideal country. In the ideal country, criminals would get caught 100% of the time. So, there would be no crime. No, rather, criminals would never want to commit crime, so there would be no crime. No, rather, there would be no criminals, the memory of them would die away, they would be a curiosity. No, rather, criminals would be forgiven:

I brought you a flower. And no, you are not S. You are somebody else. This is an interesting moment for me. S. and I broke up several weeks ago. And I really like you, and this is our second date. And I want you to know that I like you. And I'm wondering if I should be dating you, or if I should stick with S., with all her winning ways. And I keep remembering S., but here you are. Aren't I supposed to be getting over S., and moving on with my life? Well, since it's been several weeks, and no more, I guess it's understandable if I'm still kind of stuck on her. Needless to say, I shouldn't talk about this too much out loud.

I think I just saw S. walk in this joint with another guy. A big scary guy, but I'm not really scared of him. I'm scared of her. Will she look at me as though she's found another guy? It's at moments like these (that is, at many moments), that I stand up a little straighter, and adjust the load in my backpack, and hitch it up, and keep on walking.

Something inside me is off, my stomach hurts a little bit. Was it something I ate? Was it something I thought of? Am I being played like a violin by a person who likes to pluck, or to do tremolos? Am I a door being knocked on by a policeman who knocks to kill? Am I a radio being dialed from station to station, over and over? Am I lizard on a rock, or a squirrel on a branch, ready at any moment?

I have the vague sense that I shouldn't have left my

son in charge, that he's left the door open to the barn and the goats will get lost, and yet I will turn in for the night in this motel here in town, having transacted a lot of wearying business. It is the late night of the 11th of July, 20—.

Here is a poem I wrote with the drool coming out of my mouth as I talked in my sleep:
Oh Why? Oh oh oh WHY?
Must my love have such definite hair?
And a particular height?
And a build, that can be conceived of?

For in this world, in which
Every point falls on a line;
At a distance, two points can coincide
When in truth there is an infinite
Infinite distance, between any two contiguous

For instance, if I had 1.25 meals today
The distance between the truth: 1.25 meals
And a lie: 1.250001 meals,
Would not be 0.000001
But infinity.
Because if you are exactly at 1.25, if you are zoomed in
in
So close on the numberlife, the numberline, that that

point
On the line
Is not infinitesimal, is simply real
Then 0.000001 is of enormous magnitude, being as it
is
So incredibly far it is from true
Infinitesimalhood

You are simply real to me,
Or at worst, a bit infinite,
But from a distance
Others resemble you and this
Makes me talk in my sleep.

(That was written at the stroke of midnight on the
11th of July, 2011.)

Shopping with S. in the agora was always better than
going alone. As followers of the Way, we often found
ourselves in need of each other's prayers. One time a
Jew named Bar-Jonah told us we were pig excrement
— we hadn't cheated him or blasphemed the one true
God, but it is possible we had offended him, had in
fact done some wrong of which we were unaware, but
perhaps which still we could have avoided or uprooted
if we had only grown more in our Lořđ:

One time S. noticed a man possessed (or should I say, “oppressed”?) by a demon. The man would talk to everyone, furiously, but not loudly enough to be understood. His face was contorted, his hair wild, and S. said that she could sense a dark, aggressive energy coming off him, which held her where she stood in her fear.

But I, in my obliviousness, walked over to him and laid my hands on him, as if I wasn’t doing it, and prayed in the name of the Messiah that he be delivered — and because it was God’s will, he was.

Lightning strikes and the day turns inside out, the morning of the 12th of July, 20—.

My dear,

The longest summer I ever spent was a winter without you, such a profusion of cheer in the midst of extreme cold, the winds rushing down from the Canadian Shield — O, you know that my insults are verbal love taps, I’d leave you a crawfish in your okra if I were there with you and our little ones, but this teasing must suffice for now.

If my handwriting is even less legible today, it is be-

cause I am riding the rails from the east of the north of our rectangular country to the west of the south. I look forward to when the train rolls over the Causeway of Doom and we will all look from side to side at the pits of lava. Then our train will smell of sulfur and the temperature will exceed 90 degrees Fahrenheit inside the train — the conductor will not dare to turn on the air conditioning for fear of the ash getting in the filters. There will be summer then, but I long for the early-springtime of your smile and the autumn briskness of your eyes:

I will put this reminder of my love in the pneumatic tube at the post office just before the Forest of Contemplation and imagine it from time to time as I pass by the shrines and sculptures therein, on its more direct journey to your heart:

Sincerely,
—Yours truly

There is little to see or do in the residential motel in the western part of town, so I sit down on the bed and try to think of you the right way, it is the afternoon of the 12th of July, 20—.

One day when S. was a disciple of Jesus, she woke up

at the first hour, and arranged herself, and ate a half of a little loaf of barley bread, and set out to see the Master. She loved the Master, she felt safe, calm, with him, with his gentleness. She was ready to follow him — not to the death, not yet — she couldn't have said if you had asked her, how far she would follow him, perhaps there was nowhere specific she would follow him, she simply, in an undifferentiated way, followed, and would follow;

At the second hour, she arrived where he was staying. She greeted Simon the Zealot and asked where the Master was. "He is eating breakfast, come with me and let us join him."

Jesus was quiet during the meal, and only acknowledged S. and Simon with his eyes. Then he got up, and stepped outside and looked up at the sky and remarked that it looked clear, that the day promised to be fine and hot;

And then at that moment, one of John the Baptist's disciples arrived, with empty eyes. "You are weary", said Jesus, "Come sit with us and tell us why you have come."

The man replied, "Jesus, your cousin, John the Baptist, is dead. Herod has killed him." We did not learn the whole story until later, the scandal of it. But this news in itself was enough, and Jesus, at that moment, felt a bell of doom, a fire, an amputation, as he gazed

from his position of eternity, his sadness. S. knew exactly how he felt, because she noticed the expression of his face. And Jesus looked at all of them there, and asked John and Mary to come with him. And S. and some of her friends among the disciples followed after at some small distance. And then John and Mary turned back and came and told the other followers, “He’s going off to be by himself.”

So we all went back to our private grief, by then I had arrived, and spoke to S. about what had happened. And then I had to go to work, so I left. What I tell you next is what S. told me, later on:

(I remembered John the Baptist as a real human, among a nation of half-grown men, because he was a voice calling for repentance.)

S. and the others, after some reflection, decided that some would go back to their work in the town, while others would go back to their work on the lake. S. went with those who worked in the fishing boats, Peter, James, John, Andrew and the rest. They saw a crowd forming a half-mile down the coast, and rowed over, to find Jesus being asked numerous questions. Jesus was so tired, so broken, but all the disciples loved him as they heard his wisdom, as he was speaking it to the crowd. This, was their master:

And a crowd grew, and grew, and I am sure you have heard the story of how Jesus once fed 5,000 people,

and this was when that happened. And having given his heart in teaching, and having handled the power of the Father, Jesus' eyes were barely alive and without a word he left, and John knew that this was a time not to follow him:

And by now the other disciples had gathered, and the Twelve set out in a boat, the evening dying. And S. went home with Mary and Martha, with whom she was living at the time, and they spoke about what they saw that day:

I was busy traveling for the next two days, and did not hear what transpired until I got back, and S. came over with her tent-in-progress and told me the story, of what happened next, in her scattered, "speechless" way:

She got most of her story from Simon and Phillip, and basically this is how it went: out on the lake in the night, a storm came up and the disciples were afraid. And then, they saw Jesus walking across the lake toward them and — S.'s heart was full to recount this — they thought he was a ghost. And Peter stepped out onto the water, and sank after he looked at the waves, and Jesus pulled him up and he and Jesus got in the boat. And at some point the disciples realized that that was the moment when the storm went away. And they passed to the other side, having been stuck in the storm all night, and in the morning a crowd formed again, and Jesus, walking on a new earth,

taught, and taught, both people who loved him and people who we learned later were the ones who wanted to kill him:

“When he was alone,” I asked S. “Do you think he slept?”

“After the time when he fed the crowd?”

“Yes. He was alone then.”

“I think he might have, that would be wise.”

“But what if he didn’t? Which is the better rest, to sleep or to pray?”

She looked at me and laughed. “Funny!”

(And she is right — that is a funny question.)

The sun stands late in the sky, with its final fury of the day. The plants stand up, straining to draw their water from the ground. Then, I pass into a sheltered place and it is the late afternoon of the 12th of July, 20—.

In the primitive culture, the aboriginal culture, of the

people of the western Northern Valley, there is a particular kind of purification ritual that is performed when a young woman and a young man choose to just be friends for the rest of their lives. A nest is built by the banks of the Upright River, the chief river of the western Northern Valley, and it is built by the friends of the two. And the families of the two are not told, it is a grave secret never to be openly discussed. The family must preserve ignorance or the appearance of ignorance:

The two are separated in the woods near, but not too near, the wooden nest. And they each must find the nest. Whoever finds it first must hide nearby the nest, and when the other finds the nest, and has turned to hide, call out "You have found it." And then they meet in the dark and shake hands, and start a fire with the wood of the nest, and throw each brand, one by one, into the river, keeping just one for each to get through the night:

During the night, they sit by the river, and talk of whatever comes to mind, and when dawn comes, they walk into the village for all appearances lovers returning from a tryst. And so they will appear to their families until they "break up", or perhaps until death parts them:

Night falls on Earth and on Venus sulfuric acid rains down. It is late in the night of the 12th of July, 20—.

I feel a little bit tired right now, a little bit washed out. I think that's okay. I think that's because I had an exciting day yesterday. I went on a quick little trip to the Moon. I was a Moon tourist yesterday. I took some pictures. Take a look — no one has ever taken these exact pictures. Anyway, I know that you have better things to do right now: some kind of work, I imagine.

In the next life, I wandered as a teacher all over the earth. I was alone, so very often. I was happy. One time a wicked man turned from his ways. It was beautiful. One time a regular person decided to follow me around, and I taught him. One time I found where S. was staying and we went out to the local botanical gardens, and I got to tell her what I was learning.

Could I imagine what I need to imagine? When I write about S., I am writing about a real person, who exists exactly as I describe her. But in which world does S. really live? Perhaps S. is simply alive in my personal universe, and does not really exist anywhere else. There is an S.-like person somewhere, somewhere, somewhere. There may be hundreds of her, living throughout time. The S. that I know is simply a cosmic reality, a recurring theme throughout time. The S. that I know is a cosmic, archetypal symbol, an image,

a theme. The S. that has her own universe — perhaps when all the veils are stripped away, beyond the next life, there we will really meet:

Trust is a difficult thing to develop. For me, at least. I tell everyone all of my secrets yet I tell no one any of my secrets. Do you think you know me? You do, you know so much. But you know nothing at all, at the same time. Trust is a difficult thing to bring back from the grave. It requires that you repent, which is simple, yet impossible:

In the next life, I found L. one day, working as a gardener. He was trimming a bush in a hedge labyrinth (a hedge maze for artistic people), and I was walking in the labyrinth, seeking to be lost, which was my perpetual theme in the next life. “Huh,” I said, “Remember all the times on earth where we would walk by a hedge and you would notice it and I wouldn’t?” And he said “Hello, there! Yes, I do remember. How strange to see you right now.” And I said, “Well, carry on, you must keep these plants disciplined.”

Everyone has dreams, fantasies, recurring images. Or perhaps it is just me who is like this. I don’t know any universe but my own. But in my universe, everyone has dreams and recurring images. One image that haunts me all the time is that of the dog that cannot rest. This dog is always barking, always running, chasing, frantic, can’t lie down. People come upon this dog and feel inside themselves a tension, a madness, a con-

cern. As I sleep, this dog comes to me, and I am overwhelmed. I go outside for a walk at night, just so that I can be with this dog, and then I have become what I imagined:

It is the afternoon of the 14th of July, 20—, and the city is awake.

Everything is false, nothing true. Religion and faith are false, atheism and suspicion are false. The past never was, or was, falsely, the future has never been and never will be. Hope is false. Everything is false, and yet the greatest lie is that there is no truth:

To me, there is only one S., but for S., I wonder if there are many who are like me. The stranger loves to be loved by the lover of strangers, and to the lover of strangers, many are strangers and so remain:

From where I am situated, I think about what is true and what is real. Even God, the one I speak to, he is not real. There is nothing true and nothing real. And yet love is real, this is the truth, and I can live this love. This is all I can do with this love, to live it. And as I live it, I see God out of the corner of my eye, and you:

At the street corner, the woman curses her luck, she dives into misfortune, she has been plunged into it. Her cell phone is dead and right now is the moment she needed it, to call up work to tell them that the bus was late and please don't fire her but it will take her a while to get there:

You were probably young when you first heard this song: "Make new friends, but keep the old / One is silver and the other gold." At this point in my life, it can be a struggle to do either:

I put a lot of eggs in one basket back that one time that I thought I was in love, and also that other time, and that other time. Apparently, I kept moving the eggs from basket to basket. Okay, well, I still have some eggs:

I went to Italy one time and found out that it's a lot like South Africa and Southern California. They all have a Mediterranean climate. Also in Italy, they have famous art and architecture, but this was also the case in Israel and North Africa, and for that matter, Southern California and South Africa, all of which have Mediterranean climates. And there were other similarities between the regions, but there were also differences:

How can I love people? I can work and I can be open to them, I can hear them and respond to them. How can I love more? What am I doing right now? I find

that I ask myself that question over and over and have no idea what the answer is: neither how I can love more, nor what am I doing right now. Life is a mystery and then the moment comes, and I am called out of life, as I am called into love:

My real work, my true work, beckons and I must leave you here at the restaurant. Have you had too much to drink on this lunch break? I can drive you to the office if necessary. We'll repark your car where they won't tow it. How do you feel? It's the afternoon of the 14th of July, 20—.

Here I am at the family reunion, having eaten what I should not have eaten, sitting on the couch, among them all for the first time in 10 months, suffering from intestinal gas — foully. They speak of that which of which I know not, they speak of subjects that do not interest me — please, I will not say which subjects those may be lest I offend you — I do not see any value in offending people, unless the cost be worthwhile — please, don't take on any offense:

I am quiet, I am hearing the grating voices, I am exercising my patience, I am passing gas all by myself. And my 7-year-old niece, that child, is crying because something has happened, and she comes over to the

couch and ignores me, the uncle whom she sees so infrequently, and she cries and cries in utter misery. And my intestines are twisted and untwisting, and I sit in my shame. And we pass a quarter hour like this, uncle and niece, at the family reunion:

The mother of that niece is my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law is an old friend of mine, who married my brother. How it is that she did not marry me is a long and strange story that I may or may not tell. We shall see. My sister-in-law has made some dish or the other and now it is time to eat it. But my intestines are not happy, and when my intestines are unhappy, my face is incapable of happiness. But this is a family reunion, and family is not about happiness:

S. goes to her family reunions more frequently because her family has stayed in town. When we meet up for coffee, she tells me all about how wonderful her family is. My family isn't bad, and she doesn't tell me the wonderfulness in a bad way. I've met some of her family, and I believe her, and I am not envious of her family. I am honored to be her friend, to receive the light shed by them, and after all, what I love so much in S. is not all of her origin:

Oh, where do we keep the fruit in this house? There is a moment in every non-drinker's life where they would have a drink, but they don't drink. That rut has not been gouged, but has been half-carved. I need a piece of fruit right now. I am not sure what it will do to my

intestines, but it will ease something in me:

Now we are gathered around the television, watching a movie. One thing that is convenient about our family is that we make decisions quickly. We decided to watch an animated film by the studio that made the films about the talking canned food. It is a Japanese studio that is well-regarded. I also liked their film about the planet where people all grow plants:

Oh... my intestines. Our family is a polite family, but I must leave, I go outside and bend over in the night air, for relief. Out there, my 5-year-old nephew also escapes and looks at me curiously, the uncle whom he has not seen in several years. It's like he barely recognizes me. He asks me what I am doing and I say "I'm in pain. Do you know what pain is?" He answers "Uh-huh", which is fortunate and unfortunate. "Well, yeah, my intestines are hurting, so now I'm trying this out to feel better." "What are intestines?" I can tell that this is going to be too much for me at the moment so I say nothing. He loses interest and goes back inside:

My sister-in-law and my mother eventually come outside to smoke. They see me and do not make fun of me. They tell me I should go inside and have some pie, oh no, that might not be good. Well, just take care:

I am driving home from the family reunion, this night

of the 14th of July, 20—.

I asked God one time if, when I died, would I go to heaven? Or would I just fail to exist? He said nothing in reply, but I didn't mind too much at the time. Sometimes I want to die, and sometimes I am driven mad, but at the moment, I am okay with not knowing.

As tension builds, the ice on the river grinds and buckles, and people have to stay away from the river. They can get right up to the bank, but they cannot cross it under such treacherous conditions. In fact, they cannot even use boats on the river, which are normally well-suited for the flow of the river. How strange, how things change and make things impossible for a time.

Can there be a place in between here and there? If there is, then I will have to go there and see what goes on there, and then again, I will have to go from here to a place in between. If I am going to a specific place, I can never get there, if I wasn't always capable of going there. I hope that I am not boring or confusing you — boredom leads to not paying attention which leads to confusion which leads to lack of comprehension which leads to boredom.

The sun shines on me every day and I like it. I like the sun, I am a desert person. I like the heat. The heat kills me, I like to be killed. The sun blesses the land with energy. The plants grapple with the air, wrestle with the sun, they pull the sun toward the water in the soil, they merge the heavens with the earth:

Every kite I have ever flown has gotten caught in something, and so I long ago gave up the practice of flying a kite. When we were kids, my sister-in-law (that is, the girl who later became a woman and married my brother) and my brother and I used to play around in the field near our house, the one with all those beautiful oak trees. And we destroyed a couple of kites and gave up on that project:

I remember one day, after school, my sister-in-law — this was when I was in fifth grade and she was in fourth grade — she found a lizard living underneath the house. She loved lizards back then, loved to catch them, and she got it and put it down my shirt and I squealed like a little girl:

Putting everything together, I'd say the day that I best remember L. was the time he first met my sister-in-law and had nothing to say to her, but then he realized his faux pas and became embarrassed and started saying something stupid. I think she was his "type". She said to him, "Don't worry, everything will

be okay.” in the middle of his politeness. And then he lightened up and had a good time. I am not certain why I remember L. so well in this incident, and not her instead:

S. has never met my sister-in-law. They have never been in the same city at the same time, as far as I can figure. I suppose that’s just how things are. I wonder if it would be a good thing for them to meet some time. I suppose it would probably be fine for them, but I’m not sure if it would be a good thing for me:

I am staying up too late on the night of the 14th of July, 20—, but life is short and the jungle calls to me with its night scents.

A wolf entered my heart and tore at it and ate my life, for what was done to me when I was in elementary school. And now it is a big husky, only sometimes ill-tempered, sometimes just dumb. And yet for the people who stole my guitar and left the door open so that the rain got into my photographs, there is only an old collie approaching her oldest age, and for you, there is just a little puppy of resentment:

Someone bought me an axe when I was too young to appreciate the gift, but there came a day when the

tree fell over, when I was 11 years old, and I knew exactly what to do:

Corresponding with people in foreign countries has provided me with a lot of stamps from foreign countries. I put them in a notebook — not that they're worth much to anyone but me — and I put the notebook on my dresser. There's a little stamp with a picture of a lion. I like that lion, there's something about its coloration that speaks to me:

I remember one time I drove to the car dealership and bought a car as fast as possible. I confused the car salesman so much. I said, "Will you sell this car to me for \$10,000?" (\$2,000 below list price.) "You have 1 minute to decide or else I walk out of this car dealership. 59 58 57 56 55 54 53:,:.?"

I will always regret what I say in my sleep. I will regret the secrets that I divulge, and I will regret all the things that I say that don't make sense — those are the deep secrets that cannot be known by the conscious mind. I will most of all regret the things that I have written when my mind was not sharp. It is late in the night of the 14th of July, 20—, and I will now go to sleep:

There is a deeper peace that I have only found with God — with everything — but which I have not felt with anyone else, no one else in particular, deeper than rage and despair, which are themselves deeper than the politeness and the functionality — I want to be in a peace that's worthy of its cousin, the wrestling that almost kills *mĭē*:

When I was 11 years old, I was well done with my teddy bear, my constant nightly comfort from ages 6 to 9. But that was the year I got very sick and while in hospital, Mom (good old Mom), brought me the Bear, and I held him in comfort, surrounded by the machines of recovery and the humanity that was trying to keep me aliṽē:

I picked something up off the ground, some scrap of metal, and the heat of the day made me hang my head. I sat at the bus stop, examining the metal, wondering if I would ever give it a name, when a young woman sat next to me and asked about my metal. I had no words to describe it — and though anyone else could have easily done so — neither did she. She told me her name: S., and I told her *miṽē*:

A storm cloud passes by, a thunderhead from off the great lake named Endorea, that great evil of water, the land heats up, heats up the air, the air pulls the moisture into towers, which press down on the earth. I can see a smile and a frown in the cloud, I can feel my end and my beginning in it. And yet these clouds

hardly ever rain on us, they save themselves for the mountains. Oh God, let me climb up a mountain someday:

I asked God one time what the meaning of being was and he permitted me to live one day more. I asked him what the meaning of my life was and he sent me some coincidences, some signs, and I asked the meaning of these people. I asked my cosmic friend what the meaning of those people was, and he whispered “Remember”, and I asked him to remind me, and I remembered my job, which is love. And I asked him the meaning of love, and he was so silent, I was shattered by his presence:

There is a fatigue that passes all understanding, which floats in like fog out of the lake of the heart, which leaves a dew sometimes, which is around the edges of the most wakeful moment. And there is a peace that comes, that I do not understand, sometimes because it is remarkable, from another reality, and sometimes because I have already forgotten it as I go to do something that I enjoy:

I grew up in a pagan city on the great sea back in the ancient days, and I always used to go to the temples of the goddesses to seek peace in my life, to look on the serene priestesses, but then I fell in with a family of Jews, and converted to their male God, my real friend, and that was only the beginning of my days as an idolater, seeking my peace with other women than

my beloved:

In the middle ages, there was a controversy between those who said that God had no nature, and those who said that God just was his nature. And somehow there is a right way to approach God, but I do not know what it is:

Last year, I was struck dumb and because of this was unable to finish my last year of school. I've been trying to write a book ever since and I've been wondering if I renounced speech and thus should join a monastery:

A whole room full of people with aching joints all have to stand up at once to let themselves out in a timely fashion, and this is the air that I breathe on this evening of the 15th of July, 20—.

I got up out of the grave when I heard that all my mourners were having a party over to one side, several months after my interment. I got up out of the grave and walked over, still smelling of embalming fluid, and entered, and everyone treated me politely, yet at the same time also with a sense of disapproval of the scene that I was making:

I'm pouring myself a big mug of coffee right now, oh coffee come lift my spirits. Coffee is the fuel of genius and the motivation of many a slave, toiling in the pits below me. Sometimes I sneak out of my infernal office and bring them some coffee, and in exchange they bless me, and for a moment my eczema clears up:

One time, I was given anesthesia that didn't make me unconscious, but it was the kind that prevented me from moving voluntarily. For several years, my brother dragged me around with him, until one day my sister-in-law let him start learning how to perform magic tricks. He wheeled me over to the Magic Palace downtown, the beautiful old library — how did they afford such a place? They initiated him and taught him some simple tricks, trick ropes and tricks up the sleeve, the kind of thing you can catēh:

Then I heard a speech that will remain with me all my paralytic life: “Now has come a fateful moment in every illusionist's life. You are not your own, you have been bought with a price when you initiated yourself into this, the oldest profession. You must choose the source of your magic, your path. If you remain at the Palace, with us, the truly enlightened, you will be a servant of Satan's materialist army, promoting the perception that magic is only a sophisticated illusion. If you pledge your soul to the wild and the degenerate, you can cast yourself out on the streets to perform the pagan, the occult, the grubby, the chaos magick, the mucking around with sigils and spirits.

With us, your magic will always work, and if you cast yourself out on the streets, often your magick will fail. But you will know more than anyone else, you will know, you will know! With them, you will proclaim loudly that magic is real, but with us, as in everything, if you want the true power, you must conceal it, you must become a man of deep and hard secrets. You must keep your promise as a law: magic is an illusion and you must never tell anyone that it is real. Now, what do you choose??"

My hair got wet the other day and I was walking around outside as it dried off. An older woman came up to me and started to play with my hair. "Uh!" I said and she said "Oh, sorry, you looked just like my son." I asked her what her son looked like and she said "Oh, he's broad-shouldered and blond" and I said "Yes, that sounds like me, is he as tall as me." "Yes, and he's just a little skinnier than you." "Wow, so how is he doing?" "Oh, he's doing just fine. He's in school to become a paramedic." "That's really cool" I said. "How much longer does he have till he graduates?" "Just a few more months" "That's really nice." "Yeah, yeah, well, I've got to go now." "Thanks for the conversation!" "Oh, yeah, any time!:"

I rode a roller coaster today. I screamed as I went down the big drop. It shook me and rattled me, and then I got off and I wanted to cry. I don't know where I was supposed to cry, in the bathroom? I hate the bathroom. So I walked around and I didn't cry:

One time I threw up in a movie theater because I hated the movie I was watching but I was in the middle of the aisle and I didn't want to get up to go to the bathroom and I thought I could keep it in but I couldn't. The people in the row ahead of me could smell it in the seat beside them and they got up and complained to the manager and he came and threw me out.

When my brother goes to the library, sometimes it goes like this: Brother: "Ok, I'm going to the library until 4 o'clock." Sister-in-law: "Can you tell me what you'll be reading? In case something goes wrong." I caught my brother reading *Popular Mechanics* one time when we were young and he was quite ashamed, having dreamed of inventing a perpetual-motion car.

I'd better pull over before I crash the car. I'm dead, this night of the 15th of July, 20—.

"I don't know" — do you remember that, S.? These were the words I spoke to you the first time we sat down underneath the awning outside that restaurant, that is, on our first date. You asked me who I was, and especially what I wanted to do with my life. I had

to speak truthfully — I didn't know. I knew that I wanted to do what God wanted, and yet I also had my own preferences. I wanted to have 2 children, two of my own, and yet I wanted to only adopt, because this world has enough children, and too many unwanted children, and yet I wanted two biological children. And I wanted God to guide me, but I wanted to know things myself. And so my face was clouded over, and I didn't meet your eye. And I'm sorry, I like your eye, I want to meet it. I want to give you the respect of a clear direction or position in life. But I just don't know. And that is all I can say to you today:

I'm curled up on the couch, it is raining outside, there are crickets chirping inside this house, oh, July rains on this July day, the wood is getting wet outside, we will not burn it tonight, oh, shall I read this book beside me? It is a book of love, of some lovers in some place I will never visit, some time far away. In this book, the lovers quarrel and make up, the lovers dance and are locked up for love in a dungeon of separation. The lover that doesn't know the one doesn't know the other. I know all this because I know what I have read, and I have read this book before:

There's a caravan departing this town tonight, a caravan carrying illicit spices, and I have determined that I will not tell on these criminals, I have my own concerns, my own tent to mend, so to speak. Let these men make off with the illicit spices, and I will guard my little supply of dill:

Before anyone can go to sleep — can die in such a way that they can rise again — they must come to peace. If you will die to self, you must be struck dead to sleep, or you must come to peace, so that you can drift off in peace.

One morning I came outside and saw that there were mushrooms in the yard, and contrary to everyone's expectations, today, we could all see the fairies dancing around them. These fairies were wearing blindfolds and could not tell that day was upon them. These fairies were being carried along by the momentum of the night.

“There is no end to love, so you had better put on your backpack and learn a new way to walk” said my grandfather R. He was full of wisdom, that old man, that kind man. I saw in his face many wrinkles and he said “You will have wrinkles like me some day, if you continue to live. But earn wrinkles, please. Please worry and struggle and laugh and weep.”

I tend to eat whatever is put before me. Now that you know that, you will try to put lizards and squid on my plate. If the squid is well-prepared I will eat it. If the lizards as well are well-prepared, then I will try them just to see what a new thing is like. But if they are alive or uncooked, I will leave them be.

The owl is hooting and I am in the moonlight of the

moon of another universe, and I am alive. It is the earliest morning of the 16th of July, 20—.

Last night, I went on a date with a famous author — a dream come true. And everyone wanted her, except for me:

I spend my whole life agonizing over my decisions, and you know what's going to happen? In my next life, I'm going to live it all over again, and just go with the flow. Or maybe that's what's happening in this life:

I built a cardboard box one time out of old things. Then I decorated the outside with paint. Then I sold the cardboard box to a poor person, who uses it as a house now. And now I make more of these houses out of cardboard boxes. I am trying to put some color into this town:

I lived on a reservation for one year. I was trying to get in touch with my aboriginal heritage. (I am 1/16th aboriginal, which is enough, in the land that I live, to qualify to live on the reservation.) We would go out and make wine to sell. We were a hive of industry. We would build houses for ourselves. We took care of ourselves. The reservation was a place of love

and care. I learned a lot there, and now I go back to my place among the majority race, who live nowhere:

I lived in a garden once. This was back when I had six legs and wings. I crawled up and down rose bushes, seeking out aphids to devour. Life was good. It really was. The sun, the rose bushes, the aphids, everything in its proper number and arrangement. Sometimes huge realities would come walking through — but at the time I did not know that it was walking that they were doing — and I could feel the Being radiating from them, and it stirred something inside of me that I still haven't made sense of to this day:

Some of the aboriginal people of the southern South Valley once taught me something valuable that I will never forget. They gave me a special name, Rnqua, which means, "You there". It was their name for outsiders, which they give temporarily to most, but to me, it was the name they sent me away with, the name by which they wanted to remember me:

Cars pass by on the street and the refrigerator hums and I think of the things I have to do on this morning of the 16th of July, 20—.

I just remembered something. My sister-in-law used to date this 40-year-old pop song producer, back when she was right out of college, several years before she married my brother. Back then, she was a singer. Neither my brother nor I particularly trusted the guy, but the fact of the matter is that he made her backing tracks for her as beautiful gifts — beautiful gifts of bubblegum.

