

Waving At Trains



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It is beautiful to do nothing and then rest afterwards. -Spanish Proverb

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It is not
a perfect morning.
There are too many
problems to be solved.
And it is cold.
And it is raining.

But,
there was
a rainbow
at sunrise.

We found a camping spot a mile or two down a dirt road in the mountains. There were Ponderosa Pines and Pinyon Pines and Lodgepole Pines and several other pines that I don't have names for – as well as a few scattered stands of Aspens – and a few Blue Spruce. We were far enough down the dirt road that we couldn't hear the cars out on the highway.

There were no other houses or barns or structures, but there was a split rail fence running along the perimeter. I suspect there were cattle on the land. You could feel the breezes against your skin, could see it rustle the trees – especially the Aspens of course. And you could hear the breezes in the trees and occasional birds and such. Like the buzzing of bees and flies who came to see us.

The chipmunks were absolutely silent. We would see them scurrying about, but they made no sounds. And they stayed well back from us. They knew we were invaders. At one point I saw one run into his hole and a bee flew after him. "Talk about invaders," I thought. I wondered if the chipmunk cowered in the reaches of his tiny den or if he turned to shoo the bee away. Talk about courage. No way I could shoo away a flying beast who was comparatively as large, if it had been in my home. No.

After dark, the bugs were most of the sounds. There was a full moon building, and the light was beautiful and the air was filled with the songs of the insects. We would sleep with the windows open. The breezes would be as gentle to our skin as our touches. The night would pass, and in the morning we drove back to the paved road and on our way.

A friend of mine called and asked if he could borrow a sleeping bag for a trip he was taking up into the mountains. It was all on very short notice. He had the opportunity, and he was going. But he didn't have time or money to gather and buy the equipment. I told him I had a good down bag that was for very cold weather and large enough to fit him.

Turned out he was going to Nepal. Kathmandu actually. And hiking in the Himalayas. He wasn't going to make an assault on Everest, but he was going to go where it would be visible. He might even make it to one of the lower base camps that Everest climbers used.

He was gone for almost a month. He had wonderful stories and pictures. It was the trip of a lifetime, and there weren't really any words to describe it.

Putting the sleeping bag back into my hands, he said that it probably wasn't as dirty as he had expected it to be. When I gave it to him I told him not to wash it or have it dry cleaned – being filled with down, it had special cleaning needs, and I had soaps for down and knew how to clean it better than a cleaner would. When he said it wasn't as dirty as he

had expected it to be, I asked if he had washed it. He said, "No, you told me not to. I just had more opportunities to bathe than I had expected." We both laughed.

So this morning I gave my down sleeping bag to the washing machine. (Set on the correct cycle and using the right detergent.) But I am loath to lose the dust and dirt from the Himalayas. I am sad to think of it passing down the drain. But I am okay with my bag being clean again. I am glad that I can use it on my next trip without having to wonder if that faint smell is left over from his sweaty climb. And I am very grateful to have a sleeping bag that has been to the Himalayas: Even if I will probably never be there, some of my stuff has been.

Well, yes, it is a
shame. And, yes, you did sort of
bring it in upon

yourself. Many of
our troubles are brought upon
ourselves by ourselves.

But that doesn't mean
that we have to simply live
with the shame: We can

learn from it and change.
Or,
having learned to be
victimized, we can
become our own perpetrator.

When I was 6 and 7,
we lived for a while on
Glenwood Avenue in
Minneapolis, Minnesota.
It was a nice house.
My mother recalled it as her favorite home
for the rest of her life.

It was about a mile away from
a golf club driving range.
My brother and I often walked through
the woods and clearings to the driving range
and would pick up golf balls that had been hit
beyond their back fence.
It was great fun – like an Easter egg hunt –
and we would come home with
pockets and hands filled with golf balls.

No one in the family golfed.
Our father,
although very competitive,
was forcefully opposed to almost all sports.
But he would take the golf balls to work
and sell them to coworkers who were golfers.

Ever since, I have had a very hard time
passing by any stray golf balls I might find on the ground.

Picking up each one still puts a smile on my face.

Sometimes I keep them in a bowl
for a while

before I give them away to a golfer.
Often I think about taking up golf again myself.

A couple of years ago I even bought a few clubs
at a thrift store
so I could practice.
But I ended up giving the clubs away a few years on.

Today on my walk in the park nearest our home,
I found the droppings of some golfer
who had been practicing there
and wasn't willing to walk into the wooded sections
to pick up his hooks and slices.
I picked up 25 balls: Smiling all the while.

Then I brought them home
and washed them
and put them in a bowl on the mantel.
It was a fun walk,
on a nice morning,
with many happy memories.

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Although his collapse
could come in many forms, I
am hoping that it

will be a simple
psychotic break, and we find
him sitting in front

of the White House, one
day, naked, smearing his own
shit on his belly.

Shhhh! Listen. There is a very small voice from way down deep inside of me that is calling out to you, asking