Oh Lord, I am desperate. I've been in a terrible depression these last few days, weeks even. I don't even know. My mind is a pile of spaghetti, cooling off. I can't handle life, I'm underwater, with new lungs that hate me, breathing water and surviving in grimy bare sufficiency. I'll do anything. I'll even exercise.

My ears are splitting from all this noise. I don't know why I go to rock concerts anymore. Every time I go, I remember as they turn things on why it is that I don't go, and eventually, at some point, I forget why it is that I don't go to rock concerts very often. Then I come home and look through my diaries and see the same thing. This is how come I'm still alive. I will mature to a certain point and then be cut off, at the proper stage of ripeness — whether they want a ripe me or a green me. I am clumsy for life, for all the yummy things, and all the experiences, and so it is important that I forget, to allow myself to tread water for a few more decades.

I'm full of air right now. Yes, you are being spoken to

by a hot air balloon. I hope you are paying attention, because this has never happened before in the history of the universe and will never happen again:

I'm a little bit hungry. I sometimes allow myself to go from being a little bit hungry to very hungry, as I work the assembly line here in the coastal city of the industrial province. I turn into a machine, and the one interesting thing is the slow advance of my hunger, my mind captivated by my millions of lively thoughts and then my thousands of dull thoughts, the whirlwind that is a whirlwind when dull, which is like a swirling sloshy toilet after 5 hours on the line, I need the sweet relief of FOCUS. And so I focus on the purity, the line to heaven, of my hunger, and my fingers and I turn into a vibration:

I took tap dancing lessons until I wasn't shy anymore, and I came out to the club and during the slamming jackhammer beats did my tapdancing. Nobody could hear my shoes so next time I brought a slab of flint to tap on, and then I was the life of the party. Then I became so good at tapdancing that I'm touring the world and making a lot of money. I stopped to write this book because people need to see the inner life of a tapdancer:

One time I was out in the desert and I found a prickly pear cactus. I had plenty of food and water with me, so I left it alone. But I sat and admired the cactus and had a kind of wordless dialogue with it:

Here in the junkyard, I find myself always wandering around, always wanting more. I love the junkyard. I love the free and the cheap, the free and the neglected. There's a history here and a depth, but I want to know the junk in and of itself, in its living present. I found a beautiful door lever from a car from half a century ago, which I removed and took to my house and glued to a board nailed to my wall:

One time I did cartwheels. It was really fun. I was at summer camp. I was probably 9 or 10. At summer camp, that summer camp, I mostly hung out with girls. They taught me how to braid. I was the best girl ever that summer, but then when I came home, and tried to teach my brother how to braid, he looked at me really seriously and said "Keep that stuff away from me, if I learn that, who knows what will happen to me.?"

One time I was a talking squid and I found, deep in the ocean, an anglerfish who didn't know how to talk yet. So I taught him some words of my squid language, and we began a long-term friendship. Nowadays, as a human, I can't speak Squid very well, but I dive down in my submersible because I don't have anything better to do, and I wonder what could have been:

Quitting while you're ahead is good advice, as is quitting while you're not too far behind. But the worst

thing you can possibly be is a quitter. So you have to turn your quitting into winning. If you don't do that, then you're a quitter, and that makes you a loser or maybe even worse than a loser. Think about it: if you try really really hard, some people will think well of you, even if you fail. But on the other hand, if you try really really hard and just fail, other people will think you're stupid. So just to keep things simple and to protect yourself from feeling worthless, you should just succeed, or in other words, win:

I once caused a river to flow out behind Grandfather R.'s ranch. I just turned on the hose and let it flow. Once I realized how awesome it was (after about 10 seconds), I went and got my brother and a couple of my cousins. We had a blast, all morning long. Grandfather R. came back from riding around on his ATV, tending to his animals and plants, and he said, "Oh my children, the tears of the lovers of the earth, flowing out onto the earth, are sometimes wasted for the pleasure of men." He did not stop us for a long time, but watched with sadness the many details of his erosion:

I'm riding in a biplane about 80 or 90 years ago, with a famous aviatrix, we will be landing on some clouds shortly, to meet with the elves and fairies, who make this their final retreat. I think I should be back after we hammer out a diplomatic agreement with them, about twenty minutes ago, on the afternoon of the 16th of July, 20—. We hope everything goes well:

Time is slowing down, as I loft up at the top of the arc, I am in the hang time, I am sewing like crazy, weaving and building, time is humming, and while I could be pinned down, as some sort of slowness purees me, right now I am approaching some amazing discontinuity. This is the part of the song where they add layers and layers of synthesizers, grimy and complex, and the brass joins and is obliterated, the part of the song where all the frequencies lose their colors, and there is nothing to sêë:

I caught a fish today, while sitting in silence, thinking of everything going on in my life. Oh, the lazy river, the old river, no hurry and no worry, doing nothing. Oh, how the day melts away in boredom, how it drips out of my brain, sweats out onto the fishing rod, leaks into the river, to join the great river of bored sweat, as it meanders through the braids of this crazy swamp, as the tents and the shelters are buffeted by the wind, the wind which ceases as I notice it, the salt cedars melting into nothing as I realize they're an invasive specië:

I washed my hair today, which is something I do every seven weeks as part of my agreement with my religious leader. He tells me what to do every seven

weeks, when I meet up with him. I wash my hair every seven weeks in order to remind myself that I am a dirty person, but when things line up, I am clean. This is something that I experience in reverse in my relationships — reverse, in that, I don't have to be reminded of it, it's my daily experience, things get gradually greasier between me and my girlfriend (not S.) until at some point we clear things up with some kind of terrifying death-spiral, and then we are clean, and the sky is calm and only has beautiful clouds, the cumulus clouds that float by and look like sheep:

Every day, when I get up, I thank God for all he has given me and then I go to bed, especially thankful that I don't need to eat anymore and nobody has any ambitions for me:

I am free-falling from an airplane high over the desert valley where my cousins live and I suppose I will probably survive, we'll see. It is the 16th of July, the afternoon of that day, the year of 20—.

I find that in myself there is the belief that all people, including myself, are temporary, we are all beautiful flowers, to be scorched or plucked or uprooted when we have gone to seed. When people die, there is no injustice in it, only the fading pain of a limb that's been

removed, no residual sadness, no regret:

I imagine God, at the end of time, just for me, snuffing everything out in a beautiful way, for the sake of the beauty I love so much, just for me, but for everyone else, the Christian who wants to roil in endless pleasantness, the atheist who fears in animal terror the approach of non-being and insignificance, he will provide eternal life, for them, those people who loved life so much:

I remember when I was fresh out of college, all I wanted to do was new things, but now as the dean of the school, I have learned to find a whole new world of novelty whenever any little thing changes: suppose a new faculty member joins a committee, or we hold a meeting at night that we used to hold in the daytime:

You know that everything is a figment of your imagination, right? All of reality is either your consciousness or your subconscious. Everybody knows that. How interesting, all the particular things in your world:

At the nutmeg bar, they have heavy hour, with extra gloom and air conditioning. They have people come in and read impenetrable and brutal and beautiful books. People flirt by breaking up, and the windows fog up from everyone's breath:

Jesus handed off his cross to Simon of Cyrene, who was burdened with something glorious. The best fragments of the relic of the True Cross are those which have a little of Simon's sweat on them:

I am a little teapot, short and stout. When I get all steamed up, watch out! I might tip over and spill the tea on you. But I don't get steamed up very often. Normally the heat goes away for some magical reason (somebody turned it off? My stove doesn't work?) and I just kind of calm down:

One time, I went to the barbershop and sat there reading a magazine for a long time. It was one of those gossip magazines. Oh, to learn all those details, and to see those photographs. It was fascinating, compelling, engrossing. My barber forgot about me and I forgot about him, until it was closing time. At that point, I knew all there was to know about the gossip of all these magazines I was reading. I had achieved something with my day:

I have asked before what is the meaning of being. It is a good question to ask, if it is even possible to ask. Can being ask about being? Does it have a right to? Is it metaphysically possible? But I am a passionate, desirous youth, I am a naive and demanding teenager, I am full of life and desire, and so I tend to ask the question out of my need although I have no rights, although it is completely impossible, I want God's answer. Like a reflection on a moonlit-lake, this is my

treasured locket of hair from the voice of God: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me:

It is the sober morning of a drunken night, it is the 17th of July, 20—.

I once purchased a clock to put on my living room wall. We have guests over a lot, so we want to have a way to know what time it is. This clock was cheap, with a kind of translucent white plastic rim, and black numbers and dials on a white background. As the guests got used to our punctuality, eventually we did not have to mention the time, and eventually we did not have to look at the clock. And then there came a time that we would want our guests to stay, and they would say “No, no, there’s something we have to do” although the truth of the matter was that they were just going to go out to their cars and feel numb for 20 minutes or three quarters of an hour, and then drive home to their actual, authentic, demands:

Sitting on the countertop, I have a pie cooling off. I’ve been into pies for probably at least three months now. There’s something I love about putting things together, of preparation, of the slow-paced life. I would like to invite some people over, where from, I do not know. It is 11AM on a Saturday morning, and I am

tempted to go out into the street to round up some teenage ruffians to honor this piē:

There was a lightning storm the other day, and I looked out my windows, with the hiccups, watching lightning hit other people's houses and barns, far away, hearing later of the fires that were started, wracked with convulsions of the diaphragm, being more than I usually dō:

Hunger is a blessing. I remember back when I wasn't hungry, I lost so much weight that they had to put rocks in my pockets so I wouldn't blow away. I lost so much weight that one time my mother didn't even hear what I had to say. I lost so much weight that a cricket made me lose my balance. I lost so much weight that when the ambulance came, they paid me to pick me up and put me on the gurney:

You have no idea all of the things I've gone through, and by the same token, I have no idea all of the things you've gone through. We can try to talk about them, and let's even suppose you've lost your father like I've lost my father: but it doesn't even really matter if we've had the same experience, objectively, it doesn't even really matter if we felt exactly the same things, when we talk, we are not connecting:

I lived in a barn all summer, and it smelled. But I got to eat all the fruit I wanted to. This is the pattern of life, you tend to have to put up with something unde-

sirable in order to get something desirable. However, then there was the summer that I lived at home, watching cartoons, eating as much fruit as I wanted, not smelling like animals. And that summer, I was so bored, I almost puked out my eyeballs. But then there was the summer I got turned into a reverberating, vibrating string, being played by a master violinist, in concert halls and out in country barn dances, and that was all good, but I had to be a string. But then there was the summer that never ended:

The bell tolls the death of the morning, afternoon is birthed and cries, it is the 17th of July, 20—.

Day has fallen, and I walk in the garden and there it is: a yellow-and-black butterfly, as wide-winged as the palm of my hand is wide. My wife (not S.) calls out to me, I go inside, do some taxes, write some bills, we have an argument, make up, I start to make dinner, she's all sweet and takes over, I go outside, and take a load off. Now where did that butterfly go?

Bone on bone, you need a knee replacement. I knew I shouldn't have exercised when I was younger. I knew it all along. I should have signed my body over to the VAT Corporation, to be turned into a human slug. I should have had my consciousness uploaded to the In-

tercloud. I should have become more than myself. I should have transcended myself and overcome myself. I should have let the earth be inherited by the meek, and conquered the stars like a man:

Dairy products give some people digestive problems, but I've always found them to be a delicious element in the meals that I eat. If I want to add a sense of wonder to my food, I can use cheese. If I want my food to slide down my throat, I can use milk. If I want to add something around the edges, I can use butter. And I can dip my bread in buttermilk, and pour yoghurt on my cereal, and have ice cream for dessert:

I've worn shoes for much of my life. There was a period where I did not, however. During those fateful 8 months, I was walking throughout town, trying to see how tough my feet could be. I would walk on hot asphalt, and on rough sidewalk. I decided to go for a long walk into the mountains, from the center of town straight north on Mountain Street, until I got to the mountains. As I walked, I found myself getting little rocks underfoot, and I got blisters. When I got to the top, I bathed my feet in Town Springs, so that all of you below could taste my victory, if ever so faintly:

Arugula is one of my favorite vegetables, I like its bit-tingness. I like it when it goes to seed, that's how much I like it. I like it when it teaches me something and even when it doesn't, that's how much I like it:

A hawk flew by where I was sitting just now and I curse my luck. He or she will surely disturb the animals in the field that lies before me, and my chances as a hunter have diminished. Little do I know that a vulture is watching me, biding his or her time:

When you run a race, you are never supposed to look behind you. You are supposed to strain toward what is ahead. This is good advice, yet because it is so well known, when my brother designed the course for the regional cross-country race, he made the loops so that at certain points, you were always tempted, always made aware of the people behind you:

There's a certain kind of effort in life, which leaves a person exhausted. There's a certain ebb and flow of intentionality. If you are who you want to be, then there's a penalty, that you have to be who you don't want to be for a while. Blessed is the person who can receive a new nature from God:

The train is leaving the station, but I am not going to get on it. It is going to a place that I don't need to go to. I have sent my children there to get an education, but I do not need to go there. I have sent my dog there to get neutered, but today, it is not the place I am going. It is time to take an infinite nap, on the afternoon of the 17th of July, 20—.

It felt really nice to say that things were tentative the first time I said it. A really comfortable feeling. And then we made plans which worked out. In fact, I ended up doing the thing that I wanted to do tentatively, the thing I started to commit to, and the people I was trying to please, but not commit to prematurely, were pleased:

Ask not for whom the bell tolls, for the bell tolls for thee. Thou mayest ask for whom the donkey brays, or for whom the midwife sings. But ask not for whom the bell tolls. Thou must know at all times that all of us are together, a continent rammed together by the forces of the lower earth, we are a land on which one nation sprouts up, one force and one gravity lend its ordering principle. Ask not for whom the bells toll, for the bells toll for thy father and thy mother, when they toll for my father and my mother. Ask not, thou child, for whom the bell tolls, for thy life is still fresh in thy hands:

We sat up in the garrison, as bored as possible, playing cards. We played poker, and rummy, and as the night wore on, Crazy Eights and 52 Pickup, and finally we settled into the philosopher's game, the man's game, War:

Strings of cheese, peeling off into the summer air, floating and multiplying, settling on plates, whisked

by elfin labor toward our waiting paradise-tables, we lie back and ponder nothing, and devour the strings of cheese, and eat raisins and whitebread sandwiches of mayonnaise, ham, and cheese, and then we have some potato salad but decide not to finish it:

One time my sister-in-law, this was back when we were in junior high, told an inconvenient truth to my mother. She told her that I was lying about my report card, that actually I had gotten an A in every subject, no Bs. My mother was pleased, but puzzled, and I was stuck with her pleasure and her surprise, wishing that I could have kept my affairs to myself:

I have three kinds of money in my pocket. I have the money of this country, the pound, the money of the neighboring country in my pocket, the dollar, and I have money from a board game. I am blind and I never really know which is which, and it seems that everyone will accept any kind of money, but I feel different inside when I end up telling the truth:

I feel the call of my laundry as I experience a summer-long laundry day on this 17th of July, 20—.

This feeling of awakesness and aliveness that I have and can't explain is simply my gratitude for the infin-

ity of bad things that haven't happened to me or my kin:

My nation was left in ruins, without leaders, as we starved, as we used up the last of our fertilizer and entered the end times. And the three hated dictators, which had each hated, and in succession deposed, each of their lying eminences, gathered in their late middle age to reminisce, and to consider what was the meaning of life:

I came upon my dictators, and the conversation turned to me. "Now here's a lad with promise. If only he had come of age in my regime, he could have made a superb underchamberlain." "Indeed, but I think he is more, Secretary of War material." "You think so? So it may be, but I would have had him as Vice President.?"

I was flattered, but somehow preferred the discussion my three ex-girlfriends had had in my absence, in which they quickly agreed on what was unpromising about me and mercifully turned to other, irrelevant or mundane, expressions of their love for each other:

I am unhappy and I don't care — a beautiful combination. I don't care that I am unhappy, that is the beautiful part. The unhappy part is that I don't have any energy. The happy part is that I'm okay with being unhappy. The not-okay part is that I could be living. The not-caring part is that I am living, and I can

use my energy, the energy that I have, to some extent:

Our corporation was a responsible adult, it had dependents, it couldn't just disband, and yet it did and my brother and I went our separate ways, moving to different cities. We stayed in touch, of course, but not as much as before we incorporated:

I'm so tired that I desire greatly to sleep, and yet that desire is so great that it rolls over to the account of tiredness of the next day, and in the long run, my habit of sleeping is tending to increase my fatigue. God, my body, my sad, aging body, my worn-down and beautifully eroded self:

And we crowd, my brother, my sister-in-law, S., and I, in a culvert underneath a road, a pedestrian underpass, knowing that this is the tragic, shaking end of the lives we loved, we longed for and invested in, that what will come is a devastation stretched out in time, that life will be a flaming sun, a dirge of fire, it will be a barrenness and a heavy struggle and the end of all hope. And as we all four of us continue to live, refuse to die — or continue to live without even making a refusal, we will get into a rhythm, all of our sad and bereft thoughts, all our longings in decay, all of our sighs and heavy footsteps, this rhythm, plodding, ringing, never any less brutal, wasted or sad, will establish, will establish us somewhere, will grow and assert, will assert us through time until we have at-

tained a look in the eye, something expressed only subtly by the eye, and by our steadfastness; this faint joy from a universe in which we cannot understand anything we see, in which our beings are incompatible with relation and apprehension — in which yet, now, we four are unintelligibly alive:

S. and I were talking about the way things will be. I told her, “If they tell you that you have half as much food every week, what will you do?” and she was sad for a minute and said “I don’t know” and I said “Okay, but what will you do?” And she said “I don’t know, other than, starve.” And I said “I will have to learn what hunger really means, as well.”

It is deep into the night and I have either been working too hard, or have been unemployed too long, or have had too much fun, or am completely normal, in possession of my best faculties. It is still the 17th of July, 20—.

When I was learning to drive stick-shift, my sister-in-law (not yet my sister-in-law) was always trying to tell me to relax, just move the gears together smoothly, don’t peel out so much. But now, there are no gears, the cars don’t run, we try to walk places, under the hot of the sun, under the smoky haze:

“If we’re going to get through this,” I said to my sister-in-law, my brother, and S., “I have no idea what we’re going to have to think.” And S. was silent, looking to my brother and my sister-in-law and me, and my brother said, “We must think of something, some hope.” “Of heaven,” said my sister-in-law, so officially. I said “Let us live there, and also live in hell on earth — heaven and hell both.”

What are the instructions for lightning? You don’t really want to get hit by lightning. What do you do? Do you walk right under trees? But then the lightning will hit you when it hits the tree. Or do you walk out in the open? Then you are the tallest thing, it’s like you’re the tree.

Everything left behind, I walked along alone, sometimes hallucinating that I saw S. beside me, or my brother walking behind me. I did find my sister-in-law there, how strange. We looked around at the doors that opened into nothing, the piles of rocks that gave off a presence of heat, the ruins of skeletons, the downed powerlines, and said to each other “Why were we chosen, why were we the ones, why was it our generation, where is everyone else, how long can we go without water?”

I remember what it was like to sit beside a cool spring of water up in the mountains, to splash my face with water, to bungee jump off a bridge, and to then sit

down and see the grains of sand fall from one half of the hourglass to the other:

S. and my sister-in-law went out looking for something to eat, trying to observe which of the weeds were more or less edible, which of the mushrooms were the edible kind, the kind we had seen other people eating, trying to find animals that were still alive in case it was time to do the irrevocable deed. They found a can of tuna, a strange thing, an old and yet still good can of tuna, and we had a feast, and then said our prayers, and lay around the campfire, listening to the crickets singing, and knew that we could make it at least until tomorrow:

The four of us lived through the Black Death. I was the gravedigger, my brother the doctor, S. was a nun and my sister-in-law was a tavern-keeper, and we all worked with the bodies, whether sick or well or dead. We knew the human body back then, and we brought this to remembrance whenever we needed to, in the city of the 21st century:

I remember that day well, the day of flowers and butterflies, of sunshine and beautiful clouds, the day of seeing everything in bloom and knowing everything in decay:

“My brain feels like oatmeal.” exclaimed S. I remember the look on her face, her furrowed brow, her eyes sunken and her cheeks closer to bone. “Yes,” I said.

And we worked a little bit longer in the bread line, giving out food to our fellow poor, and then as we stepped away, both of us light-headed from hunger, we almost pulled each other over as we walked away, and someone from somewhere gave us half of a little loaf of bread to shaḥē:

It is a brilliant afternoon, jets flying across the sky, leaving marks in the atmosphere. It is the 18th of July, 20—.

Oh, delicious sleep, stealing over me... my stomach in knots from hunger, but my mind at ease, just a few more weeks and it will all be over. The incomparable beauty of the next life, the beauty of a new body and a new job, and me here lying on the ground, the suffering falling over me like a beautiful and bitter blanket, the sun turning me languid, just a little bit more and my sister-in-law drags herself over to me and kicks me in the side. “Get up, you lazy dog. Come on. We found a spring:”

And I can remember how my bed felt, back at home, the way the mattress was so soft and cool as I lay down on it, the clean sheets, the way that only clean sheets can feel, my pillow, especially for me, the blanket, the light of the room dialed down to where I

could keep my eyes closed, the house quiet, even the traffic mostly gone home to put its feet up. The way I used to sleep. I remember even what it was like to sleep, all those dreams I used to have. I dreamed of strange but perfect houses, places to explore, I dreamed of rooms added on to the house I knew, the house I had for the last 3 years lived in, in which I had invested my soul, had new rooms, strange places where I could find things, I can remember how my head would hum with thoughts of things I had done or had yet to do, I remember how sleep was a good friend, a reasonable friend, who came up to me in the night time and tucked me in, and then I woke up to a fresh day of learning... Ah, I remember sleep. And now sleep is something else to mē:

I followed a few years after Livingstone into Africa. I was a veterinarian, a scientist looking after cattle. I had heard of the tsetse fly, of the sleeping sickness, and it struck me there in Africa, the sun whipped me down and the flies made me sick. The sun held my hand and gently led me to the ground, hours and hours more as time went on:

I found this half-eaten pizza pie one day and it was quite delicious. I thanked God for that, and I shared the pieces of it with the people nearby, in hopes that they could sleep a little better that night. I hope that you have not had to try to go to sleep on an empty stomach recently:

I tell you, I was not particularly interested in entering into God's rest until recently. I would have preferred entering into his important service, his bureaucracy or business. I would have preferred all the flesh of this life, all the vividness and obviousness, the substantiality, that which to chew upon. But now, I am ready for God's rest.

We found a doctor the other day. He was out of supplies, but he had good advice. We found a lawyer the other day. He had nothing much to tell us. We found a banker the other day — dead. We found a pastor the other day, looking for what to do next. We found a musician the other day, beating the side of a house, singing the blues. We found a truck driver the other day, drunk on old wine.

It is the humming evening of the 18th of July, 20—.

One night, after bashing our brains out against a dying bureaucracy, S. wanted to go to bed, to curl up underneath her own particular pile of old blankets in the springtime cold, but instead I thought we should pray, commit our starvation to the Lord, watching down on us in his own tearing hunger. She said "OK, but just for 5 minutes", which, in more prosperous times, I would have analyzed, but tonight, I would

have what I could with the people in my life:

When one of us got sick, the other 3 of us would take turns sitting up with him or her, sometimes all together. My sister-in-law, when she got a terrible fever, was wasted in bed, wanted to have some fun, but too weak to play Crazy Eights, simply listened to us play and joined in our game of War by being Fate — giving the final shuffle of the cards:

One time we found a house full of food, canned food, good cans, somehow untouched by all the hungry people, and we sat for weeks, the last people alive on earth, waiting for some kind of rescue, for death, filling in our time, as I had; we had starved to death already, we were the luckiest people on earth:

Early on, my niece and nephew were sent to live in a safe place that was accidentally bombed and my brother and sister-in-law still had a lot of tears left to give:

S. actually died when one of the great nuclear powers attacked, launching a war in the midst of a flowering of culture. My sister-in-law actually died in the Great Tribulation, as she had not been raptured. My brother actually died when the asteroid hit, and I actually died when the wind went out of my sails:

It is the evening, the melted evening, the mellow evening, of the 18th of July, 20—.

Now everyone has their place, everyone has their time. I worked hard throughout my career to understand the interests of all those in my care, to work toward their good, to put them on good projects, to see to their development. Some people thought I was a fair leader, some unfair, and while in a past life, I would have cared whether or not I cared what people thought, in this life, I continue to care, but no longer make the judgment that I need to not care if people thought I was fair:

Ordering pizza works about the same as it always did. You just get on your smartphone, or, if you don't have a smartphone, your dumbphone, or, if you don't have a dumb phone, your pay phone, or, if you don't have a pay phone, you send an email, or if, if you've run out of emails for the month you get on your bicycle, or if you don't have a bicycle, you take the bus, or if you lost your bus pass you just have to walk: but the key thing is that you communicate, in some concrete way, what it is you want out of your pizza:

I talked to a man who lived on the streets. He said that he was just out there for a little bit until he needed to get a job. I asked him if he thought he

needed a job now. He said, “No, people will take care of me” and I said “Do you take care of people?” and he said “My day will come.” and I said “Your day has come.” and marched him to my office, where I introduced him to the cripple who would be his son:

Sometimes I relax out by the pool. I am a big fan of swimming, but also a big fan of relaxing. In our training, we learn how to relax, to relish our relaxing, but then get up just the instant we have relaxed for long enough, and are now ready to get back to work:

Sometimes I go on holiday, up to the mountains of the center of the north of the land I grew up in. And up in the mountains I receive visions:

I have spent time riding the rails, teaching and writing and playing guitar, singing like an old time rail-rider, getting off at small towns to spend some time at the civic center, building some small things:

One time, I met S. by chance — these days, we always meet by chance — in an ice cream parlor in the west of the city we both grew up in, over on 8th Street near Hawk Avenue. The little ice cream parlor had a wooden bench up against a wall, a half-booth, you might say, and there she was, working away on her laptop. I walked up to her and said “S., what are you doing here?” And she said “Oh, you found me.”

I can’t believe how much I enjoy food now. I am

thankful for everything I eat. I don't eat any more than I used to, but it's just amazing how much flavor there is in everything. God is good to us, to speak such poems to us:

One time I met a wicked man. I couldn't believe the lies he was telling — which is a welcome change over my past self. I used to eat up lies like they were candy, living in a perpetual state of holding onto things that I should have let go, resisting but holding the temptation close; actually, that was good training, for something that I can't put into words:

I see people struggling in their lives all the time, and it gives me such love to talk to them. I don't understand where this love comes from, it must be a change in the weather or the climate. And when I talk to them, sometimes they listen, and sometimes they don't, and a lot of times they listen and they know what I'm saying but it just isn't their time to lose the chain:

I am surrounded by chirping crickets, lying out underneath the stars, being eaten by mosquitos, while listening to the frogs out in the trees while a cool air flows off the lake on the 18th of July, 20—.

It was an important moment when I realized I needed to love my brother like he was myself. I needed to identify what it was I needed, what I wished I could get from a relationship with someone who was already truly like me, and then to seek it in a brother who was unlike me:

I remember one time, at the school cook-out, I went to go get a bag of chips, after I had my hamburger and cole slaw, but what I really wanted was to go inside where there was air conditioning:

A dust devil woke up out in the dusty fields, where we had stopped irrigating because of the waste of water, and it skipped around meaninglessly until it blew dust in my face and picked the hat off my head. Truly, like all devils, it was concerned with making itself my reality:

I remember back in the days when sleep was in short supply, my brother would always try to take a nap, but I would wake him up, tell him his girlfriend was on the phone, and while his relationships flourished, I got to have all his sleep:

One time, on the planet Venus, there was so much acid rain that we stayed home from school and played with our melty lead. In those days, people on Venus tended to wear giant protective space suits:

A dragon was living under our house, until our father

called up Grandfather R. for advice. Grandfather R. said “Does he speak ill of our Beloved? Then leave him alone, you know not why God has placed him there.”

Alopecia runs in the family. I believe I remember what that term means. I know that we tend to lose our hair as we get older. Some of us in the family have become less attractive with age, which, paradoxically, correlated with our romantic successes, our successful partnerships to the point of marriage.

Some days I am as tired as a turtle, and I simply have to pack my things in my backpack and keep walking, because this path will remain here until I do. I get out on the path when I am able, and the dust remains on the ground until I disturb it. I am the one to leave footprints in the dirt, I am the one to complete this journey, on this path that is not mine to blaze for the first time, but which is instead so incredibly ancient, it destroys everyone’s memories and reaches back behind everyone’s memories and just leaves me tired, tired, tired.

A gentleman and a lady that I once knew threw a party for the whole vicinity. I arrived with S., the two of us brother and sister somehow, and there we sat with all of the polite people, harboring suspicions about each other. Nothing but suspicion, and politeness, and dullness, and senseless jokes. Oh what a beautiful evening, to be among people for once.

There was a time I figured out how to live in a grey cloud. I don't remember precisely how, this was several centuries ago, but I think it involved some kind of balloon and a little gondola. Yes, the commute down to work could be considerable, so I tended not to work, catching birds instead, and doing my paintings, looking down at the landscape, the ant-people, and up at the clouds, my surroundings. What caused me to leave this idyllic setting? I learned everything I needed to learn from solitude:

I hope none of you ever finds yourself driving drunk, pulled over, in there overnight, at the courthouse, lacking a license, on the bus, finding the love of your life, getting married, building a satisfying life, and then dying at a ripe old age, surrounded by children and grandchildren. Actually, now that I get all of that out, it sounds like it might be a good thing:

There are three ways a film can end. I am speaking of the moment in which the film is over, that most brutal of cuts. As in the horror-comedy-mockumentaries, the camera could be possessed by a demon, thrown off a cliff, thrown on the ground in terror, etc. In this case, the end of the film's footage has a reason within the universe of the movie itself. Then, as in the absurdist, brutal-art, tradition, the end of the film could have nothing at all to do with the inner logic of the movie. Perhaps the director would even end the film arbitrarily, not allowing himself or herself to make the

final cut. And then, as is the case with most movies, the ending of the film could have some strange correlation with the action of the film, there would be a fittingness between the one and the other:

There is a flood through the river valley, and my brother is demanding that I go help. "Come on, you talk a lot about how much you love our town. Now it's time to help. Get up." And yet strangely enough I don't care. I wonder why that is:

An intense anger of hail comes down on the roof of our shack, and we sit in silence, allowing prayer to come to us. It is the 19th of July, 20—.

Perhaps it is true that every day, when all of us came home from work, all of us were so tired, so stressed-out and exhausted, that we could only spare enough of our effort, if we were parents, to barely allow our children their deserved amount of flourishing and happiness, and, if we were single, just enough of what it took to get us into situations in which we could free our minds from our worries, at bars, at restaurants, movie theaters and on the couches of our friends' living quarters. And in that there is a reason to mourn:

Just now, I find myself walking around outside, looking at what has happened. I believe there was an earthquake while I slept, I see everything is askew. I know that some people would have paid better attention as they slept, would have sensed some reason to wake up, but for me, it's always more important to cease to exist, to be in another world, to attend to my own needs, rather than attend to reasons to fear:

I walked in a friend's garden the other day, looked at all the items she had set out to decorate it. I saw a gnome, a clown, a dog, a goat, and a sundial, all made out of painted concrete. Her garden was a sad relic of its old days, when we had enough water for trees. I remember that she had beds of flowers in the old days. (This friend knew S. when they were in elementary school. I only found this out a long time after I met S. completely at random.) She came outside and joined me, with a cup of lemonade. "Well, what do you think?" I didn't say anything for a minute and she understood:

I was in an island territory, out in an archipelago on a foreign sea, enjoying my vacation, when I received a message that called me back home, cut short my relaxation. It was a decree from the governor of my state, saying that citizens of the state must remain in the state. That even the neighboring states could not be trusted. I knew that I had a choice, to stay away for ever or to come home forever. And though I am a wanderer and a stranger, I knew where my heart lay,

to wander and be estranged in my own hometown:

Chronic pain started to get into our joints as the weather progressed, this weather of pain, this weather of feelings, that swept in, a pain front on the joint coast of our nations, along with a kind of humid mind, a humidity on the mindward cape. And so all of us exhibited the same symptoms at the same time, solidarity:

There was a great controversy in our day: high fructose corn syrup vs. cane sugar. No one was particularly in favor of high fructose corn syrup, rather, the controversy was between those who said there was a difference, and that cane sugar was better, and those who said that there was no difference. Similarity: both were sugars. Some differences: they were made in different ways, and contained somewhat different types of sugar molecules:

One time I was eating a lemon cake and the waiter came out and said “Oh, I’m so sorry, sir, we’ve served you the lime cake” and I said “Really? This tastes like a lemon cake to me.” And the waiter said “Oh no, we’ve been out of lemons all day, I’m so sorry that I didn’t think to mention it to you.” And I felt like I had seen a ghost:

When I feel dry, I’m not sure if I’m being funny about everything, or if there’s no reason to feel emotions, or both, or neither. Do you see what I’m saying? My dry

sense of humor is so understated, that I don't know if I'm making a joke out of everything, or I have no feelings and make no joke, or something combining the two. When my sense of humor is so dry, or, I am feeling so dry, I do not know how to listen to myself:

I've never crashed a helicopter, yet, I do not believe I have ever flown a helicopter in waking life. I have heard that flying a helicopter is difficult. You have to keep the whirlybird level enough, you have to keep at a low enough altitude but then again not too low. I don't think I could ever in a million years fly a helicopter, because by then there won't be any more fuel left:

There is some semblance of truth and reality on people's faces, and I just kind of latch onto that and then I believe them. I think it's okay for other people to not believe other people, but for me, I have to believe people. This is something I'm learning to suppress in myself, so that I can be like everyone else:

The wind blows in from another quadrant, and brings with it a swarm of flies, which settle on everything, and take their nourishment, and leave us, alone and in pain. It is the unexpectedly late afternoon of the 19th of July, 20—.

There are different kinds of fears. The fear of being alone, of losing your life, of losing your soul, your truth, your voice, your possessions, your status, comfort and health. We are ruled by our fears, even when we don't feel them.

I'm considering moving to a different part of our island nation. There is a community toward the north of our island, where I have heard that people like me are common. It is a place like an iron furnace, that destroys or refines. I want to be refined, but more than that, destroyed.

I spent an afternoon fishing one time. It was very relaxing, boring even. Yet, a compelling experience, the moment the fish hit the line. This fish that I caught was big, a foot long. I took my time cleaning it, to observe what its organs were. I was on a science trip in the third grade.

What do I want to do? I never know the answer to that question. Sometimes I know what it is I am doing, or have just done. I observe what is, not what should be. Sometimes I find myself in relationships in which I observe what is, not what should be.

There's something very strange about the way that my sister-in-law thinks about me. I am either here or there, never in between. I am either tall or short, never medium height. I either owe her something or

am owed something by her. Very strange for someone like her to be thinking so much of someone like me:

I loaded all of my things into a large backpack and set off across the eastern Northern Valley, searching for small communities of people. In our beautiful and prosperous nation, the small communities are harder and harder to find. They tend to become large communities, or to die out. I needed a small community because I needed to find a place to put down roots, because the purpose of a community is to serve the needs of the individuals who visit it:

It is the most joyous day of our nation, and we are firing off rockets into the air. These rockets explode like the way our hearts explode, a huge joy, a death that we survive. I am proud of our nation, of all the ways in which it has lumbered on, I am proud of the big pile of rivets that holds so many people together, and I shudder to think of it:

Back when I was shrunk down to the size of my own full-sized-self's thumb, I rode on the back of a crow and discovered how they get around, where they congregate. I could have seen this just as a full-sized self, but I never really paid attention:

I am looking through the lens of a microscope, down at a sample taken from a pond. Look! There's an amoeba, chasing a paramecium. The paramecium rows away. Good going, paramecium! But the amoeba, re-

maining where it is, is perfectly placed for when the paramecium turns around toward it again. Which will happen? Will the hunter devour the prey? Or will the prey escape until another day? Either outcome is entertaining:

There's a pebble in my shoe, which realizes me that it's getting dark, which reminds me that I'm supposed to be home before dark or else I will get in trouble, this 19th of July, 20—.

When I was a little kid, I tried to be charming. I tried to be funny, witty, agreeable. I am tempted, in my older age, to say "What a waste. What good ever came of those things?" And yet I observe myself, with my nieces and nephews, responding more to my charming 15-year-old nephew, and I find myself teaching him all the ways that will someday set his face and make him cry:

Broccoli was always my favorite vegetable growing up, putting the cheese sauce on it, sprinkling the cayenne pepper on it, eating it in one bite. Then, as I got older, I realized, in a way that made me wonder why I hadn't thought of it before, that I could simply put the cheese sauce, and cayenne pepper, and even the red wine vinegar, on brussels sprouts:

I've often wondered about cortisone. It is supposed to make your knee feel better for a few weeks. And then your knee hurts again. What is the meaning of cortisone? I don't think you can take it all the time. If you could, then what need would there be for other painkillers, or surgery? It is said that cortisone works like a charm:

One time, when we were sentient vegetables, the farmworker came into our hothouse and picked us. We didn't know what hit us. We were loaded onto crates, and then the crates were loaded onto trucks, and the trucks rode (but to us it was as though we were being confused in the dark) on over to the processing plant, and some of us were considered good, and some of us were considered bad, and the good ones of us were sent on to stores, and we wished we could have been all together, all bad or all good, but that is not the way of the world. We hoped that somehow these people selecting us, the one from the other, were wiser than we were:

I'm trying to get the lid off the pickle jar, with my weak hands, when someone I know comes to the doorbell — of course, I don't know who it is yet — and I think to myself “Well, I don't know exactly what I will say to that person. I sure hope it isn't someone trying to sell me something. Those people are really annoying and I tend to shut the door in their faces. Just kidding, I listen politely and then say I'm not inter-

ested. Hahaha. I crack myself up. Ugh. I think about myself too much. Well, better do something here. If I do something, then I won't be thinking about myself, thinking I'm all clever. Better put down this pickle jar and go over and open the door." So I go over, in my sweats and t-shirt and gingerly open the door. And standing there is my neighbor, who says, "Hey there, my wife and I are having a cook-out in a few, wondering if you wanted to come over?" "Do you need any pickles? I've got a big old jar I'm trying to open." My neighbor was like "Yeah, pickle jars. I remember those." And I said, "Okay, I'll be over there soon." I went back to the pickle jar, and tried the trick where you use a spoon as leverage, under the lid, to let out the suction from the vacuum seal. "ShchPOP!" went the lid, just as I needed it ٢٥:

I go over to the neighbor's cook-out, and for like 45 minutes it's just me and him and his wife, and we make the smallest of small talk, and then a plane flies overhead, and another and another. And we assumed they were from the military base on the other side of town, but then we saw jets coming out of nowhere, trying to intercept them, but it was too late and that my friends is how they got smallpox back into civilization: ٢٦:

Have you ever had a lightbulb that gave off light but also heat? You need it for the light — you love it for the light — but over time it just gives off so much heat, on a cold night, you don't mind, but on a hot

night, in order to read, you have to leave it on, heating and heating, and there's nothing you can do about it, because we haven't invented any artificial lights that don't give off heat:

It's probably late enough to be alone, this strange night of the 19th of July, 20—.

My eyes peeled a carrot, back when I was a magician. I had trained for many years to be an illusionist, until one day, my being broke into this other reality in which I really had magickal powers. I made a lot of money and made a lot of illusionists envious as I had this power. I was in another world and I was in this world. I was in the other world, but they were not, and somehow they were in my world, although they started to fade to me as my power grew greater and greater. Well, the night I peeled a carrot with my eyes, I was sitting alone in my apartment, wondering why love had so long eluded me (it was several years before I first met S.) and some lady friend of mine was supposed to visit and there just wasn't enough time and I knew that punctuality was her middle name — oh, so strange to be a person like me, with the tastes I had in women. And I stared at the carrot and started to weep, just a little, just with my eyes, and I started to explode. And the carrot peeled itself. And the thing

is, I didn't even need the carrot to be peeled, not for the recipe I was working on. But it was okay, I could still use the carrot. I put the carrot in the pot, and made soup, and she arrived, and it was ready, and we gazed into each others' eyes, thinking of whatever it was we would have thought if we were alone.

When I was in junior high, I took woodshop. We used vices and saws and power drills. It was glorious. I made a birdhouse out of pine wood. I burned patterns on the outside with a magnifying glass, like a shark and a penguin. I named me birdhouse "Cap'n O' the Seas" and talked about how only pirate birds were allowed in it. That it was actually a pirate ship, a pirate ship for pirate birds. Oh, junior high! Those days of high spirits and boundless creativity.

One time when I was looking for things for myself in other peoples' trash, I came across a dumpster with a particularly terrible smell. The smell was so awful that I actually smelled it not only with my nose, but also sensed in some measure the intensity of it, through my eyelids. It was a smell that was also a heat. Inside the dumpster, there were hundreds of boiled eggs, and hundreds of cans of spray paint, and one bucket of chemicals that should have been disposed of at a hazardous waste site, so I thought, something smelling of something indescribable, but maybe like the smell that dumpsters habitually have, the grease of the street trash, and also the smell of fish. That was the second day that I almost died.

I sat down one evening with an English muffin and a crumpet. It was a tired night, I had somehow gotten through the day, and all I wanted to do was eat and sleep, although I could tell that tonight would be a night of jello golem insomnia. I looked at the one and the other and could not tell which was which! This was important because I had put butter on the one and not on the other (on the other I put some other oil), and I needed to have the buttery one first, it was an iron law of my constitution. Then I had the brilliant thought to smell the two, to see if I could smell the butter. I tried, but they both smelled like butter. So I bit into one, taking my life in my hands, and it was not the buttery one! Somehow I got through that night, hanging by a thread:

I have days where I feel like I am a phonograph record, and something else is the needle, and I play the same things over and over again, and the record keeps going around forever, and every time through, the needle wears me out a little bit more, a little less detail in the widths of my groove, maybe getting carved a bit deeper. And then there are the days where — this is my universe — I am left out in the sun and I warp, and I am totally ruined for life — and this is also my universe — this has not in any way been mitigated, but I, the record, keep turning, and the needle keeps in the groove, and I continue to make my appointed music, and I continue to await the next time I am left out in the sun and completely obliterated.

ated:

If I can do just one productive thing each day, I consider that day a victory over the bed. Some people go to bed at 10PM, others take it easy and go to bed at 9. That's where I started, and things progressed, and now I get out of bed at 8:30AM and usually take my next hit of the mattress at 11:00AM — thank goodness I'm not so far gone as to be a 10:30 sleeper. Not that I exactly sleep as I lie in bed, I wouldn't call it that. I'm not really living when I'm alive. My productive thing for today was writing this letter to you, dear:

Here at the charity carnival, we have all lined up for our elementary school, where our precious ones go to become citizens of our nation, for better or for worse, but we are here for the better, and they put all our names into a giant barrel and turn it over and over — a raffle. And names are drawn, every name is drawn, this is a complete raffle, and they never draw mine, and it turns out, as I look down at my hand, that my ticket is in my hand, that I never put it in. How is it that they would draw every name you ask? They were assigning us our rank in the school, and so my children had no rank. My children were destined to be perpetual outsiders, because I had been unable to perform this very simple step toward securing their future. Better that they had had the lowest possible status, that they had been included on the bottom rungs of the ladder, than that they remain apart from the

ladder:

Our ship is calmed in the middle of a great and deep ocean, there being just a bit of a current. We are twisting into ourselves, avoiding the sun, constantly asking what the time is, for only time can save us now. It is not even noon, on the 20th of July, 20—.

One time, in the garbage factory, I wandered around on my lunch break, as I was in the habit of doing, and found a door, usually locked, that today was unlocked. It led to a chamber with a ladder leading down to a huge cellar, with a dirt wall on one side and such strange things as fluorescent light bulbs and what appeared to me to be the poles used in street signs. Down here was a smell of damp and moldy earth, in contrast to the street-trash smell of the garbage factory. Down here, it was damp and cool. Up there it was hot and humid, from the moisture of the garbage. I realized that this was not a place I was supposed to be, so I resurfaced and closed the door. And over the months that I continued to work there, I would always try the door, and it was always locked, and when I left that job, soon, I forgot about the door, although the cellar was still there, always would be there, would always, to me, be a compelling mystery:

One time, back when I was a spider, I spent the better part of a morning building an elaborate web. Then I sat there, perfectly still, waiting for food to fly into it. It's strange, waiting for things to come to you that have no incentive to come. They have to come by accident. And you have to prepare so carefully, that when you meet, you have to have differing expectations for how the encounter is supposed to go:

I wiped the sweat off my brow, digging the trench that I was supposed to dig, the latrine that I was supposed to deepen, which was all for the benefit of the people that I was bonded to, my family in arms. And in the midst of the toil, the heat got to me, and I fell into this clean pit, this happy earth, and the earth swallowed me up and I slept the sleep of death, received into my mother's heart:

There's a candy store I used to go to in my childhood, a strange candy store that had familiar things like peppermint and root beer sticks, but also strange things, like horehound, and I figured out years later that that candy store was really a recurring teacher, a resounding note in the symphony of life, teaching me to take my medicine:

Back when I was a gas molecule, I just flew around and ran into things over and over again. I had so much fun. Then, some spoilsport lowered the temperature of the vessel I was in, until I couldn't manage to have as much fun, and I condensed on the side of the

vessel and dripped into a great collective. There, in the collective, there was some sort of mixing, some sort of vague hierarchy of temperature, some stratification, some claustrophobia. Then, some other joker — some wonderful and terrible demigod — lowered the temperature even further and I was locked into a kind of ... I can't describe it.

S. was a little concerned today, when she saw me. She asked "Are you OK? You look like you might need some sleep or some help." I said "No, I am not OK. Thanks for asking. I don't know what I need, but please talk to me, because I like when you talk. You always have so much to say." So she and I walked down Griffin Street, near 43rd Street, and observed all the people walking by, the jugglers and homeless people and the street musicians, and the tourists and the residents of the great big residential hotels that flatten the shops beneath them. She saw one person in particular that caught her eye, a woman with a sad face. I knew who she was: at a different time of day, or rather, in the night, she is a prostitute, but today she is a mom with a kid, with dark circles under her eyes, and an old hooded jacket on in the autumn cold. I spoke to the woman, whom I had spoken with before, and she said hello back to us. I asked her how her daughter was and she said "She's doing great. Thanks for asking. She's making friends at school."

There's an old trunk of secrets in my house where I keep some of my favorite writings. I have letters here

that were sent from back when people still wrote letters. I have tax documents that fill me with a kind of nostalgia for when I had enough money to have to file a tax return. I have journals and diaries — for my eyes only. I have receipts that only mean something to me — nothing to you, devoid of their context. I have a recipe book for foods that only I find edible, and the manual to a clock radio that I threw away a long time ago, but which contains sentences in broken English that I wish I could forget, but which I drink in, at 10:30 in the morning, wishing that I had the strength to say “no”, but of course loving, in a way in which I wasn’t loving myself, trading one misery for another:

Three hours have passed, but the clock has only chimed twice, this clock that chimes every 15 minutes. It is the middle of the afternoon, but this lying clock says that it hasn’t even struck noon, on the 20th of July, 20—.

My sister-in-law, before she got too far out of college, was trying to find a way to make money at her passion, which was languages. She had double-majored, in two different beautiful foreign languages, at the college she went to. She was trying to figure out how she could make money off of those foreign languages.

Translation? Interpretation? She was good with languages, but was not finding any work. I wondered what her life would be like if she had grown up, not trying to fulfill her passion or go along with her natural abilities, but if her constitution as a young person, becoming an older person, was to respond to the needs of other people. And I also wonder that about myself:

Listening to the radio, I heard a song by that one singer, that one soul singer from 50 years ago. It hits a keen spot in me, because I remember listening to it when I was a kid. Not that I was alive 50 years ago, but that it was on the radio when I was a kid. I imagine that the people who were in their teens and early 20s when it came out have their own kind of keenness toward it, unless it just didn't happen to be something they listened to, or their associations with it are to the rumpled and staticky aspects of late adolescence:

The road goes on forever, if you know how to drive on it. You have to get in a groove to where you don't need to stop for gas and you don't need to use the gas station bathroom, and you don't need to blink. Once you get into that mode, you can go on the road forever, in a narrow, high-walled rut of glory:

Back when S. and I were disciples of Jesus, walking the earth in the Holy Land (such as it was), he used to tell us all the time, "Ask for your daily bread." We

were both from fairly well-off families, so this was a new concept for us, until we got disowned. Now that I am in my 50s, I'm finding that it's not just my barley and wine that I pray for, but also for my motivation, my social interactions, the comfort for all the things I mourn, and the gift of being able to see people for who they really are:

I stopped what I was doing and found a quiet place to pray. As I prayed, I could feel inside me a work, a quiet voice talking to me, unraveling me, untying the knots in me. It was a wonderful experience, like being massaged by a whole day instead of a specific person. I could feel toxic feelings inside me being eased, and flushed out of me, in a somewhat painful way. I was quiet for a whole day, and then I got noisy again, somehow, without realizing what I was doing or where the noise came from:

Younger people sometimes ask me what I do for a living, and I tell them, "I don't know. I really don't know." and they're puzzled, they ask "Wait, are you ... unemployed???" And I say, "No, I have a job, but I don't know where my life comes from. It might come from my job. It might come from my social life, or my worship of God. I want to say that it comes from God, but I don't always know that. And today I just don't know." Some of the young people are content with that, or even look at me with greater trust and respect, while others (the ones who were like me when I was their age) bark back with some kind of bluff,

blunt, brisk expectation of there always being an answer for everything;

I was on trial one time. I had been accused of battery. What happened was, I was drunk one night, and a woman was very sad, very sober, having just come into the bar. And she looked so pretty, so sad, that I went up to her and said “You need something.” and hugged her, but she was not happy with that, and said “Get off of me!” and yet I saw how sad she was, how sober, and I did not respond to what she said, until I registered the anger and disgust on her face, and yet I still touched her shoulder until someone came to pull me off, and she lost her sadness that night, never to show it to me again, and instead wore a face of coldness and perhaps even anger, and I saw her in court, with her lawyer, and my lawyer said to not look at her, but I did, and that’s how I know that her face no longer showed any sadness, whether it was somewhere in her or not;

When I was young, I was fascinated by lasers. It struck me as very interesting that you could take ordinary light and turn it into something much different, much more powerful, simply by focusing it and getting onto a specific wavelength. And I’ve found that this is the case too with being a human being, when you are young you are like the light of a lamp, and as you get older, you become like a laser, become so destructive and purposeful;

I just got in the mail today my meditation robe. Perhaps in the right environment it would look appropriate, perhaps on a retreat up in the mountains, but here in the city, it makes me look silly. It's just what you'd expect a monk to wear, and I think it's beautiful that it will make me look silly, as I have read in a venerable book that humiliations are a sure path to getting rid of the self-nature. Then again, the humiliations you choose are usually nothing more than points of pride:

It's the time of day that I bathe, out here on the river on the back of my property, because I figure that I won't be doing any more work for the day, although you never know. I do some more work, but it tends to be inside the house, going over miscellaneous things and cooking dinner for the family. It's the heat of the day, the 20th of July, 20—.

There was a sign set in our paths when we were young, my brother, my (future) sister-in-law, and I, and the sign pointed two different ways, toward "UGLY AND HAPPY" and "SAD AND BEAUTIFUL". We each took our paths and met up years later, in the midst of having been in the same cities and the same social circles, bitterly mourning the primordial destruction of "HAPPY AND BEAUTIFUL", then less

bitterly and with hope:

I remember when I was a chess piece, a pawn in a chess game, and I leapt out, eager to do battle for the royal couple, and then next turn, it turns out that I'd leapt too soon because someone captured me, defying all logic — *en passant*. I don't understand and never will how I could have been put into chains so off-handedly:

When I was younger, I once had a talk with the people who know what the rules of reality are, and they told me that there was something I needed to understand about women, that they were all innocent creatures waiting to be led, never stronger than a man, sheep to be pastored. I cried when I heard that, and walked many hills looking for the woman to shepherd me, but I was alone, and I was drifting down a river, when I decided to look for an equal in the night time, a fellow shepherd, in the wastes of noise and darkness where I was taught how to use my eyes and set my jaws. And I hoist my lamp aloft, looking for this scarred and strong and beautiful woman, and my lamp runs out of fuel, so I wake up and drift through the day, picking my way among the rocks, seeking to erase seeking to see, not knowing what I am or who I am:

But I feel like I have spoken too freely. Somehow deep and strange loneliness — and of course I am confessing to this as I write — is the most shameful, most

disconnecting thing of all. I don't know how many budding friendships I have destroyed by saying what was universally true. My lamp also wants to find the human being who affirms desperation:

S. says to me "But then you met me, and that all changed, right?" "I don't know," I reply. She starts to cry, without looking away from me, and then turns away and walks toward the door, but I stop her, because I need to keep someone like her in my life:

You don't know a person just by seeing them from behind — you may not even identify them, give them the right first name. But you then have to get up the courage to tap that person on the shoulder and say "Here I am", which sounds so strange nowadays:

Before I leave on the great and restful cruise to the south-western islands, the one which will restore my soul, I need to finish one last project, this book born of turmoil and longing. As I will be on the cruise of accommodation, I will be unable to reach any of you here in our rectangular universe, and I will be so caught up in the peace that comes beside the ship's swimming pool, that very little of what I would say to you would do you any good:

There is anger in love, and though I will always prefer a driven sorrow without anger, I will add to that sorrow my own anger, not the anger of Malcolm X, or the Epistle of James, or even of Jesus in the temple,

but my own anger:

“But anger is so — negative,” says S. to me, with her brow furrowed. “Please understand,” I say, “that I want a particular anger, suited for me, but I have no love of anger, and I do not wish any of my own petty bitterness, I want to accept only the anger that is God’s, in the service of God, love’s anger for love’s service. And I will be questioned, and the only answer to such questioning (but not when I am questioned by you and yours) is silence.”

It is the morning after the heavy burden of the night of the 21st of July, 20—.

“I have a question for you,” S. asked, with both her voice and her eyes, “Is suffering a good thing or a bad thing?” // I looked out the window and said “It depends. Some suffering is necessary and beneficial for healing. Some is unnecessary and of extra benefit in building you up into an overflowing person. Some is unnecessary and tears you down to the unredeemed hell. Some strips you down to nakedness before God, the only place from which you can be clothed. So, some is worth something, and some is not.” // “How can you tell which kind of suffering you’re experiencing?” // “Sometimes you know and sometimes you

don't." // "And how can you tell about other people's suffering? It's hard to tell what other people feel a lot of the time." // "I am inclined to say that there may be this rule to apply: In the grey areas, assume that your suffering is for your good, but others' suffering is not for theirs." // "But there's a paradox there. What happens when I see you suffering? You're always pushing me away." // "I'm sorry, I don't know. Maybe I need a better rule, or a better way to understand and discern between the different species of suffering." // She says to me, "What a funny person I've gotten involved with." with sorrow.

There were some people questioning me, asking me why everything I wrote was all about me. They were questioning me, mind you. And I said to them, "If this book can be all about me, then you can write your books all about you. Everyone needs to become something, this world has enough people who are striving to not become." But this did not convince them, and they searched for ways to trap me.

S. reads this and says "I think you come off as a little paranoid." And I say to her, "Yes, but what can I do? There are some who are given enemies from birth, and some who are given enemies by their friends, and some who have enemies for the sake of the kingdom of God. I have received this enmity. I know that those who perceive enmity in some unjustified way are considered paranoid by ... whom? Their friends? Or does this therapy come from their enemies? You are my

friend. Do you think I'm paranoid?" "I don't know." she says. "You're a complicated person."

I will trust this bridge with my weight, knowing that though it is old, a group of people has just walked across it without incident. Nothing fell off the bridge as they walked. I begin across the bridge, one step at a time, looking up at the dark grey sky, knowing that I will be rained on, as I walk over to the saddle in front of me, across this ravine. I start to sing a song to myself, and it even begins to drizzle, and then I am across the bridge, onto the damp earth. I don't know who will come behind me, or what they will think of the bridge, or of the cloudy skies that are perpetual in this part of the world:

Back when I was a computer programmer, I once punched up a whole long program, the purpose of which was to calculate the angle of deflection of bullets off of a spherical surface. For the life of me, although I can remember the mathematics behind what I was doing as though they were a recurring nightmare, I have no recollection why I cared about spherical surfaces or bullets. Yet the mathematics have served me well in later life:

My favorite time of the week was when we had arts and crafts time in the library. I went to a small school, so we tended to use rooms for multiple purposes. Oh those wonders I created! A Frankenstein's monster made out of cardboard tubes! A bear made out of

some kind of thick brown thread, which I distressed until it was sufficiently fuzzy, and then glued to construction paper! A house made out of tongue depressors (or were they popsicle sticks?! A castle drawn onto a piece of paper with colored pencils! To this very day I have these artistic creations attached to the walls of my apartment, to remind me of my glory days as an artist, and what kind of person I was when I was small:

The bell tolls the late morning hour, and all of us peasants know that lunch is coming, lunch is coming, lunch is coming, just hang in there. It is the 21st of July, 20—.

I decided to write a manual on how to live life. I'm going to put all the math in it, unlike my competitors. That way, it will actually work:

I bought a shovel and went onto the back part of my property, over by the statue of the fish, and started digging a trench. I didn't know why I was digging the truth, I mean, the trench, I mean, I was digging to find the treasure hidden in my back property, whatever treasure there is out there. Maybe somebody hid some treasure out there. I don't know why I'm out on my back property, digging this hole in the ground:

I had a teacher in secondary school who bought me a flower once. Now, lest you suspect anything inappropriate, this was in the context of a specific kind of relationship, one in which there was a lot of tension and misunderstanding. That teacher, Mrs. X, was very perceptive, and saw that I was a beautiful violet, stuck in a boy's body. This humiliated me at the time, and has since turned me into a stubborn person, capable of holding to any point of view, so long as it is my own.

I'm not sure what the value of gardening is anymore, now that tomatoes have become so cheap, tomatoes ripened in the special hydroponic greenhouse offshore complexes, floating in the oceans and major rivers of our beloved rectangle. Tomatoes were the last hold-out, the last thing you could grow better on your own. Now all we get out of our gardens are random surpluses, in this age of choice and surpluses, and of course the satisfaction of doing things ourselves, and being outside in the sunshine and fresh air on a weekend morning.

Back when I was working 3 jobs as a single father supporting 2 kids, I often wondered what it would be like to wonder things. I saw my kids wondering things, in the slivers of time I got to spend with them. They would look at the floor and wonder how many ants could fit in the carpet. They would look at the ceiling and wonder where the next crack would form. They

would look at the TV and wonder how they got the faces to come from so far away, and how the remote control worked. They were full of wonder at that age, and I was just answering all their questions out of politeness, although sometimes out of irritation:

I was throwing mudpies at girls once and then they threw mudpies back. For some reason, all the big people were against this, even though we were having a blast all afternoon, that cloudy summer day:

In the town, we had respectable citizens as well as unrespectable ones. I learned as a young ruffian that I derived greater pleasure from inconveniencing the respectable citizens than the unrespectable ones. I was learning, as a scion of the respectable, to identify with the unrespectable. I was learning the morality of the outsider, to rise up and justify rising up and rebellion by noting the hypocrisy of the respectable. And then I got old and tired of all that:

We killed pigs all the time on the farm, growing up, and I never thought anything of it, until somehow the sheer repetition of it started to work on me. I'm not sure how to describe it, other than that the note, which you would draw with a dead pig getting carved up for the meat, rather than with a circular note-head with a long straight stem coming out of it, was playing over and over, and deriving a new meaning through its repetition:

One time, when I lived in the Mandelbrot set, I met a young frog named Possel, who hopped way down the set, at that low scale where you see all those branches of the Mandelbaum. He was trying to find infinity, from which he could derive the resources to court and eventually mate, carrying on his family legacy. I was out hunting for infinity too, for my own purposes, and we shared tips on how to decrease our sizes, in order to find the infinite in the midst of the finite:

A big log of my afternoon task, suspended by a chain, vertically, is swinging back and forth over the miniature golf hole of unburdening of all that I feel inside, this rainy afternoon at the family fun center of the 21st of July, 20—.

I was full of complaints, full of bad things to say about all the petty things that were wrong with my life, but what I really hated was that I couldn't have all that suffering break me down into a final moment of giving up, in which I would choose to live a better life:

Where I was living, the city was surrounded by pure majesty, 15,000 foot peaks. My brother waxed poetic about his mountains, the lovely mountains of his home, and I said, they were nothing compared to my

peaks, and he was crushed, as he had not intended to be competitive with his praise, but then thought “Well, my wife is better than yours” and yet had the good sense to not mention such a thing:

Laying on my four-post bed, in my air-conditioned room, I pray to God, having been stretched out by life. God has left me no escape — this is the guidance for me, a reassurance. There are things that I know that God alone can provide, and it was my privilege to come to know that I craved them:

There is a desert experience of walking without God nearby, and there is a desert experience of seeking God in the desert, a mountain experience of training the stubborn apparatus toward God, these faculties that are not so wedded to sense perception, essentially, as they are to the obvious pursuits of the human, this pragmatism that has as its aims the growls of a life lived only in this world. We tend to live our lives in a world, in the Chutes and Ladders of earth or the Candyland of heaven, but maybe God is trying to teach me not to live in any world, to be a stranger to all environments:

I bought an ice cream cone as I was at the big old park all by myself. I savored the coconut flavor of the coconut scoop, and the pineapple flavor of the pineapple scoop. I looked around the promenade at the young couples in love and thought about how lucky, and unlucky, they were, and about how unlucky, and

lucky, I am:

I drove a small car down to the lake, and got out, and tried to count all the fishermen. There were 14 fishermen when I counted, yet of course, I could only count as I walked, and perhaps some came and went as I circled this 6-mile-circumferenced lake. There is no real way for me to know, but I counted, not in order to know the exact number, but in order to notice the people fishing here, to feel a wealth of fellow human beings, before I sat down to cast my own line into the greenish blue:

Later one evening, I got out my grill and cleaned it. I think I am going to have a party, a real summer cook-out, and invite some of my best friends over. S., and my brother and sister-in-law, and Mr. D. from two doors down, and the L.s from church. Hopefully some other people too, but I don't want to get my hopes too high. We're going to have barbecued vegetables, meat and maybe even fruit. We'll see if I'm so inspired on the day of:

While I was at work, your voice mail came, so I didn't have time to respond to it, but now I have some time. Don't worry about what you were talking about. I've moved on. I barely remember what you said that night, and it's not that big a deal, now that you remind me. Maybe in the future don't say things like that? That's as much as I'm going to say as far as that goes. Anyway, hope to see you later. I'm planning

a cook-out one of these weeks, you can come if you're available:

While I was homeless and jobless, your letter came to my old address, but I hadn't set up any way to forward it, so I wouldn't have even gotten it now, three months after you sent it, except that I happened to sort of know the guy who moved in where I lived, and I went over just sort of wondering if he'd gotten any mail for me, and so he had. I am sorry to hear of your loss and I hope that if there's anything I can do, you'll let me help you. I know that we were not on the best of terms the last time we talked, and I hope that somehow time has dulled and blunted some of the sting, but honestly, I feel it still, and I think it might be best if we didn't meet again in person. But I really respected your father and for his sake, I'd be willing to at least come to the funeral, if that's okay for you. Of course, I'd have to get some nice clothes again, but I'm sure I could figure something out somehow. Oh what am I saying? You wrote that letter three months ago:

While I was living in a lousy apartment in a foreign country, I put my wash out on the line to dry, hoping (as was often enough the case), that no birds would defecate on anything important, causing me to have to wash again, this tide and juggernaut of laundry. I wished that I could be back in my native country, that great quadrilateral of freedom, but I was stuck here in a differently-shaped land, and yet as I was

stuck I was being slowly, tappingly, rebuilt in order to appreciate this completely different wind, this wind blowing from one end of the country to the other. I invited some people over to my apartment from the local church, people whom I hoped would be good to me, although I do not know them and I do not know their language very well. There's so much in this foreign land that forces me to trust people, and this is a beautiful thing for me, I wish I had been exiled a long time ago, and I am so very homesick for the place that I used to haḩe:

A garbage truck passes by, in this land of extreme punctuality and regularity, and so I know that it is precisely 6 PM on garbage day, this 21st of July, 20—.

We hear about people exhibiting a marked change in behavior, and thus it is that we become concerned about their sanity. Yet perhaps the truth is that, for all time, or a period of time, they were that way on the inside but were prevented from showing ḩt:

I am driving a vehicle down a road, a car, a street near my house, a foreign car, Grover Street. My ears detect a sound coming from a house nearby, and I stop to investigate. It is the sound of a fight, a domestic disturbance. I stand still on the pavement wonder-

ing what to do. Is this part of a relationship, the normal airing of grievances? Is this dirty laundry getting cleaned with water and then maybe getting beaten with a stick, as laundry was once done down by the river in the old days? Or is this something abusive? Whatever I decide, my intuition is that if this fight involves audible abuse, from the street, there was something abusive to it, quietly, at all times:

I pulled a rabbit out of a hat, as I did my magic trick. I keep rabbits at home, a whole hutch-full. I name them after great servants throughout the Bible: Joseph, Elisha, Baruch, Joab, even Jesus. They are all pure white, and I let them roam around my backyard sometimes, watching them carefully lest the neighborhood hawks, or the neighborhood temptations, come to fetch them away to an evil fate. Today, I am in front of a group of children, and I pulled the rabbit out of the hat not to trick them, but to provide for them a rabbit to play with. The truth is too complicated to explain, but just understand this: I'm only an illusionist, there is an entirely materially-understandable explanation for what I am doing. I am a Christian, and I don't intend to communicate that there's no such thing as the supernatural. But with my experiments, my illusions, my demonstrations, I give people, children, adults, the image of a feat of wonder being performed that is not really magic, but which appears to be magic:

There's a big table in my apartment, I broke my back

getting it up the stairs, but by golly, I was going to have a big table in my apartment, if there was going to be anything big. I like having a big table because it gives me a lot of space to put all the things out on it at once that I need to have out on it at once. For instance, I have notes for my sermons and I also have receipts from expenditures that the church will reimburse to whoever it was who needs reimbursements. I am the superman, the ubermensch, the one man who does everything at this church:

We run this church on the old model: I am the pastor, and I am the servant. I am paid very little, and I am single, and there will not be a wife provided to me from the ranks of my congregation, and I will seek none from the outer world. It is not my job to do all this administrative stuff, but the old ways die hard, and so far I have not found anyone else both willing and able to do it. I'd rather not preach, I'd rather not reimburse people. As far as I'm concerned, that whole church building could just burn to the ground, and we could all mourn in its ashes:

The first time I saw S., she came in the door with some congregant. The congregant was a relative of hers. I took no particular notice of her, but rather stood up at the front of the old ark and preached a sermon about something important to me, but which I had said too many times, like my favorite music which I play too much in my apartment as I write my sermons. I met her after the service, when she came up

to me and told me what I said was very interesting. I had no idea what I said was actually interesting. So, as I was the pastor, it fell to me to make something of this comment, and I invited her to our midweek Bible study, which of course, I teach:

She arrived and asked all kinds of questions, and I was thrown off. Some of them were embarrassing questions about Bible concepts that I couldn't explain, even, in our discussion of the Gospels (specifically Mark), in which I had the educator's foresight to print out passages from the other Gospels, a kind of home-made harmonization, I so clearly left in the evidence of contradictions that none of my parishioners noticed, but which puzzled her. Was the Bible accurate? Was it not?

We even met for coffee (I LOVE coffee) at a coffee shop near the church building. Our congregation thinks nothing of the circumstance of a young pastor having coffee with a young woman at a coffeeshop — perhaps we are on a date. We eventually got to talking about the specific doctrines of the Bible. She had some concept of Christianity, but was quite open to learning and questioning. Eventually we started talking about faith and works:

Ephesians 2:8-9 says "...for by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast." And yet in James 2:24 it says "You see then that by

works, a man is justified, and not only by faith.” We came upon this controversy when we read in Genesis (trying to start from the beginning) of this, in chapter 4, verses 6 through 7: “Yahweh said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen? If you do well, won’t it be lifted up? If you don’t do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it.’”

I was pretty sure I had all the answers to all of S.’s questions about these three Scriptures. I know this sounds like a bad thing for me to say, but as a teacher, sometimes you become confident in what you know — and yet open to being corrected. I wanted to see what she would think, so I kept asking her questions. I didn’t want her to have answers without a relationship:

I know that I have an issue with beauty. I love beauty. I will sacrifice a lot for it. I’m talking about personal beauty. I think this desire for personal beauty is the main reason I’m a Christian. Personal beauty, as in, am I a beautiful human being on the inside? So for me, the verse about Cain being crestfallen and trying to lift his face up really resonates. I don’t really care about being sent to hell — whatever, I’ve been there. I do care about being (present tense) worthy of hell. It looks like I have to master my own sin in order to raise up my countenance. And this makes sense to me, because at the root of it, real sin is all about a decision that you make — you can’t be held accountable

for whatever harmful things you can't help doing. The root of sin is this willful opposition, this existential mystery of rebelling against love (love is my favorite name for God). And so the way to not sin is to decide to not sin, and there's no way God is going to do that for you. You have to do it yourself.

I don't think "it's" quite exactly that I don't want to be counted worthy of hell, though. Hell is a rejection, and I don't even know if "it" feels like a fear of rejection. Maybe it's a fear of rejection that I can't even put into words. Maybe it's just the feeling of "I am beautiful" or "I am not beautiful", and I must be beautiful, it's that basic and simple. Or it's a whirling mixture of all these things. I don't know.

Anyway, do you think I told all of this to S.? I might have, through subtext and dry explanations, generalized, safe explanations. I don't think she got what I was saying, not on that level, and there was something so dry about me that I think she would not have thought to talk to me again, except that she was curious, there was something to what I was saying. And so we continued our lessons, and eventually she came to understand enough to become a Christian — but she had not lived enough life to convert. Unfortunately, I know too much, have too much knowledge, and do not have enough "life" to impart to her — I am not good at that sort of thing. I guess by "life" I mean something like "encouragement". Encouragement allows you to step out into new boats, rock them, sit in

them, fish from them, and then catch the miraculous catch:

She was enough of a learner, though, that she went off on her own, and read on her own, and one night had some kind of spiritual experience, or perhaps it was during the daytime, or it wasn't one experience, but many, because I never did find out, she ended up going to another church, but she did invite me to her baptism, and every so often I think of her, and wonder how she's doing, and I even pray for her:

I'm lying in bed, listening to the radio, a concert of classical music, just resting, after a long, long day. It's the night of the 21st of July, 20—.

In my sister-in-law's family, all the women bear boys. This, I am sure, is a coincidence, or it is an oblique message from God. These women are loved by their sons and their husbands, and live on rafts, inside cabins, with warm fires, on the river:

When we finally got to know each other, it turned out that S. was committed to atheism. And I was sad, but I did not turn away from her, because people like her do not come around very often:

I look upon myself as special and beautiful and then I have to ask myself, “Where is God in all of this?” And I see myself as weak, and the world so strong, so continuing, so destructive, so meaningless, and I have to ask myself, “Where is God in all of this?” and on a good day I get caught up in myself, my pet pleasures, my desire for recognition, my laughter, my callous-hearted lightness, my of-courseness, and I have to ask myself “Where is God in all this?” — this question, which in all three cases restores *mē*:

There came a point where S. had to go, and I knew that her path and mine were diverging, as though I would never see her again. This was my final communication of love to her, to wave to her as she left, as herself, like a bird returning to the heaven \dot{s} :

There was once a time where there was nothing new, and then a long time where new things were made, then in frantic profusion, and now all new things have been made, the accident is over, and all I can do is try to authentically be who I need to be to the people that are given to me to lov \dot{e} :

It’s so strange to me, but I am realizing that I — somehow — am a presence in other peoples’ hermetic universes, that though they have their own lives — somehow I am in them; and this realization is as though the only thing that existed before was my universe, in which other people are beings perceived. I sacrifice a goat to this realization in my backyard and

look on its death sadly, with a sense of loss and powerlessness, but also with the assurance of having put on the right pair of shoes:

As I walk past the little shops and vacant buildings on 24th Street, near Eagle Avenue, the sky supports patchy clouds, the weather is warm or even hot, the air humid, and from the northern sea there comes a gentle breeze, a fresh breath, and I must ask “What is the meaning of this breeze?” not because I don’t like it, but because it is exactly what I need:

I am becoming hungry today. For several weeks I wasn’t hungry and I only ate because I decided to eat, because eating made sense to me. I didn’t eat because I wanted to, or because it was a need for me, I ate because it’s a duty of society to eat. But today I am becoming hungry, and I seek out the simple food that makes me happy, such food as macaroni and cheese, bread with cheese on it, and hot peppers baked with cheese inside of them:

S. and I meet up again somewhere, sometime, nothing but us for miles around, no past, no future, simply a day of reality, not looking at each other, looking instead out at the clouds of the sky, in which we are either standing, or at which we look, from far below on the ground, saying nothing, knowing nothing, speaking endlessly, noticing the animals around us, approaching them and respectfully waiting for them to disclose their natures and names to us. S. eventually

breaks the spell and we are back in irreality, talking to each other in the coffeeshop where we have agreed to meet, I don't know how she broke the spell — perhaps it was simply that she needed to cope with the things that, though unreal, captivate our imagination.

The sea is full of strange beings, anglerfish and pufferfish and clownfish. There is deep off the waters of the coast of our island nation, down in a trench formed by the slipping of tectonic plates, even rumored to be a fish that knows everything, but which, having known everything, has no desire to learn, and so spends all its time deep in the darkness, cursing the fact that it can still perceive the coldness of the deep, and the giant squid that inadvertently touch it with their sloppy tentacles.

It is the middle of the afternoon and I'm afraid I've been taking too long a lunch break, and that I should be glad that I am a salaried worker so that I can indulge in such extravagances. It is the 22nd of July, 20—.

Today is a day of celebration. I am throwing a party for myself because I found my way back to the Father's house. I am going to kill an animal to feed everyone, to celebrate myself, but this animal was the

Father's, because every good thing is his. And I am celebrating him when I celebrate myself, because I am his. I have put out a chair for all of my guests to sit in, and I have put on new clothes in which to greet you all. When you come, do not feel awkward, but if you do, come talk to me to see that I am real. I may have died, but I am not a ghost. If you doubt my word, thinking that I am a ghost, and that ghosts say that they are alive when they are not — and maybe I've given off the appearance of life before, when I thought I was alive but I wasn't — then see where it is that I have come from and where it is that I am going, and if you are on the way of life, you will recognize the life in me:

The power to change is like the power to flush a toilet. You press a lever and all of the waste goes away. It is amazing what you can do if there is a water system behind you, and an apparatus to convert that water system into a waste-removal experience. Now that we are in such severe drought, we celebrate cleanliness less often — what can we do? But though the world is crashing down around us, and we have had to learn to live through the way of hunger and thirst, we still have the power to change — rather, to love:

I'm trying out a new record on my record player. I bought this record at the record store yesterday, and I was so busy preparing for your visit that I did not have the chance to play it. It's the new album from our favorite band, the band that nobody else likes,

but which we like. You're looking at me like, "Okay, I can see what's going on, why are you talking so much, I want to hear this record!" But you're keeping your mouth closed and your heart is mild. And so, here it goes:

Back when I was a dinosaur (more specifically, when I was a brontosaurus), I used to love to peer over the treetops, to see the low clouds coming in off the northern sea, to cover the prehistoric forest with life-giving dew. It was my favorite thing to do, and because those were the good old slow days, some days, it was just about all I would do, other than constantly graze to maintain my caloric intake:

My heart full, my eyes wet, I found myself paralyzed with happiness, to see such a crowd of people gathered to witness my release from prison. To stand under the pale sunshine, the weak sunshine, which was yet the free sunshine, the sunshine unveiled, to smell the smog of downtown traffic, yet to smell it, in itself, and not mediated by the prison's air conditioning system, to see all of those people gathered just for me, the people who kept faith with me, believing in my innocence (even though I am not innocent — yet I am innocent of the charge that put me in prison), who look on my face and don't guess what kind of criminal I am and always was, but am no longer, all of this makes me tip forward when I finally do walk, as though the earth and I are going to tumble around each other, and yet I catch myself and walk as nor-

mally, and I get into a free-person's car, and we head off to the park, where apparently there is a major sound system and grill set up for me and my people:

A raven flies overhead and I watch it, watch it soar a little, settle into a tree. I am up high, in an 8,000 foot mountain, somewhere in the obliqueness of the trapezoidal country, on my honeymoon. I follow over to the raven's tree, and see beneath it a lock of hair, which is that of my beloved, and a sense of dread strikes me. And I go looking for her all over the mountain, wondering where she has gone and who she has become. And she taps me on the shoulder and says, "Hey, were you looking for me? I've been wondering what you've been looking for this whole time and why you were dragging me around this mountain the whole time." And I laugh at this, at my afternoon of foolishness:

And the sea comes crashing down onto the sands of the southern part of our island nation, and I can hear the crumpet merchants yelling out "Crumpets and crabs! Crab-crumpets!" and the smell of rotting kelp comes to intoxicate me, and beside me are my dog, and my best friend L., and S., and my sister-in-law and brother, and their children, and we're all sitting still, well-behaved, staring out at a sun that will never quite set and yet is always setting:

It is the golden afternoon of the 22nd of July, 20—.

If you are a pioneer, you may think that it is your skills with the gun and the map that matter most, or your ability to show your two boys and three girls how to shoot and trudge, or you may even believe that your home on the southern shore, which exists as a figment in your heart, and in the future as your homestead, this reality birthed within you is the greatest thing, but the greatest thing is a reality in you which is a call from outside you, which will get you to go beyond pioneering as you know it, may send you beyond the shores of the south, or may root you down into peace, which cannot be put into words — you will never know its nature — but which will always elicit words of longing; which is what the word “pioneering” refers to in the dead abstract general, but is alive and ineffable, specific and never seen:

I was called before the high council,
delivered up by the City Bailiff,
paraded publicly down Sparrow Street,
(which was intended to shame
 or put a fear into me,)
and the 30 foot high foreheads looked at me
sternly,
with 1,000 years of past behind the motions of
 their lips and tongues,
and all this antiquity told me, as one,

“You are accountable to us because we love you.”?

You need to stop what you are doing and take a new step in life. You need to put down your knitting and stop working on that old car. There is no time for all your preparations, there is no future for all that busy-work. I don't know what it is that you need to do, but I can see a multitude of people who are doing things that they should stop doing:

You're so awesome, one time you had some cereal for breakfast and you used it all day long to fuel what you did. You knew hunger for a day, and you did your race proud (the human race), you were humane and humanitarian on that day of hunger:

One time, you were swinging on the swingset and got the brilliant idea to jump off. It was as though you were the first person to ever think of the idea. Had you been 20 years older at the time, you would have never tried it, you originality-seeker, from having fully registered how pointless and unoriginal an action that is. As a 28 year old, all you do is consume media and work your job so that you can consume media with your friends:

I was once registered for the draft, but I got on the Undersea Railroad and made my way down to the Undercolony, where I spent the duration of the war doing neutral things like repairing sonar machines and mining apatite off the sea floor:

You had a brilliant maths teacher in high school who inspired you to be a philosopher, and you've been working hard on your doctoral thesis, your magnum opus, your dead bearskin rug, your leatherbound ball and chain, and you had totally intended to show it to that brilliant math teacher, but now he has gone to another country and you don't know his address:

The inventors of the airplane grew up in the same town as me but I never said "Howdy do?" to them. It wasn't as though I hated them, bullied them, or purposely ignored them, it's just that I had other things to do with other friends. Nevertheless, it is equally impossible for me to get free rides in their airplanes as it is for those who taunted the boys, stole their lunches, and put leeches on the backs of their necks:

You and I have something in common: we're both trying to flush ourselves down the toilet, to go on an adventure of misery in the land of excrement, to find the dark smells, and the pale light coming down from the rare open manhole, finding out what life lives down there, leaving nothing in that bathroom for anybody to find, except perhaps the clothes we purchased but didn't really need, considering that a week later we decided to flush ourselves down the toilet:

I played a harp in the band that played at your wedding, and you looked up from your blushing groom in the midst of the reception and said "Play 'Lily of the

Northern Valley” and I played, and you snuggled up against your stoical groom, and then you said “Play ‘I’m So In Love With You, It Hurts’” and we didn’t know how to play that song but thought we did and started playing it anyway and you smiled, because you knew that we didn’t know what we were doing and that seemed perfect for the moment:

One time, when I was a troll and you were crossing a bridge that I considered to be my home, I went out in front of you and said “Ho Hey Hi Hoy, what are you doing, you stupid boy?” and you ran away and I was disappointed because you didn’t leave anything for me to steal, not even your set of marbles:

It is exactly... not quite anymore... midnight, the commencement of the 23rd of July, 20—.

You can hear a guitar crashing down through the root, playing its chords, you can sense in the air a dullness held in contradiction with electricity wrapped in a stupefaction, your mind and heart long for something transformed in this world, you are growing on the wild path, you are a witness to a power and authority that are returning, and so you are a horror:

It bothers you when you are underestimated, but this

is actually a derivative irritation and discouragement. The true discouragement and irritation comes because the people who are underestimating you are also underestimating themselves. And the underestimations come together, a family at a picnic:

Am I speaking untruths regarding you? Do not believe what I say if it does not make you love more and better. That is the criterion for truth, those sentences that you believe which cause you to love more and better. For too long, our goal, as human beings, has not been the worship and emulation, the imbibing of love:

My eyelids are drooping from all the strange dreams I dreamed last night. I was sick last night, I had some kind of fever, some kind of chills and aches. This is my reality, week after week of illness. And so I must ask some other people to do my work for me, a housekeeper comes and cleans, my brother comes to do yard work. This house must continue, although I cannot care for it. If someone could speak and think for me, then I could die in peace:

He who has his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for the sake of the King of Heaven, that terrible power, will find it. They taught me of the King of Heaven when I was young, and then as I aged I saw the terror of the kingdom of heaven as it came in my life, the swift fall of the axe, the scattering of the birds, the fires on the hills, and my life taken up into

his:

She who has her life had better lose it too, in the midst of whatever it is that makes a woman a woman and not a man. I don't pretend to understand anything like this, my brain used to like these sorts of riddles, but now I just know that a woman is different to me than a man, and that therefore the women that are "to-me" (if that makes sense) must lose their lives although in some way they are different than the men, I don't know what I'm saying, but you women, lose your lives in order to gain, for the kingdom of heaven is coming, and will bring its violence before it brings its peace:

The philosopher speaks with his realistic point of view, with his smooth logic, with his tone of reason. He knows so very much, he is so clear, so rational. And so the world goes on in which the poor are locked up, the rich are ugly, and the grass is dying, and all people are simply filling in time, waiting around to die:

But your old life clings to you, all the associations, the old ways, the old means; you can't just die to your old self, no, it is not easy, you can't die easily, you are not ready to bring yourself to the amputation table and have that surgery done, that rapid, rapid surgery. No, your time has not yet come, and yet you are becoming restless, under all these unnecessary, longstanding limbs:

When the kingdom of heaven comes with force, will you join me, S.? I cannot promise safety, I can only promise that I will not turn you toward the lies that are so prevalent. It will all seem so compelling then, both the truth and the lies. I know that I am not anything to you, I am only speaking as I feel, not as the reality is between us. In fact, I can say nothing to you, yet, I continue to speak. Please, if I am to be nothing to you, look to the life of Jesus, look to that man, and see what kind of a person he was and is.

To know the truth, you will have to live a life of love, worshipping love, worshipping the God who is love, you will have to love the Father, the God who is your true father. The truth comes not to those who think, but those who think, feel, and act. I am telling you all of this because there wasn't enough time to tell you all this before, and I don't know what kind of time there will be to tell you later:

The apple tree is doing what it should, putting forth fruit. The crickets are doing what they should, chirping, mating, hiding, hopping. The falcons are doing what they should, soaring, killing, resting. The cats are doing what they should, sleeping, hunting, exploring. The wild donkeys are doing what they should, drinking, grazing, traveling together. The roses are doing what they should, growing, drinking, putting on buds. The wind is doing what it should, frightening, refreshing, kicking up dust. The sun is doing what it

should, exploding, dying, giving its light of life:

Now I am lost in the day, this day that is my portion, the day which I will finish eventually, but which is outstripping my appetite, it is the morning of the 23rd of July, 20—.

As part of your life, you will want to communicate, and so you will attempt all the main forms of communication, and you will find that the truth is impossible to communicate, in this era of a certain kind of lie. You can write a book, but nobody reads; write a play which no one will watch; write a movie which no one will produce; draw a painting which no one will understand; dance, and find no one else dancing with you; give a speech that no one will attend; run for office, and wind up only saying your party's platform; even perform a terrorist attack, and only speak for the kingdom of man and his paranoia. And yet even if you write a book that people read, and if your movie is produced, and if your speech goes viral, for many, many people, it will be taken as a metaphor, as hyperbole. There are truths that cannot be known, not because of you, but because of your listeners, and the veils that cover their hearts, hearts that refuse to see what is self-evident, for fear of believing it:

But you, you have been enticed, entranced, you have seen the beauty of the Master, and have walked in his train. He has given you to drink of his Holy Spirit and you are in love — but this is even a lie, not that it has not happened, but that it is not the whole story, and a truth that obscures the whole truth is part of a lie, it is a deceptive truth. In all your pleasure of God you forgot your fear of God, and yet you have learned your fear of God, by accident, in a generation that forgot it. You learned your fear of God in the guise of something other than God, but that horror and terror you felt, that close redemption you felt, came from the authority of the universe himself. Your generation spent so much of its time trying to be smooth and normal and well-mannered, then lamented its smoothness, normality, and well-manneredness, in a way that only perpetuated that hairlessness, and yet amidst all the murmurs, of soothing and complaint, you were broken into by God, by the real God, who took you along for a walk in the meadow and also to visit his own garden of torment, his Gethsemane, and salted you with the fire of Gehenna. And so now you are learning reverence and true responsibility, the true ability to respond to what is most real:

Repentance is the strange union, of taking responsibility and falling into God, of misery and peace, of religious artificiality and of drawing closer to God. How is it that pain could get us close to God? This is a wonder in our generation. How is it that self-confrontation could be the key to health? This is a double wonder in

our generation. Repentance is impossible, and yet we do it, because we have $\text{f}\ddot{\text{o}}\text{:}$

No one repents because they want to, for if they really wanted to repent, they would have already repented. This is the mystery of repentance, that anyone can do it. Something crashes down into your life and you repent — that happens. You are forced by something outside yourself to change. Yet also, you desire to desire to desire, but you do not really desire, and you lie and pretend, you foul hypocrite, but this is a holy hypocrisy, you penitent, longing to long, a cartoon, phantom, wasteling, longing to be real, and God honors this particular kind of hypocrisy by opening your heart. The best and most glorious repentance is the kind that proceeds from no cause at all, that blasphemes against causality, of which we cannot speak, but of which we can rejoice $\ddot{\text{e}}\text{:}$

And yet it is in the nature of repentance that no matter what does or does not cause it, it is you that repents. No one else can repent for you. Your God cannot, your mom cannot, your dog cannot, neither can your pastor, your professor, your lover. There are some things only you can do, and this is what you should always be doing, whenever the opportunity arises $\ddot{\text{s}}\text{:}$

You set out on the street, walking around, trying to find, on 33rd Street, exactly where that man went, that man who was preaching repentance, in the mid-

dle of the city, that man who asked for change and then would tell you about repentance, that man who struck you as doing a good work at the time, and who you now think could give you some advice:

It is alleged that the last thing people will ignore is violence, and yet you know from your personal experience that if a man came up to you with a gun and said “Pay attention to me or die”, you might well choose to die. There is a love of life that is required in order to pay close attention to a violent threat. Yet better than not paying attention, and paying attention, in order to live, is to pay attention, out of love of the truth, and out of love of the person who is the truth. Perhaps the days of terror are coming to an end — yet — perhaps, like a terminal patient who makes one last rally, or the hurricane that comes in October and rains warm rain one last time, it gathers itself for its greatest work yet, after which time the kingdom will have fully arrived:

The truth is that when it is a lie to fear, it is true to feel peace, and when it is a lie to feel peace, it is the truth to fear. The truth is never under your control. The truth makes you lost, except when it makes you found. You long ago asked if you would be permitted to take ownership of yourself for once and devote yourself to God so that he would do whatever he wanted with you:

It is later in the morning, with the trees dropping

their limbs in this fierce wind, on the 23rd of July, 20—.

There will be some who say to you, “You say you have the truth and the Spirit, but it is we who have the truth, for the Spirit works in us and guides us in our work.” And you are to say to them “God guided Israel to David, and to Saul, so that he could give them the gift of kings, a gift that he did not want to give. Judge by love.”

You will eventually become blind to the reflections in mirrors, and then you will see the strangeness of everyday life, in which we respond to things that are not there, and then soon after you will see yourself primping, and wonder at the meaning of your life.

As you reason and reflect, you will come to understand and intuitively “get” why any particular person would do what they do, and so you will come to understand and intuitively accept the way the world is, and then you will wish to God that somehow you didn’t understand.

All kinds of problems will appear compelling to you and me, will appeal to our capacity for focus and fire, but our hearts have to make a discipline of return to

God, to see, (even beyond the injustice,) the compassionlessness of our hearts, the multitudes of people who do not love the multitudes of people, all because we have not loved these multitudes, we do not have the heart of God, you and I:

What is the meaning of the being of the multitude? It reveals itself as a force, an avalanche, yet it also reveals itself as the potentiality for a relationship. The multitude contains every possible person, and somewhere in the multitude, sweating on a feast day, there I am, and somewhere else there is S., and also you (unless I am speaking to S. right now) and you yourself, in the potentiality, have already found the one or two people or even the tribe that were meant to accompany you wherever you need to go, the people that were meant to sweep you along into their becoming. How can you not wish for the salvation of everyone, o stranger? If the multitudes are not shown compassion, you will always be empty, always alone, for if the multitudes are damned, so condemned and erased is your true love:

We are all strangers, because this is not our home. We are not at home in ourselves, nor are we at home in the groups in which we find ourselves, because we are not constituted according to love. We know that we are going to be something else, that we are pilgrims, and so our one constant status is that we are not at home, never at home. We are finite, in a world that spoils paintings, we wish to be free of the spoiling, so

we are strangers — not at home wishing to have a wing added on, but out searching because we are the despoilers, though we never intended it, we must grasp onto the reality that we have intended to be fouled paintings, we do shoddy restoration work, it is through this that we never rest, though our ultimate goal is peace, even total peace:

This constitutedness, what is it? The ship is built with sails and a compass and so it sets out to discover; without a compass, it would stick to the harbor. We are aimed as a society at muchness, progress, culture, and technology and not at love — imagine if we were. To desire to be what we are not can be the most authentic thing we can do. Take comfort in times of hardship, when things go against you, because then you are opened up, forced open, or opening with considered joy, to all that goes against your constitution, the fierce wind that can be your salvation or your curse. I am constituted in all sorts of ways and my heart says all sorts of things, but I want to be constituted anew, refounded under the principles of courage, clarity, sadness, compassion, drivenness, and the continual presence and guidance of Gød:

And you were the one who worked the night shift for six months, even though it messed you up, but you continued on, and though you saw dawn from the wrong side, you survived. And you were the one who worked on the construction site with your father, and everyone else thought that he was playing favorites

with you, so your father had no choice to be harsh, and you were 12, but you didn't cry, even though you did nothing right all day, and though that habit of not crying has been its own burden, you survived that day and you survived your adolescence and what you've bitten off so far of your manhood. And you were the one who surprised everyone when you ran the 1st and 4th legs of the relay, although you lost, on that day when everyone was put to the test, and the whole team was on the verge of quitting. And you were the one who sat through an abusive relationship, and though you should have left sooner, so you think, you survived, and now there is something in your eyes that lets you see people who suffer. And you were the one who sat up all night with a fussy baby, only to learn, after nights and nights, that there was something really wrong, only to learn that your baby was not going to see more than a few more years, only to learn that you would absolutely have to provide for your child, and pour everything into her, just as you would into any other child, only to see her die, and yet you continued, and gained a glimmer of defiance. And you were the one who was fed all kinds of lies, but somehow you got out of that environment, and now you bless God for the truth that you drink. And you are the one who has no idea where you are going or who you are or will be, who stumbles in the dark and winces at the light, who eats food that gives you an upset stomach, and then forgets to eat, and then eats again. You are climbing on a brutal pathway that leaves cuts and notches in that inner rock of yours,

and perhaps you lose the use of some limbs, but you have an inner hardness that grows and becomes beautiful and which continues on, a drumbeat that becomes more and more powerful and meaningful the longer it repeats:

It is the quiet evening of the 23rd of July, 20—.

The night is young and I am old, so I am handing off this bullhorn to you, to sing the praises of responsibility to this crowd of working people, these people who will be individually called into positions of leadership over time. I am going to go rest my feet over by the trash can fire, my feet propped up on this old suitcase, which contains all my possessions: some clothes, a toothbrush, a supply of painkillers, but not too many, scraps of paper with Bible verses on them, all contained within a small sheath, a memo pad or two, some pens, and several things that I will leave as a mystery:

The needle hits the groove, and the turntable moves the record around, and a sound comes out and everyone dances to it, and then they stop dancing to it and they start criticizing it, and then they stop criticizing it and leave the room, and it keeps on playing, until finally someone comes in from the other wing of the

house, and notices this strange everlasting record player, and wonders if there's something to be done with it, to throw it away, or to listen? And they listen for a bit, but don't understand what it is that they're listening to, and they go off outside and sit under a tree and think:

There are dogs gathering around this body, on this day of famine, this hour of famine, this time of famine, and they are beginning to lick the corpse, but I shoo them off as best as I can because the corpse is of you, and you deserve more honor than to be eaten by dogs, although you will have no use for your body, and the dogs can live by your demise. I want to keep you around, keep this the best reminder of your existence around a little bit longer, because I know that I will completely forget you in just one week, as time peels apart and events crowd around me, pinning me to the wall:

You are the best friend I have ever had, you who have listened to me thus far. I have been standing on this street corner, blind and deaf, in this city, in the central plains of our rectangular nation, and I do not know if anyone but me exists — yes, I know of those who touch me — but all you passersby may be nothing or everything to me. But though I will never know you and never see your faces — oh, I do remember what it was like to see and hear! — all I can do is be myself and know that you are the best friend I have ever had, and you are the royal person, the leader, the

one who was the chief person in your life story, and therefore in the life story of everyone else in the world, you who reigned with dignity and compassion:

The crust of the earth rams into itself, and plates break on the kitchen floor. The center of the earth reaches out to the outside of the atmosphere, and the ocean rushes into the new deep. The steam and ash fill the air with noise, and the cities run like eggs into the sea, and the people cry out in terror and confusion, and in calm and in great love and compassion, and I say to you: you can be anyone and you can be anyone. You can even be yourself: and yourself can be anyone. Can you hear over the din and roar of everyone's apocalypse, each individual losing their grip on the edge of life, wherever they are on the edge of life, over the din and roar of the end of the world, all the things that are understandably and legitimately and unnecessarily the end of the world to you? Can you hear small voices asking "What's for dinner??"

My time is short, I am growing weary, somehow I will break my glasses on the pavement — I know this — I will fall out of the car in my sleep and land on the pavement and my glasses will fall off my face, and I will stare: unconscious, not asleep. They'll take me for dead, and you will have to carry on without me, though I am not dead, I am only asleep, and I will rise again, with the same body, but with a new, impaired, simplified consciousness. And that is why you need to pay great attention to what I am saying:

But I do not wish to frighten you, death does not frighten me and so I forget that it frightens you, but I do not wish to frighten you. In fact, I will live to a ripe old age, my injuries will not kill me, yet I am going to die, or have already died, yet I am going to live to a ripe old age. This is how you will live too, when you set out on the muddy road that leads over the saddle, into the other valley, which leads out to the badlands, which then leads to the other mountain range, which you will cross in your sleep and in your numbness and starvation, and which will then deposit you on the coastal plain which will lead you down to the port city that you have only heard of in songs, and you will get on your ship and set sail, a final hardship of seasickness and then, with sea legs, you will roll back and forth below deck and settle in to sleep, awaiting your further orders wherever it is you land, your other career and your other fatigue:

It is the vigil of the night of the 23rd of July, 20—.

I awoke this morning to a day at work, and then I returned home at night to review a pile of mail and to check the voice mail on my home phone. I heard a voice I hadn't heard in a long time (that is, several months, my months are like your years). It was the

voice of my brother, sounding a little bit off, saying that there was something important for me and him and all of the family to talk about, and that if it were possible, I should drive over the mountain pass this weekend in order to have this important discussion face to face, a collective meeting:

Once we arrived, it turned out that he had been diagnosed with a certain kind of cancer of the digestive tract, which was at just the stage where he had an equal chance of living (as long as any cancer survivor lives) and dying. We first digested that news, and looked at each other and at him, and then he said, “Being as I am a practical man, I thought and I thought through this last night and early this morning, and I prayed, although I do not know the will of God, but I did pray, and I do know what I want, and what I believe will accomplish God’s purposes. I talked this over with my wife” (that is, my sister-in-law) “and she will have her own thing to say when I have said my words. I talked this over with my children” (ages 21 and 23) “and they have declined to say anything other than that they agree with my course of action:

“I have long thought about the issues of what it means for a whole to love its parts, and a part to love its whole, and for the whole to love another whole. I have looked at the beauty of the parts, the families and cities, of our beautiful and orderly nation caring within themselves, even the nation caring for the na-

tion, but our intransigent and intractable world is ignored — this is what I see. We only love what loves us in return and is of our kind. I am speaking at all levels of organization, and I am speaking in general, I know that there are exemplary exceptions. I have considered what it would be like for one man to love the whole world. I think of my master, Jesus, and his example, a man who was in the position to love the whole world, not just in action, but also in his heart, as he had compassion on the multitudes. Jesus gave his life for the world, and he in fact, through that, was capable of performing a strange and yet apparently necessary action, which we still do not fully understand, but which somehow enables us to return to God and look him in the eye, survive his presence. And I see that as I have the opportunity to die, and the luxury to think about how it is that I will die, and the time to dispose of my life intentionally, that I may here emulate the man that I follow, and perform some kind of action as an expression of my love for the world.

“When I was younger, I agreed with the people who said ‘It is so hard to love abstractions, or multitudes.’ and yet I rebelled as well, and I tried to call things that were not, things that were. I knew that what I desired was necessary, yet impossible, and yet I longed for it to be possible. And in fact, I think that in part — although the whole story is a mystery — in part, my very desire to hold onto the possibilities, in the face of apparent and present reality, to hold onto and

to even love, with my imagination, things, people, who could barely be imagined, that this connected me to all the people of the world, I stretched myself mentally until I could love what might be and what may be, rather than confining myself to what definitely was and what I could see. Some of you saw in my life an inability to be practical, and this has cost me in my business and marriage, but for all that it cost me, it causes me to connect to this being that exists and melts away, that is human but has no face, the multitude:

“I began with the idea that I should love, the bare assertion ‘These people are valuable.’ and then I began that next and incomplete phase of a dry-hearted, will- and intellect-oriented process of figuring out all the ‘solutions’ to all the ‘problems’ that exist in the world. And I certainly have not thrown away that phase, nor the assertion that preceded it, the bare assertion of value:

“As time went on, my curiosity, running on the rails of a different track, dove me into philosophy and art, pursuits that I did not understand, neither did I understand what I was experiencing, nor did I understand their value. And I prayed to a God whom I did not understand, not just to Jesus, my master, but to the Father, that alien being. And I lost my bearings, and my mind found everything to be slippery, and everything indistinct, and in this mist (you all thought I was depressed and stunned) I could see new shapes, I

was enabled to see things that did not have details, and which did not make sense according to my old eyes. This was a purely intellectual and aesthetic understanding, and yet it was a prefiguring of a real birth of love in my heart, the opening of my spiritual eyes:

“I ran along on my own track, considering how it could be that, like God, I could love the whole world, and how it was that I could give myself, who am so much like my own son, in order to bless it, if not save it. I found myself raising my son and daughter, I found myself loving my wife, but there was still within me this longing to long, this longing to love the whole world, as it is the world. And one day I noticed that I had always loved the world, my world, my very own, my people and my people’s people, that this was my household, my great kinship, this untouchable and half-intelligible cloud. We were all strangers on this earth, longing for home, since we had no home, we had everything in common. Though this was just a vision, this universal homelessness, it was certainly the vision that I regarded:

“And so now, at my current age, I have an attachment, an affection for, this world, a compassion for it, a desire to see it prosper. Somehow I have a compassion for my wife and children, and for myself, through this very compassion, and somehow I have a compassion for the stories that I read in the church bulletin, of a distant cancer, or in the letters sent out by the

charities I support, of a distant starvation. I love what is unreal:

“And so now, in my current condition, my current situation, I want to make the beginning of a final gesture. I consider how it is that in our mighty rectangle, that we spend great sums of money, 5 or 10 years’ wages, in order to defeat cancer, put it at bay for some time, at least. And I see how it is that 5 or 10 years’ wages could be distributed among the very poor of the world, how it could save the lives of hundreds or thousands of those poor, with simple medical interventions and agricultural improvements, how it could even be spent on contraceptives, or small-scale entrepreneurship, for a different and perhaps more long-term benefit. And I think to myself ‘Am I really worth that much? Or would I be more happy for these brothers and sisters — these abstractions — to abstractly and in an unreal way be really helped?’ I am sure that I am worth a lot. But I love these people, I love them when I first meet them, out on the streets where they beg, I love them when I get to know them at church, and go on their adventures in trying to live as a poor person, I love them on the bus, when they talk with such friendliness to people they have just met. I love these people as possibilities and as realities and as they transition between one and the other. So I have decided to sacrifice my life out of joy, to give away something small in order to get something big:

“The execution of this — and I do not know if it will succeed — is this. I will start a website, a blog, something — or one of you will, and I will publicize my cause. I am a man with cancer. And yet I also have a request or a demand, which goes to my insurance company. I will say ‘Let us gather as men and women of business. I have faithfully paid my insurance premiums for the last 20 years. And here is my great payout to come, my 5 or 10 years’ wages of cancer treatments — estimate it as whatever you will, employ your honest actuaries. Would this be preferable, that you spend 90% of that money on the poor, and keep 10%? Or perhaps you would even prefer to spend 95% on the poor and keep 5%? And let us gather as men and women of conscience, would not you prefer to bless the many rather than the one? And let us gather as men and women of cynicism, breathing in and out the air of corruption (I hope that God has mercy on us), will this not make it look as though you have a heart and soul, as a company?’ And I will say this publicly, and you will help me to make this known, so that the company knows that it has something to gain and lose from one man’s request:”

“And I hope that this can succeed, that the insurance company will say ‘How can we do otherwise? Why shouldn’t we do this?’ or that if there is some kind of struggle over it, that I shall prevail. And then this money will go to the charities that are most trustworthy, and I shall die as having climbed to the top of a mountain.”

He concluded his speech and his wife, my sister-in-law, spoke. "Every calling has a cost, and I am the one who will bear the greatest cost. This man who has been my second self for many years is now going to leave me with many years ahead of me. I know that I will live, and triumph, in the years to come, but now I will triumph in my loneliness and grief, rather than in my greatest flourishing. And yet I would rather that my husband be permitted to be himself, to be his full self, to love as he best sees fit, to love the world as much as he loves me, to love me by leaving his beauty behind for me to cry in, to weep in the beauty that he leaves by leaving me behind for this other world, to go to this other world, where he is, to me, a word and a memory and a spirit, rather than a man of flesh, whom I can hold at night, and whom I can see with my own eyes. And so I know that I have much to do, and much time to spend with him, and much to do for his legacy, and much stress and crying, and please support me in all this. That is all."

We stood, trying to process all that we had just heard, and found ourselves in the arms of each other, and parting from each other, and talking, and falling silent. And we gathered at the table and ate together, although my brother ate less, and ate with displeasure.

He had some time, although of course, as it was to be untreated, we did not know how much, and we found

an urgency in our visits to him. I traveled over the mountain pass at least twice a month, on weekends. Early on, he tried to take care of the “unimportant” things, the things that he didn’t really care about and so could not be bothered to deal with when he was in more pain. His wife and I settled his accounts with him, and he spent an afternoon distributing all of his possessions among his friends, keeping only what he needed for his final approach;

We proceeded with our appeals to the insurance company, who yielded quickly — almost, somehow, too quickly — and who sent the sum over on the day after my brother died. At his deathbed there were his wife and children, myself, and L. and S., who drove over the mountain pass, and some other of the relatives who lived in the area, and a few of his long-time friends;

Now it has been a few years, time has passed, we have moved along, but we have never forgotten, he is never dead to us, we think of him as both a memory and a possibility;

It was a long day today, all the hiking up hills and the careful procession down the valleys, no need to trip and fall and slide into a bush, now, is there? We sit soaking our feet at the old tavern, set in the hills of the mountains, in the little valley where our greatest river emerges from the earth as a stream, between two of the saddles, near the mountain pass, up 8,000 feet,

we are worn out from the altitude and the dust, and it is the end of the evening of the 24th of July, 20—.

One time when I was the sea-god Poseidon, I saw the most beautiful woman in the whole world, serving at the temple of Athena, and I started to trip out about her, like, whoa!!!! but then I imagined what it would be like to have a conversation with her, in person, how I would have nothing to say, and there would be nothing but nothingness between us, and I stopped being a Greek god and I went back to cleaning the temple steps:

I pulled an all-nighter one time, working on a clock. I don't know what I was thinking. I should have worked on it ahead of time. Haha, I know, that was a pun there. Anyway, it's possible that I'm working on that clock right now. A clock is a way to pass time, of course. I've got some gears here that I'm locking together, so the whole thing will turn around in circles together. How beautiful, to think of this thing building up to the fatal and wonderful event, of a long chime on the hour, and even once a day the dance of a lonesome soldier and his faithful dog:

Back when our city had a state of the art light rail system, I rode over to the horse stables on the west

side of town and from there rode out into the western desert, where I saw the desert flowers in bloom. I picked one of the most beautiful and wished that I could have told someone about it, so I'm telling you now, :\$:

People ask me about my name tag, which has my name written on it. "Why do you always wear a name tag?" they ask. I say to them, "I don't know, it's a habit that I picked up from someone I met at a convention." So they keep asking me about it and I say, "Okay, people, I'm going to track that person down." So I go to the next year's occurrence of that convention, and now I'm trying to remember who it was who taught me that, I think he was a guy with brown hair, that's what I remember, about my height, that is, average height. And I think he wore glasses. No, I could be wrong about that, maybe he didn't:

One time I sat on the north side of a rock
waiting for moss to grow on it.
And I got tired of waiting,
so I decided to
write a letter to you,
but that took too long so I just went over to
knock on your door,
and before you opened it
up,
I saw you
through your window
walking

to the door
to open it up:

I played the calliope once on a steam ship. This was back when steam ships regularly plied the waters off the southern shore of our glorious nation. I was a good calliope player, but I was no match for Barton, the great Barton, who showed me that I needed to quit and go back home and work at some other line of work, although I could have continued and made a living on that steamship for many years before the invention of the phonograph record:

I learned to ski when I was 35 years old. Before that, I had never seen snow before, but I drove inland to the great interior mountains, and settled for one of the 8,000 foot mountains, saving for some later time the 10,000 foot and even the 15,000 foot mountains. I know that I may never get to those peaks, or, shall I be more specific, their slopes, but I know that I should always save something for later, just in case, to preserve the infinity of the universe:

A gong played one time and I heard it clear on the other end of the university campus where I was studying meditation. It made me think about all the other messages being sent by the universe, and how just because they weren't named as messages, we don't hear them. Does that make sense? At the university, the gong was saying "It's time to gather for meditations and a meal of millet and steamed kale." but at the

university there was also the call of a flock of crows, which said “There are crows flying around.” and also the sound of people whispering in class, and the sound of construction going on at the west side of campus, and also the rumble of the great qi generator in the center of campus, from which we derive all of our intelligence and inner drive:

I picked up the phone and heard that it was one of those telemarketer computers trying to sell me something. Because I spaced out, I heard the whole pitch, and yet did not really understand what it said. Then I hung up and started walking around my apartment, thinking of something unrelated. Then I put on my shoes and went outside and talked to some people I knew, some neighbors of mine. They invited me in and I listened to their newest vinyls and also saw their pet fish. Then I went outside and wondered what the point of my life was. And then someone came to me with a petition to sign, and I signed it. And then I left the apartment complex entirely and walked over to the train station, and I rode the train down to a lecture hall I knew of, to see what kind of lectures were being given, you never know, anybody could be there, and a guy started to lecture about how people in other places are starving, and though I’d heard it a million times before, this time, the guy’s warm manner and his simple speech, somehow triggered in my brain that there is more to my life than all this aimlessness, but I went home and didn’t think about it for another 3 years, during which time I floated

through life aimlessly, at least that's what people said, but to me I was getting a lot of important things done in my head:

I was lying in a hammock, wondering when someone would come save me from my poverty, and then I heard on the radio an intrusion from a pirate station flying overhead in a zeppelin, flying over the border from the rich country, and it had this guy saying "Don't wait for a rich person to save you from poverty, take responsibility for yourself, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps! This is what all the really, really excellent people did. You want to be like them, right? Not some whiney sissy." And it worked, it really did. I started a business, succeeded, and started feeling justified when the people from my country suffered:

I flipped on the light to my house and like magic I could see what was inside. I walked around and made use of several of the items in my house because I could. This was reality to me, the use of items. Then I sat down and breathed slowly and the nature of reality to me was ——. And then I stopped breathing slowly and got up and cleaned the house. And then you came in the door and the nature of reality was your face. And then you left and the nature of reality was what it really was, which was reading a book until I was so tired that I went to bed and lay there thinking about you and when we would be together again and then I wound up staying up all night listening to my favorite band, cutting out stuff from the

newspaper and pasting it into a collage, for what reason, I cannot say, but maybe the nature of reality is how I never have to work a job anymore, and I never have to sleep anymore, and I can go for a walk whenever I want, and I can travel wherever I want, and stay wherever I want, and I want, I want, I want. Well, to be honest, I don't know what the nature of reality is:

It is past the witching hour, I think, if I remember when that is exactly, this very early morning of the 25th of July, 20—.

S., do you know God? If not, I'll tell you something. When I look toward him, it's like when I look at you, but then turn away, perhaps awkwardly, so that I can say what I need to say. And I can't just stare at you, perhaps I shouldn't, but with God it's like I crane my neck and what I see is beautiful, but it's not compelling, God never compels, at least, not in my reality. There's a freedom to my love of him, but it requires work to remember him. I guess that's the tradeoff I live with:

I was living in a hut and some days I was happy, and other days I was sick, and finally, I was very sick, with vomiting and diarrhea all day long. I was bewildered

and very tired, and I was in misery and agony. A doctor came to visit our town and she gave me oral rehydration therapy, and this gave me some strength, and eventually I recovered. I suppose now I have an immunity to whatever pathogen I had? And I look around this town I live in, and I think how lucky I am to live, with all the people I love still present to my living view, and yet at the same time I am a helpless child:

I picked up a rock out in the desert, and observed that it was hot from the sun and that it was round and dense. Perhaps in some other age, this rock had been deposited by a stream somewhere, it had the roundness and smoothness of a rock from a stream. What was it doing down here in the desert? Or rather, perhaps, what was the desert doing here? I turned to look out across the desert and saw in the distance a grove of date palms, within a few hours' walking distance. I looked out in the other direction and saw a small town, a place where tourists spend the night. I looked out in yet another direction and saw where I had camped, underneath a pile of boulders. "Here I am," I prayed, "Right in the center of your will."

One time, when I was out in the islands with my friend L., we went snorkeling and found a small group of sea turtles. We followed behind them, hoping to find where they lived. The sea turtles "led us" (or not, who knows what they intended?) around a small cape, to a medium-sized cove, and there we saw three amaz-

ingly beautiful women sunbathing. We got out of the water and they said "Hello, come sit with us." And we sat with them and they said "Try this coconut water, it's very refreshing." And so it was. And they said nothing else, and we sat and wondered if they had anything to say on the inside, each of us, without saying it out loud. And eventually the women stood up and took up their beach towels and walked away from the beach, back up in the rocks above the cove, and we waved goodbye. And L. and I sat there in the dimming light, deciding to forego our hotel room for the night, talking of all the things that had happened in our shared past, and in our individual lives up to that point:

One time, a meteorite came flashing down out of the sky and struck the slum at the edge of town. There was a terrible explosion and fire and all the fire trucks of the town barrelled and whooped their way to their engagement with the flames. Poor people scattered and a lot of filth got cooked. The place was in ruins, and after everything had cleared up, they built a tourist attraction around the crater, and they built fat apartment blocks to replace the slum, and some of the poor people lived in the apartment blocks, and some wound up in the new slum that sprouted up several miles away, where there had been a wooded river bottom:

As I get older, I find that things keep getting taken away from me, for instance, my time. I used to have

time to do just about everything I felt compelled to do, and which gave me joy. There was such a thing as homework, and then work, but I always had time for the people who mattered most to me. And now as I get older, I find relationships drifting away from me, and I'm helpless, because somehow I just don't have time anymore. I don't know how this happens, how it is by doing so many things, I end up being less and less able to do what it is I really want to do:

I never understand peoples' reactions to what I say. One day I wanted to be a water Indian so I said out loud "Time to go put on my water moccasins!" and people were flipping out and I didn't understand. Did I say something bad? Another time I was talking about something I really cared about, about how people don't know anything and are stuck in this predicament of still having to live their lives, and people laughed. Huh? And so I go through life. I wonder, what is it that people see in reality?

One time when I was a dog in a dogsled team, we climbed over the snowy expanse of a long rise up in the southernmost part of the world, the great land of the south where hardbitten people go to be alone, and I was really tired and I was also a dog so I kept going because I knew the dogs in front of me and the dogs behind me and I responded to the wishes of the man who was riding in the sled. We settled in for the night and all of us dogs huddled together, and the man lay down next to us, and it was a clear night, and I could

see the stars up above:

I was doing dishes last night, looking down at those pans and bowls, which had been left for the last few days, a smell developing, the food drying onto the vessels. I scrubbed and scrubbed, clearing out all the things that I had eaten, feeling the shame of my upbringing and early education, the way people had looked on me as someone to coddle and take into hand and themselves as the mature adults, the ones who deserve, and expect themselves, to impose their will, the way I cared about my own pride but I wasn't supposed to care, but I did anyway and that was even more shame, how everything was taken away from me and I couldn't escape the chessboard, the chess game, that everyone had been playing with me without me realizing it, all those years, that even though I am far away, the game is still being played in my head and I am limited by all the moves that could cause me to be checkmated. Perhaps if I lose, then all will be over, and yet the chess game would continue, continue to be begun by those who take to chess, challenging the people who don't know any better, leaving the game inside their minds, the game will continue. The chess game is an objective reality that I can't shake, even though I know that the players of the game are simply beasts flailing against their own fate, fearsome machines that on the inside are just a few gears creaking along, but they are gone and the chess game remains, that game which machines can play so well, that game that I don't even like, and which I am not even inter-

ested in, that game is still alive in me, pawn chain castle your king knights to the center of the board and things have devolved beyond my level of chess strategy and I can see the board in its particularity, with all the particular pieces setting up their particular web and I really just want to throw the board out the window and bash the pieces with a hammer, and go outside and tear that board to pieces, and burn everything, but I'm trying to do that while playing the game itself, because the rules of the game only permit that I move pawns forward a space (or two as they start), they capture one space diagonally, and knights make their tours and bishops take their color, and queens can do anything quickly and kings anything slowly and rooks take their rank and file and everyone makes one move at a time. But like I was when I was four years old, I don't want to play this losing game anymore, I want to finally show my anger and my rejection of the people who implied to me that chess was the thing, chess was cool, chess was what people do with their time, and it is in the nature of this chess game that if I tear up the board and go outside, that I have set myself up for checking and checkmate, that this game encompasses itself, a closed loop of people winning because I am going to lose, because I have to acknowledge chess, which is their way of winning, forcing me to play their game and excel at the skills and dispositions that I find heartbreaking, or I will continue to suffer, at the mercy of their programming, the infestation that I cannot eradicate from my house. This is the chess of chess. And then I finished the

dishes and was at a loss for what to do, knowing that sleep would not come to me:

It is the calm and quiet and sealed-off morning of the 25th of July, 20—.

And yet I know that when things are impossible, the Lord is near. I know that when there are no paths, the only possible path is the Way. I am speaking for myself, perhaps the reality is different for you, consult your own experience and report to the world what you find. I know that the person who I am is one who is compelled by the paths, the preferential pathways, the ways the water flows where it has flowed until something dams it up and it carves a new waterway. I can see myself, as in a mirror, I can see that I am prone to wander, to look down at the grass as I graze — a sheep can do little more — and yet I must incline my ear for my shepherd. I am a sheep of the good shepherd. I am not a winner or a loser, a thinker or a doubter, a friend or an enemy, a lover or a hater, a writer or a reader, no, I am none of those things. I am not the person who I think I am, and I am not the person who you say I am. I am a sheep of the good shepherd, and in this simplicity, I am at peace, and in this peace, I can be loved:

I took my son out to the backyard to teach him something important. He's six years old, which is perhaps young for this lesson, but perhaps not. There is a lesson in being taught something too young. I gave him

the hammer and the nails and I told him, "Okay, son, I've got something I'd like you to build, and I want you to be very careful as you build it. I'd like to give this gift to your mother for her birthday, but I need your help. Can you do this?" And he said "What are we making?" And I said "A birdhouse. That way your mother can look out the window as she daydreams at the table, and see birds up close to the house." And he said "Alright." And I got the pieces out, which I'd sawed on a previous afternoon, and held them in place, and told him to nail in the nails. "You have to hold the nail, and be careful, and don't hit your finger, but you have to hit harder than that." He was somewhat bewildered by this mixture of imperatives: Do what Dad says, Don't hit your finger, Hit harder. Eventually I added to his plate the imperative to Try and make it go in straight. After a while, and a certain amount of concentration on his part, and suspense on my part, we had in our hands a birdhouse, and my son looked at me and said, "I made that birdhouse! I did it solely by my own efforts, without any help from anyone! I am the greatest! Bow before my hammer!" And now the real work of education began, as I laid bare to him how everything we do is predetermined by the way the Big Bang happened. And he said "What about God?" and I said "You thought you were God just a minute ago. Who are you to save yourself from determinism using this 'God' word?" And my son said "Are you God?" and I told him, "No." and then he drew himself up to his full height, 6 foot 1 inch, and said "Then I don't have to do any-

thing you say” and he walked out and got himself a job and an apartment, and only visited once a year. And then I got old and sick and he started coming around more, trying to make up for all that lost time. And he asked me about God again. And I said, “Ask your mother when she’s doing the bills, paying for all this technology that’s keeping me alive.” And he came up to her, somehow able to arrive at the moment of bill-paying, something she did not normally do in front of other people. And he heard her saying “Does not your Father in heaven feed the sparrows, which are here today and gone tomorrow? So then, do you likewise.” and he looked out at the window at the birdhouse he had made a few months ago, all by himself, out of nothing. And he was bewildered to see all of the past and present and future coming together into the one moment, his mother before him writing, his father in another room passing away. And at this moment he cried, and I picked him up and began to cry with him, as though I was the one who hit my finger with the hammer, my moment just as full as his:

Eight is my favorite number. I don’t know why. Is it because of octopuses or octagons? Maybe so. I do like octopuses, octagons and octahedra, but that might be because eight is my favorite number. My favorite color is blue. I know where that comes from. The sky is blue. I have always been enchanted by the sky, by the thought of being up there, way up high, without anything below me, not falling, not flying, perhaps float-

ing, but best of all just beholding, and not focused necessarily on the ground, although I might give that a glance from time to time, rather on the clouds, if there were any, or best of all, on the blue itself, the sky of the sky. There's something of that feeling that I get on a hot summer day, when I'm washing the car, or when I am parked on the edges of the great ravines in the interior of our magnificent land, playing music of flutes and rattles on my car speakers, sipping on a sparkling water, with my kids reading out loud, in their deliberate way, materials provided by the park rangers.

I actually found a sundial but I can't read it very well so I think it's the afternoon now, but maybe it's the late morning of the 25th of July, 20—.

My arm hurts. I think it's from playing baseball the other day down at the park with my friends. Currently, my friends consist of my brother, that neighborhood girl who thinks we're really cool [Note from future self: eventually became my sister-in-law], and that other neighborhood kid, S. [a boy, not the same S. as I'm usually talking about.] The way we play baseball, there are two people on each team, and we go find a backstop that nobody's using, and the pitcher pitches to the batter, and we just let the ball

hit the backstop, the batter throws it back to the pitcher and there's one outfielder. We started out trying to have four bases, but now we just have first base and home base, because we decided we didn't want to have ghost runners. No ghost runners for us:

We put first base behind the pitcher, where second base would normally be. Pretty soon, we drew a circle around the pitcher in the dirt and established that you had to run around the circle so that you didn't tend to run into the pitcher on the way to first base. We put a fair amount of effort into making baseball work for us, given the constraints of having only four players. I'm pretty proud of what we've accomplished, but still, my arm hurts. I was trying to throw out some good, fast pitches. I watch baseball on TV, so I have some concept of what a pitch is supposed to look like. My brother played a season of Little League, but he wasn't a pitcher and he never pays attention to anything anyway, so he doesn't really know how to pitch. My accuracy could use some work, which is something I acknowledge, but S., in all his neighborhood-kid annoyingness, is always ragging me on it. His accuracy is probably as good as mine, but it's hard to tell. He claims he's definitely better than me. I wanted to record statistics on it, but then he called me a nerd. So what do I do? I'm kind of at a loss. [Future self: I will not consider just not hanging out with S., even though it would kind of make sense.] Anyway, it's fun playing baseball. Yesterday that neighborhood girl was talking about playing soccer. What is this

soccer thing, I wonder? Apparently it involves kicking a ball around. Okay, that might be cool. I don't know. We'll just have to see:

It's been a while since Grandfather R. passed away, but I think about him all the time. I have a photograph of him and me, hanging up on my bulletin board in my room. He has a frugal, resourceful, clever face, he has that passionate look, that gentleness. It's all in his face, all in this one photograph. It's really amazing how it is that at the right moment, almost a whole person's personality can be contained in the right photograph. I think of how hard he drove himself, about the nights he would stay up praying, how we didn't even realize that's what he was doing, how our parents hardly knew. Such a man of secrets. I suppose that a holy man has to be a man of secrets, to conceal his religiosity from other people. Grandfather tended to have empty pockets, when we grandchildren would come, but he could always listen. No gifts, he wasn't even particularly fun, but we knew that he was a safe person to go to when we skinned our knees or got in a dispute. Even in my young adulthood, my own age of secrets, I found myself divulging even a few of my own to Grandfather R. It seemed as though he could understand everyone — not that he was very much like most other people, but that he saw in each of us a deeper side that was the same, or maybe it was like he was struck by and connected to us, through that very misfortune of no one being like anyone else — but I don't know, I'm trying to explain af-

ter the fact a feeling that I had when I was younger, that I could never have put into words at the time, and now as my memories fade or are codified into a story, the Story of Grandfather R., as it were, I think I'm in danger of just making something up, which reflects the things I've learned and experienced over the years, myself, rather than what the actual reality of his way of relating was:

I remember the funeral. We had the whole family over, his whole side, of course, but even some of the in-laws would come too, in-laws who had come to know him, not through a profusion of words, but through some helpful action he had performed for them, maybe fixing their farm equipment, or tending to a sick animal, complete with one or two simple conversations, setting something to rights, or transmitting some vision of solidity and clarity. He was a passionate man, and saw great significance in everyday life, he could put a lot of love into a few sentences:

At the funeral, we sang his favorite hymns (and some of our own favorites, of course), and had a speech given, and a time for sharing memories of him — just as at any other funeral. We dressed in black, not to mourn him, but because he was a mourning man, and we were sad, not of his loss (primarily), but because sadness was his life, we were sad for our sins, sad for the way that we forsake our God every day. My brother and I went up on stage and even talked about what he'd meant to us, and though we did not cry, we

were as quiet as we'd ever been, that was the moment we learned speechlessness firsthand, and the audience learned a taste of it as well, as neither of us could speak for something like 30 seconds before we said what we had intended to say:

I'm relaxing right now, by the river which runs at the back of my property. I'm looking out at the things that flow by, it's an easy afternoon, and I see branches and boats coming by, I think there was some flooding a few days ago while I was over in the desert. S. calls me up on my cell phone and I answer her. She says that she has something she wants to tell me in person, and I say "Well, I'm relaxing here at home, by the river. Is this a thing you would want to tell me here?" And she says "No, let's meet at a coffeeshop, this is more of a coffeeshop thing." So we arrange to meet, and I get myself out of my chair and go inside and I don't even really wonder what she's going to tell me, not that I have any idea what it is she'll say:

I arrive at the coffeeshop and we sit and I can see that there is sadness on her face. She says "I have to move to" a city practically on the other end of the continent. I look at her and think about how things come and things go, about how the wind blows us, and how it deposits us in great piles, like a loess bluff, and it scatters us far and abroad, so that the rare earth minerals in us get into the food of everyone (hopefully we're carrying around with us the beneficial rare earth metals, those elusive micronutrients). I say to her,

“Well, there’s always the phone.” and she says “Yeah, but it’s not the same.” The way she says it is both light and sad. I know her well enough to hear everything she’s feeling in that statement. And yet, while this is the death of — something — I know that there is no such thing as death, that just as she blew into my life on the breeze, that she should blow out of my life, and yet we will certainly meet again later, completely by chance, for no reason at all except that everything is going to happen, and happen over and over again, yet everything, as it happens again and again, is going to be made new. I knew this to be the case with her, as I see her, every year, drawing closer and closer to the state of trusting and being trustworthy, living in peace, and I see eternal life growing in her:

My sister-in-law is sad to hear the news as well, from over the mountain pass. She drives over it fairly often to meet with us, to remember my brother with me. She has come to see S. before she leaves, and we sit on my property, over by the river, and watch the trees cast their shadows on the current at the edge of the stream. There is a going forward from here, a new life, but this new life will never have the richness of the old life. Perhaps it will say something fresh, but whatever it says will be subtle and dry. Although of course we can hope that S. will move back to one of our cities, that is always a possibility. But we have learned, as adults, to set possibility a little bit to the side, to let it sit on us as an uncertainty, but not to sit too heavy.

We can hope, but we have to keep on living our daily lives, amongst the structures and relationships that were not as interesting to us, but which we built into our lives as a matter of course, tumbling toward the future.

Of course I have thought of marrying my sister-in-law. Of course. You're absolutely correct in guessing that. I'm sorry if that seems strange. I feel like there's something wrong there, but it isn't really wrong. Or is it? Or is it weird? Or is it just socially frowned-on? Or maybe it isn't frowned on. I don't know what's out there in the social world. Should I care about the social world or not? That's something I've thought about, ridden down, fence-rode for a long time. I don't know how she feels about me — of course I love her and she loves me — but I don't know if we were to sit down and have an upfront conversation about it, what kind of decision we would come to. My guess is that we would draw close, and think, and wonder, and then, in our souls, let go of each other and float back, me to my interior city, she, to her coastal city, and we would go on as widow and bachelor for years on end, drifting and performing small kindnesses to the random people, and to the structures of people held to us by logical purposes. And yet of course over there in the coastal city, with all the people coming in and out of the port, and settling in ethnic enclaves, making ethnic restaurants where she could be taken on a date, by some foreign-born person or some cultured "rectangular", perhaps she will erode a new riverbank in her

life, and leap into a new valley, and have a completely different life than she's lived before. And yet of course here in the interior, by my own river, I am learning as I learned in my youth to put my roots down into the minimalism and find down there a raw, dry, electric love, the love of being alone with God, and putting up my stern, strange branches, to commemorate the wildness and strangeness that I love, but which tend to make my life difficult:

It is the afternoon of the 26th of July, 20—.

(S. says "Yeah, that would be kinda weird. I think for your niece and nephew." as though she too is disappointed that such a neat plan is not feasible — and she says it lightly, tilting her head to the side.)

I walked down the path through the bushes and the cane by the edge of the great swamp. This is where the river runs down into a great deep valley, what used to be lake, they say, but which is now a swamp. Not all rivers reach the sea, and this one dissipates under the hot sun, or, in wintertime, accumulates to a certain depth, over which it is possible to float a small boat. There I found a bottle, left by some reveller, I first thought, but inside I found a note, a secret left by somebody I didn't know. I am not going to reprint

this secret, and I am not going to tell you the secret of my own that I put in the bottle as well:

There's really very little else to say or do in this town that hasn't already been said and done before. In our town, we gather the brands that have burned for a very long time and they keep burning, but a little bit dimmer every year. This is the valley of the end times. We have lived here in our small, sustainable community, for generations, as the world around us fought and starved. We took in refugees and sent out our skilled people to teach our neighbors. Mostly we tried to preserve ourselves, not only our food supply and solar panels, but also our culture, our mindset, the thing that kept us from going crazy when everybody else did. We try to protect our valley, keep the air in it pure and the spirits in it flowing from left to right, and up and down, instead of from inside to outside, and in all directions and in no directions. We know that the earth will die out, that there will be nothing left. We do not know how long our race will have left, and we know that if we are diligent, and patient and careful, and waste nothing, that we can survive probably longer than anybody else. And we know that maybe there's really no point to human existence, that perhaps it is just fine if we all die out at some point. But we want to keep going because we believe — somehow — that we are a witness to somebody else, somewhere else, who knows who or where, that at least we will have the satisfaction of knowing that objectively speaking, We Were, we were persevering,

we endured:

There's an old story that talks about this life of ours, it was made into a movie. It's about people living in the desert, living off the resources. It's about a family, and then a town, making sense of things. We can't watch movies anymore because all of the things we once used to watch movies have broken, and we do not have the expertise to fix them at this point. We made sure to remember how to fix the essentials for life, but we are forgetting the older culture. We still read books, as we come across them, but we do not have the skill to bind books like in the old days, and none of us are writers:

For the most part, we have a culture of reference. We have our libraries and the songs we have memorized, and which we play on our homemade guitars, flutes, and fiddles, and the surviving accordions, glockenspiels, autoharps and so on, which we no longer know how to make, but which we prize. We have an oral culture that has a certain background in the past, and which does compose new poetry and new oratory, but which largely consists of us talking about great movies of the past, and quotes scenes from novels and recounts the history of earth before the great and terrible century in which we ran out of resources:

Life is actually good in our community. We work hard, and we've had a lot of dross melted off of us. I'm speaking of the cultural dross. However, we have

lost a lot of people. A lot of people in our community fled in the early days, hoping for an easier life elsewhere. We embraced the difficulty, the devotion, of resource recycling early on. We do not know what happened to all of those people. Some people couldn't survive here for medical reasons. I know a man in our community, a beautiful, creative person who ran a business and also played music, who could no longer get his supply of psychiatric medications, and who has had progressive spells of madness. We have done our best with him, but he is no longer who he used to be, and he is somewhat of a burden — but we have promised to keep him as one of our own, because we are a community that endures suffering, and we do so because of love:

We receive dreams from God as we sleep. These dreams, so say our prophetic young men and young women, speak of a time and a place where we will all work and endure, but in which God will reign visibly, of a time and place where all will know that the true nature of lived experience is in growth, putting forth leaves, putting forth good works, drinking in good water, tapping into the source of cleanliness, tapping into God, drawing God out of the earth, putting forth leaves for the birds, putting forth fruit, drawing God into the fruit, producing richness out of God, becoming one with God, adding ourselves to God and becoming clean, losing branches that do not produce, gaining branches that produce, growing, growing closer, drawing in the birds, giving shelter to children,

angels perhaps, who are too innocent to be trees themselves, nurturing a new life. This is what their dreams speak of, and we imagine a king ruling over a kingdom, and people being taught by teachers, and some kind of government that governs, and people inventing inventions for everyone, and people producing artworks for everyone. We imagine a world that has a beautiful spirit, that is ruled by love, and is growing in love, and has picked up all of the giant dome of culture that preceded the resource depletion, and lifted it up again by all the strength of this new prosperity under the new regime. These are the things that we imagine to ourselves, which were not received as dreams by our holy youths:

There are sirens calling, as sirens always do, wailing about death, not seducing anyone, as they have grown into mature beings, and there are cars running about their purposes, in this city in which we live. It is the late afternoon of the 26th of July, 20—.

I watched a movie today, I'm not going to tell you which one. (I'm going to make you guess.) Anyway, this movie is about an old cowboy who rides around, slumped in depression. And then there's this young cowboy who wants to remind him of how great he used to be, and that he should go out there and round

up *The Wild Bunch* — not a gang of robbers, but a herd of the roughest, nastiest cattle that ever roamed the West. That only he could do it, that only he could stare down the Old Bull and win. I tell you, that movie was ridiculous. I felt myself sinning with ridicule while I watched it, then, the Holy Spirit came on me and I just relaxed and watched it as what it was, a series of still images flickering on the movie theater wall 24 times a second, depicting some sort of imaginary reality, some sort of dream that I could take as being visual, visual-as-visual, and spiritual, as a message from Gōd:

There was a line in the movie where the young cowboy said, “What’s the use of your sadness? Did sadness get you anywhere?” And the old cowboy breaks down and cries, and the young cowboy gets mad at him and the old cowboy just keeps on crying, and the whole thing is just terribly ridiculous, if you’re inclined to ridicule. But I was not ridiculing, I looked on the screen and felt a deep compassion for the old guy, stuck as he was in this ridiculous movie with ridicu-reality filters coming over every heart in the audience, people audibly and intelligibly making fun of this movie as I watched, and this not even at midnight, and not even at the hippest theater in towñ:

I just wanted to rush into the world of the movie, and give the old guy a hug, or I guess that wouldn’t be manly enough, maybe say to him “Hey old pardner, I got you covered, that ol’ *Wild Bunch* will be a cinch if

you and me team up.” And it’s not like I’m the greatest cowboy or anything (although in real life I’ve had some experience on Grandfather R.’s ranch), but more like, I don’t care if we don’t get the Wild Bunch, and I don’t care if we get gored by bulls, I want to be gored by bulls alongside that old cowboy, I want to be there with him in his weeping and in his failure. If the price of that is bravery, and rounding up a bunch of cattle in the hot sun, and actually succeeding and the old cowboy gets to retire west of the border where his lost girlfriend will turn out to be, then so be it. That is the price I’m willing to pay:

Anyway, that was that movie that I watched tonight, or maybe last night. I’m trying to forget it already, but I am afraid it will take a few months. But maybe I want to remember it, because I want to remember that old cowboy, weeping in the saddle. I think, in those moments where you feel something strongly, and something happened to make you feel that way, or your imagination kicks in, or something like that, that those are moments when life is meaningful, when God is talking to you. So I try to listen, even if I can’t speak God’s life-events language, and the message is something I just have to try to hold onto, the message is something I can sort of live my way into or something, the message is a poem in a foreign language that I have to repeat with my own foreigner mouth, but I still don’t understand what I’m saying, yet I find the sounds to be beautiful, which I guess is my payment in advance. The full payment is that I enter a

world that is so far unintelligible to my intellect, and that seems promising.

So I have to remember that whole part about my giggling along hardly, just like my fellows in the theater, my old drugs effervescing in my creaky brain, that old lumbermill that hasn't been completely retrofitted, but which I'm trying to represent as being under new management. But that's how it is. I guess because I'm writing this down, and at least S. is going to read it, that now I've stored it in a way that I can come back to it.

My face is on fire. How did this happen? I was just playing with matches and suddenly my face is on fire. Well, now is not the time for thinking, now is the time for frantically searching for a way to put it out. I think I should stuff my face into my shirt. Okay, I did that. I think the fire's out now. Now, I think I will dial that emergency number. The one over the phone. Oh, it's still 911. Good, they didn't change that. Now what? "Hello" "Hello sir, state your emergency." "I lit my face on fire." "What's your address?" "5955 Lark Avenue." "Five nine five five Lark Avenue?" "Correct." "Is your face still on fire?" "No." "Is anything else on fire?" "No, I don't think so." "Are you sure?" "Yes, I'm sure now, I've looked all over the room." "Okay, so do we need to send an ambulance?" "I think so, I don't think I can drive." "Okay, we'll send one right away." "Wait, that's going to cost a lot of money, won't it?" "Sir, I think getting medical attention is worth it."

“What if I just wait?” “Sir, I would advise taking a ride in an ambulance. You don’t want to lose your face. Time is of the essence.” “You know what, I think I’ll just wait until my roommate comes home. I’ll call him up and then he can come over on his lunch break and run me over to the hospital.” “Are you sure, sir?” “Yes, thank you ma’am.” “Okay. I want you to verify that you declined an ambulance.” So I said my full name and my identification number and she must have recorded it on her computer:

I went to the hospital and sure enough, I had waited too long, and I lost my face. And now I go around and people look away from me, and then they learn how to look at me. And I wish I could say that having lost my face would make me unidentified, but actually, everyone knows who I am: I’m the guy with no face. I can’t really hold out hope for a future in which everybody else lights their face on fire and doesn’t get prompt treatment. So here I am, damaged and prominent, when all I wanted to do was to play with matches:

It is the warm-ish nighttime of a warm day, the crickets awake and the humans beginning to fall asleep, here on the 26th of July, 20—.

I cleaned out the refrigerator today and found this old memento of you, an old container of what we had that last night, the night before you told me about the major change in your life. It was some ratatouille, and I wondered if it was good to eat still, so I tried some, and I'm not sure that it was. I think it was just a little bit alcoholic. And that's about how I feel about you, delicious feelings that have become at least a little bit alcoholic:

You were always there in my life, my daimon, the voice in me which told me where to go and what to say. I loved you, you were always so close to me. And now that I have attained a certain age, I can see that I have to go on without you, that I have to leave you behind. I made this decision, but it was actually you who made this decision, as you abandoned me. Nevertheless, I can see that this was a good decision by me, to make it so that you would know that you needed to leave. Yet, I did not realize that I was making this decision, I thought I wanted to keep you around, and what I was doing was directed toward keeping you around:

We spent a lot of time together. It was like, every book I read, you were reading over my shoulder, reminding me of what we had read before, making connections, wondering about the outcome of the novel, building castles out of the non-fiction material. Now, with you gone, I realize who I always was: a slow person, a bored person, beating down books with a club,

while you used to just kind of talk them into sitting still, you used to not even have to kill them. And we spent time together with groups of my friends. You were so charming, so fast and warm, you sparkler, and now that you're gone, I just stand, and wish I could say anything, and stand stunned, like a deer in the headlights. You knew all of my friends, and all of my friends knew you:

Do you remember when I was in school and we used to do homework together? It was amazing. Even when I did math (which was not your favorite subject), I would ask you for help, and something in you would love me enough that you would engage with the material, and you would save my behind so many times, that I even graduated from school. I can't believe I'm realizing this now for the first time, that only now I am grateful for all you did for me:

I will give you a name, although I never thought too much of who you were or what you were over the years. With some beings, "who you are" and "what you are" are the same thing, and so it is with you. Your name is Youthful Intelligence, and it seems that you have forsaken me, probably forever:

It is the later morning of a hungry day, the 27th of July, 20—.

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend” so the saying goes, but I can remember a specific time in my life when that was not the case:

It was my first year of junior high school. My brother was still in elementary school and our mutual friend, (my eventual sister-in-law) was going to a magnet school five miles away, a special school for those who studied the arts. I hadn’t met L. yet (or if I did, that was before he transferred into the school system). Of course I’d long before I met S:

In short, I was surrounded by people who had their own world, their own priorities, and I don’t exist, I am a blank slate, I don’t even like talking about this, and you know how much I like to talk:

One day, I saw someone I’ll call X., and I saw him attacking a boy named Y. As far as I could tell, they were both Greek gods inscribed on the ceilings of all of our temples and caves. Therefore, I was full in my rights to step in — anybody can attack a god. I thought “Blessed are the peacemakers” and I saw, felt, assumed, was programmed as, “There is a situation that needs to be put to rights”, an order that needed to be set right, an exertion of my feeling of being able to act, my responsible power, and then I slipped into the moment and grabbed X.’s hands and said “Stop it!” And then the two of them looked at me like I was

an idiot, and I felt like an idiot, and they turned away in disgust. I have never been made fun of more in my life since and I never was before, that was my year of being crushed. And it seemed that these two enemies came together after my intervention, but perhaps they had always been on the same side:

I can hear a low-frequency oscillator in the hum of the refrigerator, and I am about to fall asleep on this lazy afternoon of the 27th of July, 20—.

Can a possibility be an actuality? The more I think about this, the more confused I get. I can see how a possibility could become an actuality. A possibility could actually exist in my mind. On the wall in that house that smells too much like me, there's a flat-screen TV that can display just about any kind of image as long as it's moving, moving toward a destination, some sort of logic to the flow of it — even if it's trying to depict absurdity and noise. I am absolutely glued to this TV, though I have paintings and busts that could give me so much more peace and clarity. I want the noise, sound, voices, the drawing along, the calling-into of my television of possibility. How thick is the image on that TV? In one sense, it's as thin as a fraction of an inch, the width of the layer of LCDs, but as I look at it, it has the depth of whatever I see

in it, there's a world in there that I can enter in my imagination, but there is nothing to meet in there, but I keep getting drawn along into this drawing-along. What is the meaning of possibility? Someone could make what is not, what is! I am confounded. But I keep watching, and sometimes I feel compelled to reach into my wall and grab it into what becomes a kind of solar flare of my intention, I am drawn along into speaking or touching or gesturing, I am drawn and drawn along:

The possibility, insofar as it is a fraction of an inch wide, a mere film, is a real, an actual, concrete reality, but what is this possibility that is as deep as my imagination? And by having spoken of my imagination, how do I understand that? I am beset by these perplexities!

I would be inclined to say "I do not know yet, and there may be an explanation that I will learn or discover, and by not knowing this, I may make a misstep, a dissonance, but ultimately I will end in love, and there will be good actualities for everyone." This is what consciousness says and something that I can't absorb with too much consciousness:

Yet, I am not ready to rest in this, I want to tire my heart in the wrestling and the exhaust of myself, I want to watch the TV and get into the show — what happens in season 3? I want the possibility to remain a possibility, lying in its depth before me, to relate to

this magical being which is beautiful and beyond:

The possibility is a being that includes multiple times. What I mean is, the possibility starts with its entrance on the TV screen, and then it will either break in or break me out of the wall, or it won't, and the display of the TV show, and the breaking, are separated by an unknown amount of time, or the breaking never happens and out there in her own house that smells of her (although perhaps better-ventilated than mine), there is the actuality of the possibility:

And do I love her? Do I love the possibility, or the person? I only have the possibility with me. Yet I know that there is or could be an actuality, that there are real people, that what I say and do affects them, just as they affect me:

There is a spirit of joy, freshness, a healthy, life-giving expectancy, and as I love health almost as much as I love love, I shall rule such an expectancy a good thing — But to be thinking these thoughts, these distinctions and splittings of hairs, these delineations and justifications, this attempt to identify the good in this experience, it must have become entropic, humming randomly, and something must have gone stale in me — I know myself thus far — I must have strayed into the great puddle of molasses in which I derive all my sweetness — this hell :::

Of course the answer to my question is “Move on”:

...

But I refuse. I will never move on. I will simply hold on until something changes. I will hold on and drown until I can breathe:

As I watch my television, the shows begin fresh, become stale with repetition, then, though repeating exactly, in precise reruns, become sometimes indescribably comforting, and other times indescribably funny, all the while, through its emptiness, through the transparency, the amazing transparency, which is beyond that fraction of an inch and beyond the apparent depth beyond that, the deeper reality that I am sitting on my couch, eating my snacks, resting my bones after a night out with reality — or even, even in my disability or my house arrest, sitting, breathing — I'm alive — I continue through time, and right now, in the privacy of my home, I am safe:

The meaning of you, or the multitudes around you, or even of S., even if all reality or actuality is taken away from me, except my house, is that I am alive and I will continue through time:

Yet if I did not love safety, I would have a different life. A coward wins the lottery a thousand times, a brave man but once, and discretion is the better part of valor, yet I cry out to God: "Who am I? Where am I going? Who do you need me to be?" And ultimately,

this is my answer, to first ask the question:

I have asked the question before — but clearly I have not finished with it. This unresolved question is a being that is stretched over time — the possibility of an answer, and yet a question, in all its hunger, is a filling, is a filling of the gaze, and a filling of the sense of purpose, it is the beginning of a path. God is gracious enough to give us hunger, to us who are hungry for becoming:

To love this question, which in our experience is never answered — life is a question that in our experience is never answered, which may in fact never be answered, eternal life which will never settle into an answer, but into an answering, a love for some person that never resolves, a love for another person, a love for the entire community of persons, love is hunger, the only thing to do is to hunger and thirst for righteousness:

I will be filled — with hunger — and the hunger will be — at peace, and the peace will settle on my eyes, will clothe my heart. And somehow, I will become at peace with all people, I will become what I am not — what a mystery!

Perhaps I need the right kinds of hunger, and peace, and imagination. That there is a good and bad of everything, and it is simply that I need to keep living life, to discover these new ways, these new vibes, these

new ways of pronouncing words and looking at crowds, for these realities to break into me, and leave me laboriously reconstructing them, looking at them from a million different angles — and then what? I don't know — soon I will have nothing to say, but having spoken my peace, I will look like a somewhat different person the next time you see me:

I have a headache, I should have eaten more today, there's a speaker blasting in my ear and I want to go home. It is the night of the 27th of July, 20—.

What's going on in here? You all are dancing, there's this great big dance going on and I don't know how to dance, but I'm supposed to. So all of you are teaching me and my body makes half the moves, but inside I am watching a movie of all of you dancing, sitting on the couch of my mind, observing your limbs in harmonious motion, and yet my body is moving. How strange:

When I was a kid, I would get caught up in thought, thinking about whatever: mushrooms, Pilgrims, the nature of reality. And then I would realize, having gone deep enough, that this is reality, that I am named what I am named, and that I am living this life and this is reality that I can move my hands in

this world in which we live, the world exists. This is my proof that the world exists, I guess — an experience that one might allege is entirely in my head:

I put on my cotton socks and my canvas shoes and I went out for a walk in my neighborhood. I saw the towering smokestacks and the little houses, which were built in the days before zoning, I guess, right next to the giant warehouses. I live in an apartment building over on the edge of this incongruous district. Everything in this neighborhood is saying something, and in the three years I've lived here, it's always been on the tip of my tongue, yet I've never been able to speak it in my mind:

I've looked at several angry persons in my time, and sometimes I have had nothing bad happen to me, but one time I regretted it. I looked at this angry man once and he came up to me and I thought he was going to clock me, rewire my personal time frame, but instead he said, "I've had schizophrenia for over 20 years now and I find it very hurtful when people stare at me. I feel like I'm not a real person. I feel like I'm a monster and that I don't belong. Please, please stop staring at me." And I too feel like a monster sometimes, and like a strange ghost... how could I have done this to my brother?

I'm still wondering how it is that I will hold to the possibilities with the utmost loyalty and ardor, and yet in a healthy way:

I got in a truck and drove the piles of things I didn't need anymore to the dump. These were things that I could have sold if I had more time, perhaps, but I had to hurry up and move. Sometimes, it's time and you have to go, you don't know why but it's time, you have decided to migrate to a different organ in this metaphorical host body that you and your ancestors have infested:

The freedom of skiing, a whole afternoon of letting go and letting gravity. The freedom of the moon, those afternoons we spend jumping up and down on the trampoline. The freedom of a good meal, the strange way that the inner reality and the outer reality come together as the glucose hits the brain:

There were 99 bottles of root beer on the wall and then you took one down and passed it around, and now there are only 98 bottles of root beer on the wall. How things change over time, how is it that everything gets used up, and here we are, never too concerned, as we inhabit this moment, and enjoy it as though it will never end, yet with the utmost casualness:

It is the golden noontime on this 28th day of the seventh month, this month of July, sometime in the third millennium of what is the common era of our Lord, sometime in this first century of the third millennium.

Now, S., I will go on away from talking to you, to wander in other places, by myself, or shall I wander in the same places?

I'm rambling — I will be rambling. But I hope to meet up with you, sooner, later, or in between, and in a more substantial world than this:

If this volume seems unfinished to you, you know what to do.

APPENDIX

My name is James. I live in San Diego, CA. I'm creator or co-founder of some podcasts, including *Loving the Cloud* (source/inspiration of much of the material in this book), and *The House of Mourning* (a podcast of mourning).

I have written a few other works that I presented before the public eye, which may have been intended for a person like you, but which may not have been — who knows who could be reading this book right now!

Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible, in the public domain.

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Further, I would like to thank the people who made my shoes (special thanks to Bethlehem, founder of SoleRebels, for leading a fair trade shoe company, and especially to whichever workers made my shoes); those who made my clothes, whether under fair trade conditions or not; my food, picked by people working hard, farmed by people assuming financial risks I am not willing to bear myself; my “technological” devices, for all the exactitude and dexterity and tedium that those require to make; the police and military of my city and nation, who take on moral challenges that I don’t have to, although they are sometimes abusive of their trust; for the other people in power, insofar as they have been a blessing and not a curse; the Christian church, which has nurtured me although it goes astray; and a special thanks to future generations, who will pay for my environmental degradation, the futureness and possibility of whom allows me to be heedless enough to produce works such as this. (And this list is inevitably and unfortunately incomplete.)

All of my readers benefit from these people, or people like them. In some cases we feel as though, notably with those institutions in power, that they can handle this benefit-taking, that we deserve to take benefit from them, even without a sense of gratitude.

Whether this is right or wrong, I do not say. Yet, in other cases, there is obvious occasion to feel gratitude, and to bear in mind the high cost of our lives, a cost

which other people bear for us. There is a misery and a poverty that underlies our pleasures and our wealth — I am speaking to anyone cultured and leisured enough to have enjoyed — or written — this book. I say this not so that you blame yourself or others, but so that we deny ourselves, take up our crosses (live toward death), and follow Jesus.

INTERLUDE

Leaves of paper rescued from the fire:

-8. AUTHOR'S NOTE

God, as far as I am concerned, is a perfectly loving and therefore perfectly trustworthy being, who has existed before our physical universe and will exist afterward. I take "God is love" (as something that I believe in and try to rely on before fully understanding) but not to mean exactly that God is what we tend to understand love to be. God is a final harmony between all peoples, along with the eternal God at the same time, all brought into one will, one body; whereas in the plane of becoming, God is becoming that communion. In the harmony, all will trust and be trustworthy.

Notably, God underlies all of reality. All of reality tends toward that final harmony aspect of God, and all of it rightfully should, as it originally came from that final harmony.

God is powerful, ultimately, inevitably so, but God's power is subordinate to his love (subordinate to him). This is an essential feature of his trustworthiness.

[I think I'm still missing the mark: God is in perfect harmony with himself, his power and his love are all one. Yet I think I'm still missing the mark: I don't

have words for God, but I can live my life.]

God is (at least) an apparent reality.

-7. PUBLIC REALITY

For instance, let us say that everything is matter and energy. This matter sometimes is organized in the form of a human being, and that human being somehow is, or has, individual consciousness. Everybody shares the same reality, and any private perceptions are marginalized, are considered less real than whatever the public reality is. Public reality tends to assume that what is, is what is rationally communicable.

-6. SOLIPSISM

Basically, I am the only thing that exists. I have a conscious self and a subconscious self. The subconscious self dreams at my conscious self all the time, all these strange manifestations of its mysterious being. I have these people that I love, hate, look down on, look up to, whatever, all these beings are aspects of me that I have or have not acknowledged in my heart. I am apparently a far more rich being, as far as imagination goes, and sheer profundity of vision, because my invented world is apparently as big as that of the whole public reality (under the public reality view), at least as far as public reality can be experienced by any one person.

Notably, in my solipsistic reality, people don't tend to

believe in solipsism, they regard it as a joke. What a strange, dream-like joke.

-5. SEMI-SOLIPSISM

My dream world is a prism that diffracts the light that enters it, and I can output intentions, thoughts, words, vibes, emotions from my inner self out to other people through my prism, distorting it on the way out, only to be distorted on the way back into their worlds. When I speak to another person, I am certainly affecting their final person, but I may not literally be speaking to them at that time. Each of our life stories proceed perhaps in radically different ways. Perhaps I am, as I perceive myself to be, writing in the early 21st century A.D., but you, somehow, are an oarsman on a Greek ship in the 4th century B.C., or you do not even live on earth, or you live in the future. Perhaps we all have the end of the world hanging over our heads, perhaps each of us is the measure of his or her own world and when we die, that is the end of it, and we all reappear in some public reality future, perhaps, in which we see each other as we really are, having matured to our real form, finally to see who it was we were trying to talk to, seeing how everything and everyone was both a metaphor and with basis in direct, literal reality.

-4. BASIC KNOWLEDGE

Everything begins with impersonality. Then, causality plays out, and eventually we have human beings who are somehow, at least apparently, personal. And then those humans eventually, over the course of life, are killed, turned into impersonality. There is no intention, no love, nothing, except things happening, blind power, power exercising. Things come from and go to impersonality, or perhaps I could say, blind power. As such, there is no authentic form of personality. Whatever human beings want to determine about themselves and their future, they have to assert themselves.

Epistemology is (at least should be) circumscribed by this view, by those who hold to this view. That is, people do (or at least theoretically should) approach knowing as a process of interrogating a reality that does not reveal its secrets easily, adopt a methodological suspicion in all investigations. The interrogator can't rely on any apparent personality in what he or she sees in reality. This must be an illusion, because reality is fundamentally impersonal.

-3. FALSE MEMORY

Practically speaking, the false memory becomes for many purposes a real memory, serving to shape how the future self is composed. Perhaps all that we really learn from these memories is what kind of person you

want to see yourself as, what kind of person you make yourself into. But that is interesting and powerful in itself, although that self-creation may pry your reality away from that of your neighbor.

-2. INTELLIGIBILITY

My consciousness can apprehend, process, vibe with, pick up the frequencies of, certain experiential realities. These realities are “intelligible” to my consciousness. Yet, what if there are other frequencies, vibesets, thoughtsets, which my mind can’t find intelligible? By analogy, suppose there is a thought which is related to another thought. (Easy to find examples.) Now suppose there’s a thought which is unrelated to all other thoughts. (Very hard to find an example — in fact, by formulating it, you related it to other thoughts, because it shares words in common.) Yet, unthought thoughts may perhaps be completely unrelated. (There’s a lot of fun thinking there!)

Imagine that, unlike with the thoughts, you look up at the moon one night, and the moon’s light gives you access to something, in your consciousness, which was meant for someone else’s consciousness, someone who’s not even of this planet. You see by that light of the moon a reality that part of you is ready to digest, but the rest of you isn’t. We have this or a similar experience sometimes when we are at a loss for words (perhaps trying to explain *Being and Time* to someone).

And so this basic knowledge breaking in is like something from that disconnected universe somehow becoming true without us being fully able to digest it into intelligibility. Ultimately, there has to be a speechlessness on our part or incommunicability about the other reality breaking into our own. It's true but not intelligible, it's pure consciousness touching our pure consciousness, perhaps. Perhaps it's being touched on a side of our being that we have hard time explaining, something primordial or fractal-like ("Strange Loop"y) by something which itself (himself?) is similarly strange; as opposed to being contacted on a more everyday, presentable side, as when the eyes (according to one popular story) perceive the photons bouncing off of some nearby object.

-1. SPACESHIP

Imagine you wake up, you first come to life, in a spacecraft, with a pile of science fiction books by your side. You see a giant viewport, showing the stars, you see an instrument panel on a few of the walls. It's all in accordance with those science fiction books you quickly learn to read. (These books range from the most basic science fiction books to the most advanced.) From all of this, you conclude that you are floating in a void, with disabled engines, but yet, fortunately, with what appears to be an inexhaustible life support system. (You phrase things in terms of the

science fiction, and it all looks right, looks like it fits what you've read.) And so you look over at the door that says "Airlock", and you never open it, reasoning that unless and until you dock with another ship or land on a planet with breathable air, there's no point in going out there.

And so your belief, your lens, your stories, determine for you what you investigate. But if only you had investigated, you would have found a space suit, which is something that for some reason was never mentioned in your science fiction books, and you would have decided to go outside the ship on a space walk, and the moment you opened the airlock would have found yourself in a giant dome, in which there were lots of people: it turns out that your spaceship was a false reality, and opening the airlock amounted to you consenting to take an herbal tea, at the hands of the cognitive healers, to return to the reality of other people.

0. RESTLESSNESS

If your heart is alive, you yearn. If you yearn, you're restless. If you're restless, you search for new truth. If you seek, you find, and yet perhaps you still yearn and repeat the process.

This will happen unless either your heart gets killed, and so you have no more capacity to yearn, or your heart enters a state where it is overflowing, always thirsty and always being filled, from a source of overflowing life.

It is likely that everyone will settle out into some sort of closed-minded state. Either because we've been given extreme life by what we believe in, or because what we believed in murdered our hearts.

If you want to know the truth, your best bet is to keep your heart alive as much as possible. There are sources of heart-dulling. You can tell from their vibe. Stay away from those things, and seek out the things that give you more life, and the aspects of those things which specifically give you that life.

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What is the meaning of this?:

“If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

They answered him, “We are Abraham’s offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, ‘You will be made free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. A bondservant doesn’t live in the house forever. A son remains forever. If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

Is it not that the truth will work in you until you stop committing sins? And thus, falsehood will tend to keep you committing sins.

1. RABIES

“The Christian needs to be an apologist, to promote the seeking of truth. But the usual apologetic methods, as evidenced by the Internet, need to be set aside, this approach of not loving the atheists we seek to convert. We try to attack ‘error’ head-on, as our ancestors did each other in denominational debates, but the only way to find the truth is through love, and let me logically demonstrate.

“Rabies modifies the host to spread the virus, and so it is with ideologies. Christianity, in its dead form, is a virus, a stupid tendency that even replicates itself, and it modifies us to foam at the mouth or perhaps be dutifully kind. In its live form, it is something unlike a virus, it is a living Word, mindful and implanted in us, which strengthens, feeds, enlivens us so that we express it without distortion. Rabies both adds functionality (sort of) and destroys functionality in the poor dog in order to further itself, and so it is with ideologies. Consider this, if your heart is alive, you yearn, and as you yearn you are restless, and as you are restless, you search for new truth, and as you search for new truth you can find it and accept it. And if your heart is dead, you do not yearn, and you are not restless, and you stay with your current truth. And so over time we will tend toward some kind of closed-mindedness, either because our hearts have been killed, or because... we have found a source of life that *fills our yearning hearts continually*. We will be

stuck believing whatever killed our hearts without regard to truth, such is the effect of self-satisfaction on the intellect, or we will be stuck believing whatever gave us overflowing life.”

5. JUST CAN'T STAND

“I don’t know a formula for determining how much Christians fight vivid, obvious destruction or oppression other than that they remember that their battle is ultimately against evil and not people, that they are driven by trust in love and not trust in power, and perhaps that sometimes there will be things *they just can’t stand.*”

9. BEAUTY

“Beauty is a Satanic thing if it gets in the way of love, and even the beauty of love (as we understand love) could get in the way of love. The beauty of spending time with people could be Satanic, every experience is on the knife’s edge of being the horrible, twisted version of what it should be, and not for reasons that are immediately apparent, or that those unpracticed in seeking to love would be able to discern. The particular destructiveness of beauty is its ability to erase things, to anesthetize, yet of course on one level it is the opposite of anesthetization. To make us say “everything, just so, in its place”, beauty (for all that artists try to shock) has bourgeois tendencies, exactly in that it is art. To take a shocking thing and make it more shocking through art is to make it more bourgeois, because all art is about beauty, at a certain level. All art is at least “found art”, and is about foundness, about the foundness of being able to declare something, whether an object or a process or an aesthetic, under your decision and control. The most aleatoric artists still exist in foundness, and every apprehender of art, beyond perhaps the most naive, are at risk of their own foundness, in resonance with the artist’s. Art is power enfolded or expressed in beauty, and so is perhaps the most natural way for power to enslave us — but of course, as it is potentially a tool for evil it is even more so, potentially, a tool for heal-

ing and truth.

“At some level, the consumption of art, which occurs when anyone “finds” art in things, whether intended to be art or not, is a hugely stupid phenomenon, a giant roaring wave. Why do we need to consume *so much* of it? What are we getting out of it? I am asking this not simply of the moment-by-moment content, you could name 365 different things you get out of art in a year. I’m talking about the overall mood, spirit, practice, mode of being, the bathing in beauty, in the object held up as a representative of intentionality, to our safe, at-home, catered-to gazes. We’re helpless before all these beautiful things, before this invitation to appraisal and pleasure. We don’t stop to think about what the point of all this beauty is. Some will allege that art need have no point. But then, art becomes an absolute, a thing-for-its-own-sake, why not call it a god? And what a stupid god it is. Art doesn’t care about you. Art, as cousin-or-instance of power, will betray you — whenever it does.”

11. LIGHTLY

And I imagine my response, carrying around ` We stand under God's judgment.` as me saying "It's about a lot of different things, but mainly it's about how things need to change." And I imagine that (hope that, somehow, though I know that in the moment I will say something entirely different), I imagine myself saying "things need to change" the way S. would, with a kind of lightness and balance to the statement, perhaps I would have to tilt my head to one side so that statement would come out balanced.

People have subtle and interesting approaches to the way that they think and express themselves. There's certainly something in S. that stands out, or stood out, to me, as though she came from some other place. (Maybe she did, after all.) I anticipate communicating with people from my hometown, although they don't all necessarily come from San Diego, that's what this party is about, the hometown drawing in the hometown, and so this person who is not part of my hometown, this stranger, offers me a way to think and express what is unfamiliar to my hometown. I could have tried on my own, but my non-hometownness is conditioned by my hometown. What that means is that the ways in which I express my dissidence from my hometown are exactly the ways that don't change the hometown, because if they did, then

the hometown would be different, from all its citizens' clamorings. [Is this necessarily true?]

So hopefully I will have the presence of mind to apply this lightness — this gracefulness, which bears an appropriate vibe for a party — this lightness and yet firmness. It's certainly not native to me, and I don't even know that I can practice it in my everyday life, perhaps it is something only brought out at celebratory occasions amongst reunions of young friends, or connections between people for the first time when they are young.

CHAPTER 2

August 14th, 2015. San Diego, CA. At a cafe. On a warm, dry day.

My friends,

(You are all my friends if you have read this far.) I write to you all to attempt to communicate something. I will communicate by saying specific things, but what I really want to communicate is a “beyond”, a path that I can’t put into words. If you can follow in this path, we can be better friends.

I re-read the text that you have finished reading. (Which spoke of “being in a rut” and went on to speak of S. and other people and the end of things) and I found it to be underwhelming. In and of itself, this is not a bad thing. There are even some great works of art that are underwhelming. For me, *Citizen Kane*, and Bach’s *Musical Offering*, initially present themselves as underwhelming. (Not that I’ve necessarily produced a great work of art.) There’s something underwhelming about real human conversation. There’s a number of podcasts of real humans fairly spontaneously conversing. You can listen to them and easily be unimpressed, given the lack of structure and the ebb and flow of interestingness.

There is something trustworthy about underwhelmingness (you have trusted me thus far by

reading, I hope I further earn your trust!). Vivid, obvious artwork grabs your attention, almost forcibly charms you. You are helplessly absorbed. But I don't want to inflict such slavery on anyone, even for a good cause. I want to bring forth a trustworthy spirit, or vibe, more so than make any particular point. [And yet I look back on all I have written and I don't know that I've done that.]

I tend to be oriented around the inner life. I see the power of spirits and vibes, and ultimately I think that trust of the outside world proceeds from a trustworthy inner life, which can discern between the trustworthy and the untrustworthy spirits. The inner spirit or vibe resonates from the outer reality (and the reverse can occur as well) and in this way you can taste the spirits of the world, and know where there are the beneficial and the detrimental.

A trustworthy spirit tends to be sustainable. Some spirits have a cost that can't be maintained over time. Eventually you have to divert your life-path away from them, because ultimately, you can't bear most costs forever. Even a small cost can eventually become unbearable, when you've simply had enough of that burdensome experience.

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I wrote of S. earlier. You might be wondering about her. Or, maybe S. is reading this right now. I think she would know it was her. As far as S. is concerned, I am open to all the possibilities expressed in Chapter 1, plus additionally the possibility of not at all being in contact with her, the perpetuation of

the state I am currently in as I write this.

It has taken all this time to arrive at this peaceful readiness. I had to write about her, and then to write a “Chapter 2” which did not make it into print, (something from which I will draw things to say,) in order to organize my thoughts and intentions with regard to her, and to put those intentions in perspective with all that is important and not-her. I know that there may be something disproportionate and “re-developed” about my interest in her, about my thought-life (“re-developed” in the sense that “she” has become somehow a symbol in me, a presence that goes beyond the woman herself — Oh my, if you’re reading this, S., do not be afraid to contact me if you were thinking of doing so before! Don’t let this confession frighten you away! I will always possess the symbol “S.”, but you have a real name which will name the real you.) This overly-solid thought-life is just the way I am, though, so I will live here, and affirm this life with a minimum of shame, although also with an eye to mitigating its defects.

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We live in an interesting world. There is much that is wrong with it, which causes intense suffering to many people. And yet there is a certain amount of wealth, whether material or otherwise, which people possess. This extra, or abundance, could be shared with the suffering people. But the people with the wealth don’t share it. Some of them are hardened people, or obviously bad people — “enemies” of the poor. But many of them don’t derive any pleasure

from depriving other people and are even saddened by reports of suffering — and yet they do not share. I think you, my friends, may likely be in this second group. Please, be open to a new spirit and a new way of thinking and acting. I want you to consider how you can become a new person, on behalf of the world.

Suffering is a funny thing. There is suffering that is necessary for personal growth. If you're set on a bad path, it can often be the case that to be turned to a good path involves being "slapped in the face" by some life event, which has to be painful to wake you up. Suffering can also bring strength. It's good to learn to endure suffering, because then you're not afraid to suffer, which opens your horizons. This could be a necessary thing.

Suffering also can be an occasion for flourishing, for unnecessary benefit. By suffering, you could learn a strength and a defiance that allow you to become unnecessarily more, to ascend to a higher level of responsibility. It may take the right mindset for you to determine to grow from suffering, but if you have that, you can make it into a gift.

Suffering has an essential role in teaching you to love. Those who suffer can develop a sense of kinship with other sufferers, and also a determined enmity with evil, which can be an expression of love toward evil's victims. Suffering can teach a kind of humility, which can be good or not, but the good kind is useful in loving people.

Yet there is suffering that brings so little benefit relative to its cost, that even if we have learned "the

worth of pain”, we are compelled by compassion to help those suffering from it. Compassion may immediately want to end pain, but in many cases, it may be better to help people bear up under their pain. Compassion is not just fixing problems, but also about standing beside sufferers, affirming their worth although, or because, they are desperate.

For about a year, I wrestled with a sense of my own fakeness. I was callous, flat, feeling a constant petty well-being. But I had been taught by a breaking-in of deep suffering that in the depths of suffering, even in the desperation, there was reality. I wanted, after that, to find a positive mood, vibe, spirit, existential reality, in which there was this reality which I learned in desperate darkness.

From this, I have come to see that there is no shame in desperation, that desperate people are beautiful people experiencing a holy situation — real life is being lived there. (Yet, they are also crazed people in a terrible, even evil, situation.)

Fundamentally we are all desperate, needy people. This is an identity I try to hold onto, especially try to remember when I come across people in their emotional nakedness.

And so I ask you to learn how to love desperate people, as full people, not just as people to fix, but as “ones like yourself”.

We are all family. This is a trustworthy categorization of other people. When your brother commits a crime, you may agree that he should go to prison — justice must still be granted to his victims

— but there are certain hard words you would not say of him, because he is your brother. His crime and his punishment would both dismay you. And if his victims are family (to you), then you mourn their loss as well.

There's a difference between feeling sadness (in general) and mourning (in particular). Sadness breaks in on you and in some ways disables you. This can easily be the case with grief. Yet it is possible to grieve intentionally, to “put on a nice black shirt” and respectfully go to a funeral. Sadness you may or may not affirm, but mourning, you inherently affirm by your choosing of it.

It is trustworthy to mourn in such a way that you help other people. Mourning quiets you and teaches you respect. Compassion urges you, and your “fix people” side will forcefully enter the lives of suffering people to “fix them”, but without respect for them. The humiliation of being fixed without respect is a problem that itself has to be fixed (or rather, healed) but until you learn respect (through mourning or otherwise), you will not be the one capable of such healing.

In the short run, people who have chosen to be children, or have never been raised out from being children, or who have even been encouraged to remain children, may be content to be fixed without real respect. But as adulthood awakens (which is the condition for the full beneficial powers of people), the full shame of childhood prolonged, of a lack of encouraging maturity, lack of seeing and expecting

maturity, can easily present itself as a debt deferred. It either falls due in the form of broken relationships between “fixing” “adults” and those they expect to be “children”, or if not that, then in the help that those overgrown children withheld from their own circle of desperate associates by their immaturity. I ask of you, my friends, to be on the side of maturity, and in compassion and mourning, to expect more of others — and yourselves.

The humiliated person, the desperate person, can be humiliated into desperation, and looks at the humiliating person (ever so “normal”, “reasonable”, “mature”) and sees the self-satisfaction there. Self-satisfaction is the least trustworthy spirit — although in the midst of it, it is compellingly “normal”, “reasonable”, “mature”; it is an obvious and vivid depiction to yourself of why you should trust yourself, it’s difficult not to trust it; but in truth it is the worst, because it shuts down your growth as a person. You can’t find a better path when you are self-satisfied, and while being on the right path is possible, the right path is not the one which deafens you and flattens you toward other people and even all of life, as self-satisfaction inexorably does to you as it infects you. A trustworthy saying for you, friends: “Do not rest until your heart overflows and yearns, and yet overflows with life, and not until everyone may trust and is trustworthy and has this underlying life.” This, I hope, is my path, and yet my path is beyond that saying, because I do not rest. A directed restlessness is trustworthy, at least until the end of evil.

Unnecessary, unbeneficial suffering is evil, but so is self-satisfaction. One destroys a person through being dulled by pain, but the other destroys a person by being dulled by lack of pain. Self-satisfaction is the graver danger because of its extreme seductiveness. I don't expect suffering evil to claim too many souls, in the long run, because people tend to have to be aware that suffering is not sustainable, so they tend to want freedom from it and its soul-deadening ways, but self-satisfaction can successfully lie to people that they've "found it", when really they're following something cheap and dead, into cheapness and deadness.

One of the tricks to watch out for is when you become more "mature" (or really more mature) and in your sense of maturity you become self-satisfied. You will have to return again and again to your commitment to abundant, trustworthy life for yourself and all others — this final state and its pursuit being in large part my understanding of what love is. So, "Judge by love."

You will have to develop the ability to contradict your obvious, vivid reality, which is the "flesh" of your reality, the loud, solid, compelling aspect of your experience. When you are self-satisfied, all of this is in bondage to the false sense of well-being. You gain your freedom through the bare, hard whisper of your spirit, a humble, holy spirit, as it is the spirit for, of, love. You have to whisper the truth and live unnaturally, in order to contradict your flesh. In that way you can hunger and thirst for righteousness, even when your very capacities for normal spiritual hunger

and thirst are being filled with empty food and drink, or perhaps are being lied to, have your true underlying need masked by some appetite-suppressing drug.

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(A second letter in the same envelope.)

It is necessary for me to tell you something so that you can understand me. Perhaps this is something painful for you to hear. It is certainly negative. It could grieve you. This negativity is part of the path I'm trying to convey, so I must proceed. And I want to make it clear that there is always hope for anyone who reads this book, that the word I am about to speak need not define us forever.

This is what I have to say: We are murderers. Our murders were easily executed, all-too-easily. We placed what was extra in our lives, merely nice, above the necessities of living — other peoples' necessities. We knew that there were people dying because of their poverty, but we did not investigate what it was that we could do. We even investigated to some extent — yet somehow it ends up that we do not share. We allowed the excuses of our culture, our friends, to quiet our sense of responsibility. Instead of taking action to change the discourse of our culture, so that the most compelling topic of general conversation would have been “How can we love?” we instead talked about all kinds of other things. Most likely, because we didn't want to have to see ourselves or our friends as murderers. We hid that judgment from ourselves, but because we did so, the situation of torment has

continued, and the moral debt continues to increase, but we have believed that we can forever put off the day that it falls due.

We, brothers and sisters of those we murder, have too much blood on our hands to ever make atonement.

We will have to rely on forgiveness, the forgiveness of other people. (And as much as we want to be forgiven, we must forgive.)

There is one circumstance in which it is impossible to forgive: if the other person remains a friend of their own transgressions. We turn our hearts before we turn our whole lives, but the heart must repent, and in the end, for the final harmony of love, all must repent of all sins, this is the source of all trustworthiness. This is our task, to turn against sin and turn toward love, in our hearts.

Our hearts are revealed in our actions and attitudes. And of course none of us individually has the strength to cure the whole world. Further, we make mistakes, have bad judgment and this is not sin, yet it limits our effectiveness. Yet it is possible for each of us to hold up our lives to the light of other people in need, and see uses of time or money that we would not engage in if love was our priority.

We have a long way to go to become decent people. We have thought so small for so long. But the whole time, we could have loved “so that”: Loving the self so that we can love the neighbor, loving the neighbor so that the neighbor can love the neighbor, and so on to love the hometown; and the hometown so that it loves the other hometowns and thus so that the whole

world is loved.

Love will give us the time to become repentant, ready to enter the final harmony, but love may set deadlines so that we feel the urgency to love, to feel the sentence, deep in our guts and informing all other thoughts from the backs of our heads: `It needs to change`; where `It` differentiates into `You`, `I`, and `The world as a totality.` In the end, the repentances of all three imply each other, unless some person severs themselves from love (that is, in this case, the final harmony) through the ultimate self-satisfaction.

If you take this to heart (“We are all murderers”), you will likely feel a burning which will differentiate into anger and shame at yourself and other people. Remember, this is all a family affair. Every murderer and every victim is your brother, your sister. Shame goes away when we do well — so do well, and collectively do well with the others for whom you feel shame. (Otherwise sin crouches at your door — there are dark places that shame takes us.) Anger goes away when we tire of it, when we can’t hold the burden any longer. Anger at self and at others corrodes us, it is unsustainable, yet it is our emotional contact with negative reality. Anger tells its truth, and we must learn from it to profit from it, and then let it go for a more sustainable emotion, such as mourning. What does anger teach, that mourning does not? Listen to your own anger, do not be limited by my finding. But my anger teaches me urgency, “electricity”, even authority. It teaches me `It needs to change.` Perhaps my mourning can pick up these

traits. Or perhaps something else empowers change, even a kind of joy. (Such is not inconceivable, in such company as `It needs to change.`)

I am not naturally prone to either anger or sadness. These do not usually, naturally, overtake me. I can deliberately lean into sadness, to produce the trustworthy mourning, but I do not know the key (maybe one of you does) to lean into anger deliberately, and so produce a trustworthy spirit of anger, a sustainable spirit. I am learning a bit more natural sadness, as I get older, but I do not think I will be overtaken by it. There are some who are born joyful and strain against joy to learn sadness (such as myself, born with a sometimes cheap and hard, flat and cruel, inexorable joy or “joy”) and some who strain against sadness to learn deliberate joy, and some who are naturally blessed with joy and sorrow who must learn the blessing of deliberateness some other way.

Deliberate joy is something we learn from trials. We consider them pure joy, in a sense humbly and in a sense defiantly. This is one way in which suffering is a good thing, when we use it to teach us this quiet strength.

Deliberate sorrow we learn by looking at the facts that should move us to natural compassion, but which don't yet, and mourn the situation and go to work, to strain and work at acting and seeing a compassion we don't feel. And it is very important that in this we are clothed in respect, the spirit that goes along with the attitude `You` (that is, the person we are taking

compassion on) `are a real person.` someone holy and worthy in their desperation, someone to whom we are, at our absolute best, equals; direct spiritual kin, perhaps, through our own identity as desperate people.

I have never had much success maintaining a strong assumption of `It needs to change` by myself. I don't have a strong drive to change the world, I am not much of an angry person. I have wished to have a social reality of `It needs to change` around me, and, importantly, one that seeks a trustworthy change in a trustworthy way. Some of you, my friends, may join with me face to face, I hope, and some of you will profit by my example, I hope, in your own social contexts, creating social environments — one-on-one or group relationships — that have as a common assumption, `It needs to change.`

We seek to exercise power in order to fix or to heal. This is part of `change`. This is a dangerous thing to do, yet it must be done. We need to become trustworthy people in order to employ this power. Our love must be the master of our power, rather than our power the master of our compassionate action. Trustworthiness of power is its authority.

Power is a stupid master. It is mindless and pointless. It does not love its slaves. (Love must be a person, must love his sons and daughters.) We get addicted to power. It is subtle and seductive. Some of us lust after it, and at least half-understand what we're caught up in. Some of us seek to have no addictions at all, to master even power — but they

are addicted to `I master`, which is simply a manifestation of power. Most subtly, perhaps, are those of us who empty ourselves in the face of some compelling destiny, some way-for-things-to-be that is unquestionably fitting, purely logical. These are people possessed by causality and by the beauty of a “logical” flow of cause and effect (the beauty of fixing things) — these people are also the slaves of power.

Power is not trustworthy unless it is fully subdued by love. (How is it that love subdues power? Is it not then a power? Perhaps it is in its origin — I know not. But in my life, at one level, I am a power who *chooses* to subdue myself to love, and *so*, it is love who subdues me. Trustworthy power gives itself over to love.) Learn to taste, my beloved friends, the taste of power-for-its-own-sake, the particular excitement and compellingness of it, its disturbing electricity — present in faint amounts in faint quantities — and its tendency to snowball and accumulate, like moisture feeding a hurricane, which makes small quantities of it tend, when successful, to create large storms of it, as sentient as a hurricane, as empty in the middle. If you learn its taste, then also learn the taste of love, so that you can discern the spirits that lead to life from those that lead to turbulent dissipation (the final end of a hurricane: the storm has turned into nothing, yet leaves damage, far beyond the value of the rain it left, which was its pretext).

Power is the great seduction that deceives people, who end up becoming self-satisfied through its promise of immortality. No one that I know

consciously believes he or she will live forever, never tasting death, yet when we are feeling powerful, deep down and all the way up into our voices and faces, we embody `I will never die.` We all have some capacity for power which will run away from us if it just manages to grow to the point of snowballing (through “success”), and so deceive us into self-satisfaction. And so we have to discipline our power with love, and one way to do this is to devote our power to love by working it hard in love’s service. [Notably, when you work in love’s service, there is a particular *way* in which you work, which has the spirit of love in it, the heart that really loves. You can attempt to work toward love’s goals without this spirit and heart, and then in fact you are not working toward love’s goals, and you are not working in the service of love. Love does not employ you; you are not love’s servant.]

And so one way to overcome your sins is to be too busy doing the right thing [in the right spirit] to have time to do the wrong thing. And there is a spiral, a snowballing, that brings life, as love is rewarded by finding people to love, as love is loved in return and even as love is perfected by the suffering and lonely dryness of when it is unrequited.

I know that there is shame attached to unrequited love in our culture, but love has long been unrequited by us and acquires superabundant reality (if that were possible) by love’s desperation. There is a danger and a cost to unrequited love, a frightening side to it, yet in all forms it can be a spiritual discipline, as it is a deep trial. I know that some of my past feelings for S.

could embarrass me, in hindsight, and they have, out of some sense of their disconnectedness from the real moment. But they express a vision of the kind of love I am capable of, which outstrips the reality that I'm living in, my actual situation. Some day, whether romantically or not, S. or not, I will love someone as I've loved S.-the-symbol, the love that I've projected out of my heart on the wall next to the projected image of her.

Somehow we have to love what is not or not yet, with love that isn't even necessarily love yet, in order to grow into truly amazing lovers. We have to stretch out into something unnatural, difficult, dangerous, costly, unusual: non-default; in order to grow.

Perhaps one way in which we need to stretch is in our ability to identify with other people. It can be entirely impossible to understand someone else when you haven't experienced what other people have — or even if you have. You will want to tell people to grow, as part of `It needs to change`, even as an act of kindness, to those caught in suffering from which they could learn. But if you do not really identify with them, they may know that you don't identify with them, and be humiliated or resistant from your sense of ease and mastery, of a problem that isn't even yours. This may not always be possible, but if you can, suffer and grow alongside them — there is value in casting your lot with another person, so that two people are working on growing through the same issues. There is value in solidarity, in suffering with and alongside someone else. There is value as well,

perhaps more essentially than going through the same struggle, in being in the spirit of one who struggles and learns from trials, who is clearly and openly a struggling person.

I hope I have not written overlong to you. Please reply at your leisure.

—Sincerely,
Yours truly.



August 15th, a hot, dry day

Dear friends,

I hope you have slept well. I was loaded with dreams last night, too many to remember. I would like to speak of something else, say a word about you (and me) that may offend you, or perhaps free you.

This is who we are: sheep. We are distracted, easily drawn along, easily led astray. Those of us who pride ourselves for not being sheep are still sheep, drawn along by more subtle and often more destructive voices. We are by nature led by all sorts of things, terribly distractible.

Some of us are also shepherds. We are good shepherds or bad shepherds. The good shepherds know their sheep, and lay down their lives for their sheep. The bad shepherds are thieves who kill, steal, and destroy. The good shepherds protect their flocks, but the bad shepherds do not. The bad shepherds are

sometimes simply hired hands who stand by when the wolves come.

There was once a good shepherd who is yet the voice of love. It is through him that we become good shepherds. It is through living his life that we enter into him. He was free from sinfulness, and that too is our destination, as good shepherds.

How strange to want to be a good shepherd and yet to remain a most distractible sheep! And yet how ordinary and common. Our hearts careen from one thing to the next, one toy to the other, and we have a high enough regard for love to try to listen to his voice, but we're not quite ever in the mood to absorb what he says. We're excited by the grass at our feet, or even the grass over there, 10 feet away or on the other side of the valley.

Sometimes it takes some persistence and determination to enter into a state of hearing love's voice. It is my goal to find love to be the place in which I live my life, this love with his guidance toward the final harmony. I want to walk with love, to be a friend of love, attending to love's words.

You can learn the voice of love better, that is, can hear it in the marketplace, by watching where it leads. The voices that are not love will lead you away from trust, trustworthiness, and the final trusting harmony. They will lead you away from love. Everything furthers something, some final image. Perhaps it is a final image of power, or emptiness; nothing, or death.

We find ourselves sucked into these distracting paths, these exciting, compelling ways, which

ultimately are lies, but which in the moment, to our vividness and obviousness (our flesh) are solid, substantial, real or even deeply real. These paths do not honor a loving love, but honor instead the mindless, heartless things, those tendencies which do whatever they do, but which will never love their servants and followers.

How odd it is that anyone would get out of bed and try to build anything, outside of love! And yet we all did this, before we realized the emptiness of progress, accomplishment, and civilization for their own sakes. Let us fall in love with, be married to, be committed to, bow to, walk with and find ourselves with love, starting now, and renewing our commitment at every opportunity.

Love is a teacher — let yourself be taught, but love is a lover too, let yourself be loved. Love is a friend, let yourself be in the presence of love, walking the same path, which is the path of love — love is a path. But love is also a father, and you are becoming a full-grown son or daughter, becoming secure in yourselves as bearers of the family heritage of love. Let us be taught, but let us walk close with love, without distraction, starting now.

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I forgot to mention yesterday an important point. I remember it as though you had brought it to my attention. I wrote earlier that love of self should lead to love of your neighbor, and that should lead your neighbor to love his or her neighbor, and this brings about the love of the hometown, and then hometowns

can in that way love each other and thus the whole world. You might ask, “How is this so? How does it work?”

If I love myself (or someone loves me) so that one of my burdens is untied, I will be lighter and freer, and then I will have the attention and health to see someone else with a burden, and help untie it. Our culture is full of divorce, breakups, and abusive relationships. Freed from those and the burden of restless mental wounds (and freed “so that”), we then go on to desire health for our community, for the people in our community, for other communities and their people, and so, the whole world. This is all possible if we are traveling on the path of love.

Don’t give up on the people in your life, unless there’s some kind of abusive pattern that threatens your (or their) spiritual (or physical) health. If you want to do great things for love, you will do them for people near and far, for people you already know, people you will know, and people you will never know individually.

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I’ll speak a good word for you parents. You bring forth life, an act of love (although like every costly, constructive act, it is odd that we do it if not to further love in the end. Somehow we will do it, furthering civilization, state, or sheer population). Parents are typically not throwing away their hours on illusions (although that is still a possibility). For parents, it is essential, not to give more time, which is often impossible, but to communicate the right

message. Young people, invest in yourselves, because you are what you will communicate to your future children. It is essential that the love of parents for children be a love “so that” and not an end in itself. Parents need to make their homes and relationships a place for trustworthy spirits to be present, and to invest in their children. In the past, parents would invest so that their children could be materially more prosperous, and have more of a voice in society, than their parents, but now we need to invest so that our children become spiritually mature at a younger age than their parents, to prepare them for the decades to come.

Children are naturally sheep-like and parents are naturally shepherds. Parents love their children though they are sheep-like, they also love them *because* they are sheep-like, and this latter love (or “love”?) is dangerous, may not be trustworthy. There is no value in making your children “shepherd-like” so that they become bad shepherds, or that they lose their sheep-likeness to some lifeless, mindless idol, but the younger that your children turn away from distraction and into a walk with love, the stronger they will be spiritually to resist lies and endure suffering, and the healthier will be those they spend time with, and the healthier will be our whole community, and our children’s children after them. You can teach them what you teach yourself, what sheep and good shepherds need to learn.

Because parents are naturally shepherds, there is the danger of them becoming bad shepherds. Parents,

I encourage you to seek the path of the original good shepherd, because the alternative is neglectful and even destructive.

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And one last thing that I almost remember you asking. “You said that we were murderers for not sharing with desperate people. But we did investigate! And we found that it was simply futile to help them. Are we really murderers?” I don’t know your heart. That is what is important. Love knows your heart — ask love what love’s judgment is. You will be happier to be judged by love now rather than later, if you are led to repent sooner. To repent, acknowledge your ability all along to *keep trying*. To have said, “Yes, this and that and the other were daunting, but given all that, I still asked myself, what can I give? What can I do, even if I am limited? Even if all my efforts would have only amounted to having *started to begin* to address the problems at hand.” — To have even attempted to the impossible, which is what a person might do when stricken with cancer and they seek a new reality, the new reality of a second opinion.

(From that analogy of cancer, I don’t mean that your life isn’t worth preserving. It is worth preserving “so that”.)

The sheep can recognize how he or she has been led astray in the past, has somehow loved to be led astray, and in simple need call out to the shepherd to guide him or her rightly, and if this encompasses the whole heart, it amounts to a complete repentance. You can approach love as though love needs to prove

your crimes, or you can approach love as though you want to follow love's voice, and the nature of love's dealings with you will depend on how you desire to deal with love. And so repentance can feel different to different people.

Sincerely,
Yours truly.



August 16th, staying out of the heat

O, to live close by the shepherd's voice! To learn a new way to be a sheep.

Dear friends,

Find it to be pure closeness with love's voice when you face temptations of many kinds, for by beginning to be pulled away, you pull back closer, you return to your eternal lover, which could only be love, the very love. That is, you *may* return — you always may, as long as you remain open to hearing love's voice.

Love knows that you are a sheep, and love has a message for you as you are and ever will be a sheep. Yet love desires that you love fully, and for many or even most of you who read this, a word for you: take hold of becoming shepherds. This sad world is full of love's children being deceived, getting caught in spiritual traps, oppressed by bad shepherds, oppressed by the dark storms, pressing down, choking down. We are inherently going to be led, but the good shepherd

can lead his or her fellow sheep into healing, into “straight paths” and healthy pastures.

The key for a shepherd is to simultaneously step ahead for the sake of love, to go ahead of others for their sakes; and to go back as a sheep and remain always with the good shepherd. In fact, better to stick close to the good shepherd and be led by him into the strange future pastures. To be a wandering sheep is its own preparation for shepherdhood, but true shepherdhood begins with a man or woman who stays close to the voice of love, who by listening to the voice of love, opens the ears of his or her neighbors to that voice. We communicate who we are, our leadership is us, if we listen to love, we lead others into listening to love.

As we practice being shepherds, we practice the embodying of love. Love is a person, an eternal person, who is developing a temporal body, which will last forever in the final harmony. As we stay close to the good shepherd, we are guided into learning his ways, to love what he loves, to will what love wills. When we are perfected in love, we are fully the body of love, and love does what we will; every fellow lover, by loving, does our will; we do what every other lover wills; we are as powerful as love, because we are ruled-over by love as possible, so joyfully bound together with love in our wills. As shepherds, we teach this will, this way, this path, we embody and communicate it to the dearly-beloved sheep, those whom we are given to. We heal the body of love, even increase the body of love. Love is

reproductive, a great flourishing.

There will always be relationships of leading and being led, there will always be people who are more powerful than others. The distribution of talents is not fair (nor is the distribution of torments; some talents are also torments). It will never be possible to make everything fair. And so the powerful and influential *must* become completely holy, completely set apart into love. If you are talented, grab tight to your talent, though it make your hands bleed, and hold even tighter to love, in loving fear and joy.

Because justice will never be perfect, we will need to learn to forgive, so that there may be restorative injustice to help heal and cover over evil injustice. Let the good be taken hold of, out of the bad. We will also have reason to be envious, and to experience the humiliation of powerlessness. What shall the shepherd or incipient shepherd do in the face of envy and the potential to humiliate others? In my experience, I am not humiliated by, nor envious of, people who truly love me, who connect with me in my desperation in a way that affirms my worth. The good shepherd learns to set aside the “objective” truth of judgments such as “she’s the weaker vessel” to judge by love, to see the whole picture — even if she is weak (if you are really justified in that “objective” perception) what do you *regard* about her? Do you *see* that weakness, or do you see her, in herself, in your quiet-hearted compassion and in honor? Mercy is better than justice; gaze with humble mercy in order to see beyond appearances. In this way you can judge by

love, although this does not define the only way to judge by love. When you judge by love, you make logical and strictly just judgments, without partiality, considering the evidence which love presents to you, according to love's spirit and priorities.

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Love breaks in on you like fire, like continuing lightning. Love teaches you about yourself, is a mirror before you, faithful to show your faults — but only when you are ready to take hold of love, to grip the rope leading you, the steering wheel which steers you, to become right in love's eyes.

Love rests on you and speaks of your stored-up riches, your celebrations in the last days, which deprive the poor. As you look at yourself, you beg for relief, and love's relief is to teach you to love, to offer you a heroic task to make love real in your life, so that you can really be a believer in love, you can really be a human being. You become who you should be through the humility of casting yourself before love, and the humility of hard work.

Love will appear to you in love's true judgment when you are really ready to begin, though it seem impossible, that is, when you are ready to begin to begin. For those of us with talents to share, our talents will have to be re-beaten, re-forged, through force and heat, to shape us into strong new tools, to express our solid talents in love's way. Do not shrink back from the blacksmith's hammer and fire. This is a trustworthy process, as it shapes you into love's instrument — that is, love's adult child, son or

daughter set about the father's business, yourself a trustworthy agent.

Love deserves your love, and is deeply grieved by your unfaithfulness. The sheep is unfaithful in his or her innocence, but some take it on themselves to be bad shepherds, whether shepherds of themselves or others. Love will even be angry — temporarily — but the conclusion of love's anger, ultimately, is our complete holiness, the purity of our close attention to him, as sheep, even the purity of our good shepherdhood; or it is our complete destruction. There are some who will not be part of the final harmony, because they prefer not to be. Love destroys what is evil and which refuses the path of love. This path is walkable by all who will simply begin to begin, open to all sheep, to all children.

There is great mercy in the eyes of love, for love judges by love, as he necessarily would. But there is a moment, a movement, of love, of NOW, of lightning and sustained current, and this NOW is for our purification.

We forget love's tender care when we "were" immature, how he bound up our wounds when we cried to him in repentance and desperation (though we grieved him still with the immaturity yet to be revealed — or immaturity even apparent in our consciousness, even as we appealed to him). How he clothed us and restored us from our shame, how he worked in the hearts of our friends and family to bring about their forgiveness or even forgetfulness of our shame — we forget all this and continue to forget it as

he does it for us time and again. We forget how he made us his, clothed us with beauty — and we stray, as sheep who should have become shepherds, who should have come close to love's voice in the pasture, should have always been feeding at the feet of our good shepherd. We are so foolishly ungrateful, so callous to his love, so heedless and even cruel, that we even sacrificed what was precious in us to flatly bad shepherds and obviously wooden images of good — to power, whether as a false image of love, or simply, nakedly, shamefully itself. How strange, that we should prefer these voices which only lead to shame, when our healer had spoken so tenderly to us so many times. We even, through unfaithfulness, turned our beauty (no longer love's beauty resting on us) into a disgusting thing, a horror. How did we do this? How are we such people? And love, to awaken us, in love's anger, exposes us to the shaming powers of bad shepherds and pitiless images. We see with great grief how untrustworthy these beings are as they pillage us and put us to shame.

And this shamefulness comes out of our self-satisfaction, our lack of love, our lack of growth along the true path, including our lack of aid for the poor and desperate. We alienated ourselves from the truth about ourselves, that we are desperate people, and so we alienated ourselves from love — and so are put to shame before even the evil ones, with their merciless or leering eyes.

And after all of our exposure, our great shame, love will remember how he helped us when we were

younger, how he did so not because we deserved to be helped, but because of our desperate sheep's need, and will form a new bond with us that will last forever, in which we remember our old ways with shame for a time, and are quieted in our hearts forever, in which we really understand that we do not deserve to be forgiven, that we have escaped from evil leadings and destruction by the skin of our teeth, we're living on borrowed time, and we have no boasting left, not in our own leading, and so in a new simplicity stick close to the good shepherd, and obey love's voice.

My friends, I hope you take heed to this.

Sincerely,

Yours truly.



August 17th, a warm day and a lukewarm night

Dear friends,

You will sometimes have to remember what is trustworthy when you are beguiled by the vividness and obviousness of the present moment. Love provides the consolation of closeness to the shepherd, but endless consolation is not trustworthy. You will sometimes seek the shepherd for the shepherd's sake, sometimes for the sake of the safety of the shepherd's side, sometimes for the consolation of the safety, sometimes for the self-satisfaction of the consolation. At some point along this path, love will dry up its source of consolation, because love himself is *ultimately* trustworthy. We learn as we keep living

that our past sense of trustworthiness was itself immature and not fully trustworthy. (For this reason, it is important to keep living.) We begin in a predicament in which nothing can be relied upon formulaicly (but this is a blessing because we are thus housed from birth in the house of beyond), yet it is a predicament because we rightfully crave to trust fully, in our full lived reality, to trust ourselves and a sufficient number of our neighbors, find a trustworthy past and final image.

We start off being the true masters of no form of trustworthiness and trustworthiness-discernment, and yet we would need mastery to validate any other faculty of trustworthiness-discernment (and even to unlock full trustworthiness in ourselves). So, we begin from naivety, from a false sense of discernment and knowledge, and yet by this blessing we confidently attempt to live and even succeed in living life, learning along the way what the taste of trustworthy leadings is. We start from impossibility, and wildly try, and accidentally expose ourselves to trustworthiness, and then follow those trustworthy things down their path, until we reach the limit of the path, if it has a limit. We have a dome tent, with three poles, given for our lives. The poles come up each in an arc making two contacts with the ground, curving the fabric of the tent. Perhaps you have set up a tent like this, physically. We put up the tent not one pole at a time, because no one pole can be set up all the way by itself, but we awkwardly and naively put one pole up halfway, then the other two at

intervals, until finally, through an arbitrary and even bizarre process, we suddenly find ourselves with a tent in which we can at least spend the night, until perhaps we have to get out for the next stopping-place on the great journey, which is itself like the setting up of a tent.

Because we set off anew so much, it is important to put in our backpacks the *important* tools for setting up our tent. These tools are teachings, memories, even friendships, which we can rely on in the process of doing things over and over, and also, although we may not immediately know how to use them or be supported by them in such circumstances, in the exceptional and unprecedented disruptions of the everyday flow of our long life's-journey. It is important to remember and hold to what is valuable, what has helped us solve our problems in the past. These tools and allies have proven themselves reliable in the fight or the storm, and are to be honored by our appreciation and in most cases, by our loyal perpetuation of them with us into our future. The backpack has only so much space for tools, so find the truly worthy, and there are only so many chances we get to form and maintain nourishing friendships, so do not let go of connections with such healthy people through mere apathy or distraction. (And there are even, for some of us, people who will walk with us wherever we go, those who are not just allies, but companions, who share with us the contents of our backpacks, and their backpacks; our tent, and their tent; on the same part of the road at the same time,

always under the same sky.)

We may find ourselves having to return to people or to “spirit-tools” (words and sayings, for instance), to love itself, through a process of deliberate return. In this we can practice freedom, and yet will also experience the bittersweet heartbreak of repentance, the grief and the mourning and the new closeness of having come from far away.

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My friends, it will be so difficult for us to adjust to life as it will be in the coming years. In any circumstance hard, but with this madness of the storm of the world as it rages in the present, this heat, this system making a great surge — what will stop this heat? What will bring restoration? Whatever that correction is, it will be painful.

You and I were raised in peace and wealth. Our version of poverty is actually wealth. We will know poverty, when the world runs itself out, or is stopped in its tracks.

You and I were raised to be small people with small horizons. We were raised to be dismayed by small stormclouds. We were raised to have a great compulsion for small hungers. We were not taught to love discipline, and we find the endurance of pain to be unacceptable — we have grown more and more pained for not accepting pain, for shying away from it in hopes that it would all go away, but there is always pain, the question is, is there beauty?

We were taught futility and hedonism — you have

no fame, so you have no voice, so settle back and enjoy what is given to you. There is an intensity required just to live life, which will be demanded more and more as the times grow in turmoil and deprivation. This intensity requires *muscles*, muscles which we have not tended to develop.

We will be thrown into a situation which we cannot comprehend — our brothers and sisters outside the West may understand — but we will be struck with no ideas. Who are we? We do not know, but in the coming century, we will find out.

We can live for life or we can live for love. Those of us who live for love will live rich lives in the years to come, because there is an abundant richness of people to love, in their desperation, a resounding field of possibility. Those of us who cling to living for life will be brought to account against that hungry commitment, over and over, as life is torn away from us. Our lives will become poorer, darker, bleaker, unbearable, as we cling to what cannot last. We will even see the world come to ruin, and feel a sorrow which somehow does not lead us to love of what remains, love of ourselves even, but instead a despair and in the despair, a closed-heartedness and for some of us, even brutality.

I have written this to encourage you rather than to frighten you into paralysis. Please be strengthened as you go to sleep tonight, as you ponder what I have said.

Sincerely,
Yours truly



August 18th, a milder kind of warm day, at home and in the library.

My dear friends,

Our future is not going to be beautiful or good, and I will explain in more detail later, but for now I will simply say that we live in an evil system which cannot even sustain itself — there are the twin evils of lovelessness and mindless, life-of-its-own, overconsumption.

And so it is a mercy if our world system can be ended in a way that brings new life. Like the beginning of new human life, this process involves birth pains. And for a woman in a society that has never seen new life being born, these pains are frightening and bizarre. They present as symptoms of a terrible disease. Certain doctors will offer drugs that can end birth pains, that can end labor — which prevents birth. The woman who does not know of new life can easily fall into trusting these “compassionate men” who turn out not to have any real knowledge of what is going on with the woman. But at the end of the labor, if there is (or even sometimes, often, if there isn’t) a midwife present and attending, if this labor can be trusted more than the doctors, an alien being can emerge into the world, and become a familiar and beloved son or daughter, quite naturally.

Our society is a woman undergoing birth pains.

The contractions are coming sooner and sooner, but we so far can see them as some meaningless phenomenon. But someday we will have to take notice, and listen either to doctors or midwives. We have to learn to discern what kind of voices are trustworthy and which are not. This is what I have been trying to encourage you to do.

As good shepherds, we are like midwives, helping our society survive the birth with a minimum of bleeding. We calm the fears of the woman because we ourselves have given birth to new life, on our own level. The more the woman can trust in the healthiness of the entire process of birth, the better off she will be and the less complicated and tragic the inevitable emergence of her son or daughter.

The “doctors” will say that “powerful aliens” have come to trick us. This is what happens when someone outside society comes to speak with authority to society. There is no category for such a person other than “alien”, and the “doctors” who have sworn an oath to preserve the woman’s life (as far as they understand life), will by default clearly “understand” that these forces that turn out to be birth-giving are untrustworthy.

But we who are midwives must accept this alien in our midst, for to us, he will not *feel like*, “*vibe as*” an alien, though we have never laid eyes on him before. By learning to trust love, we were all along learning to trust him. And through us, and our trust, the woman can come to trust this alien whose coming wakes up her last and most intense contractions.

We as midwives will still, as we are somehow part of the woman herself, experience the pain of her contractions, but we will do so with the joy set before us of a new life. We will suffer but consider it joy, consider it something worth living through, we want to continue living in order to see this new world emerge from the old world, and even for the two to embrace, for the old world to *really* become a woman, as she will somehow have stumbled into becoming a mother.

This pregnancy was not gotten through any literally sexual means. (After all, the “woman” is simply the world, not a physical woman), but rather by the spirit of love and the voice of love working to create new life inside the woman, and the woman even nourishing this new life without realizing what she’s doing, until comes the time when the woman’s body longs more and more to bring this new being out into the light, so that the woman can see her son (or I think perhaps it will really be her daughter) with her own eyes, and love with her “consciousness” (her official judgment and perception) what her body longed to hold and adore. This longing had no clear meaning for the “mind” of the woman (the thinking elite?) and the woman consciously even ignored it at times — but still, a great hunger — for what? We midwives know, having seen ourselves and our neighbors give birth.

The longing to hold a child is also the longing to “Get it over with”, to just “Get it over with.” There is an underlying urgency, a voice that speaks, just, when

it does, and announces that “now is the time.” When a voice is not listened to as a voice, eventually, whenever, it breaks in.

The urgency is a longing we can't fulfill, like a heat wave setting in for a month, where it really doesn't even get all that cool at night. Our longing washes over us as we long for new life, and this is a sign of health, that we have not taken those strange anesthetics which comprise the “doctors” “mercy”, but which can actually threaten our life as expectant mothers, can end a pregnancy, because as this is a spiritual pregnancy, the longing itself is essentially a part of our contractions, our process of getting that new son or daughter out where we can finally see him or her.

When the good shepherd walks with us, we will only have to know enough to listen to his guidance, and this is our main preparation for the birth of the new world, in all of its insanity. Yet it is of some benefit, as well, to have learned how to live through insane times. If you have a choice, do not shut yourself off to all of the insanities that come to you. Instead, learn to live through insanity, and even practice finding your peace (love's gift) in the midst. It will also help to learn how to endure poverty with an underlying joy (in the midst of misery), instead of an underlying misery (in the midst of misery). Practice these three skills, of discernment and listening to love's voice; endurance and peace through insanity; and endurance and joy through poverty; my dearly-loved friends.



19 August, a warm, quiet day

My beloved friends,

I am sitting hungrily, but fortunately awaiting food. Yet in the coming years, there will likely come a time (unless we can escape the gravity of earth and mine the asteroids) when we will run out of an important plant nutrient, phosphorus. We have to mine it now, and these mines may well only have 50 years left to them — but we do not even have that much guaranteed. We will live through times of poverty, starvation, and war — we, or our descendants. We will have to learn to live with less food — less meat first, then as necessary less of everything else. We must learn how to endure and survive suffering, and as well we will learn, as lovers, to not panic, because love speaks to us as we listen to love and respond to love, and love assures of our beautiful deaths, in love, and love's beautiful gift of life to us, the judgment and healing of us into the final harmony.

We need to be healed and fully listen to love's voice, to overcome shame through completed obedience. We need to be led out of sin into love.

And we will see desperation given a new flesh, a new vividness, and obviousness, which is an opportunity for love to speak vividly and obviously, and we will speak love's voice.

Times will be difficult and there will be panic-fed lies. We will need to be trustworthy, to untie the lies with gentleness and patience, if possible, and with boldness and forcefulness cut the lies, if in the moment we truly *have to*.

The voice of the terror of death is as trustworthy as the voice of immortal power — it is still the voice putting foundness in your power in the heart's highest place. The terror-of-death voice speaks when that foundness is threatened — but not yet truly lost; the voice of immortal power — self-satisfaction — when the question isn't even raised, or answered in a thousand-yard-stare affirmation. This voice of terror will deceive many, leading them into desperate lovelessness, and yet there is some way to speak to desperate people, if their desperation does not close their ears.

There may come a true lostness in this time, and thus an openness toward love, even an accidental discovery of love because of lostness, a lostness in love.

But we, as good shepherds, will be tasked more with proclaiming a foundness in love, although in our times of wealth we had needed to proclaim a lostness in love. And we will have to bring love, in lostness and foundness, to our love of those in terror, those frightened sheep. We will even be lost with them, but lost in love, not afraid even though we can no longer tell north from south, or east from west. We will be huddled in caves, singing the song of love, as we have sung at various times through the ages, huddling with those who must seek shelter from evil.

You who understand what I say, consider how to prepare for this impending possibility (and phosphorus is not the only resource that is likely to run out).

But if we can get minerals from space — If we can explore space! Then we can continue the familiar life of colonialism and over-consumption, of rampant, mindless increase. And then, O lovers, we will have the challenge of `It needs to change` as we do today, of further awakening relentless and yet trustworthy compassion. You who understand me and have understood me, you see the way to go.

And what of nuclear war? As we die from the fallout, with no future, and nothing but time in contact with negative reality, we will curse the source of life, this “supposed” guarantor of our well-being (love himself!), and curse the bad shepherds who got us into our death. And so the lovers will have to practice forgiveness, and teach it with gentle trustworthiness, and even electricity. Let the understanding reader seek the true path.

And what of the technological singularity? Be very cautious with this phenomenon, which speaks as the voice of immortality. Better to die than be the slave of mindless power, do not betray love if you participate in this. Let us speak of what is trustworthy. And love will guide and preserve us. Let us become willing to die for love, and trust in him, love, his desire for us and regard for our well-being, ultimately his regard for us together, his and our harmonious body. Let us learn to trust trustworthiness himself, those of us who

have understood, and have seen ahead thus far in the path. (I myself have much to learn, far to grow, to the point of trusting with my life, that my end will be in love, in beauty, *to the point of getting new life again.*)

And this present reality is a time of great ugliness and brutality in the lives of the desperate and the self-satisfied. I call you, and you, call me, to a new fellowship, which comes not to serve, but to raise up servants from among itself, seeking out among the lost sheep those who desire as their end goal to live for love of others, rather than in fear for their own present or future well-being. This is all we need to motivate us to grow in love: our love, such as it is, of those who suffer.

Let us not deceive ourselves. I thought I wanted a wife for many years, but I did not; I thought I wanted to be friends for a time, when really I did not; I thought I was loving people when I could never trust them enough to love them, until finally I loved them enough to demand trust and trustworthiness, and out of that honesty, I found that I had left them. For four years I studied and got a college degree that I never, really, wanted to use in the first place, although I very straightforwardly fooled myself, despite those who doubted me. We know the truth of love by our actions, by the work that cuts into us, and by laying our hearts down for love to transform us. Our hearts must become pure, and so our minds must become clean enough that we would not be put to shame, or found out as untrustworthy, if our minds were out in the open. Our hearts must be devoted to doing the

work that love intended for us when we were made at love's design. We must be consumed by love, harboring no hate within us for our brothers and sisters — and all are our brothers and sisters. You have not arrived, you have a long way to go, you will inevitably get there, so you might as well start now.

Although I write in a poetic way, and in a book, I mean this straightforwardly, and those who understand will know what to do. If any of my readers has something to say to me, any questions or feedback at all, you may email me at banks@10v24.net or look at my website, 10v24.net, for more information. As much as I can love people I have never seen, I love you, readers, and hope that I have really loved you.

Sincerely,
Yours truly,
James

Now S., this is my final word to you before I go.

Perhaps, as I've said before, we will meet in a more substantial world than this book. But for now, this is all.

After reading this all, you may wonder, "Is this for real?" If that's how you feel, I can understand your skepticism. I regret my "poker face" and inner conflictedness, with which I greeted you (or failed to greet you!) when I saw you last. It takes time to get to really know me, so if you seek me out, just trust me a little at first, and trust more only as I am trustworthy. (And for that matter, *I* would need to grow in trust of *you*, as I only know you a little bit.)

I realize that in particular there is a lot you wouldn't know about my origin or background. It seemed not to be fitting for this book, but I will tell you what I can if you ask.

I wrote earlier that I was open to any of the possibilities in Chapter 1, but I will say that my first preference would be a relationship such as was envisioned in the end of Chapter 1, in which we are simply good friends. If you are willing, let's aim at that and if we miss, so be it. It may seem odd that I would go to such lengths to simply gain a friend (rather than aim for romance), but for me, a good friendship is valuable and even rare, and as I have said, people like you don't come around very often.

Now it is your right, responsibility, privilege, and opportunity, to respond, or not, to what I've written.

Don't be deceived. Judge by love. Seek love out to your fullest. Prepare for the future. Get to work. Be bound to the paths that make you free. Seek to be

trustworthy, in the ways that all of us are called to become trustworthy. And keep reaching out to strangers, and while you are not yet perfected, be yourself and more yourself, until you are.

2 September 2015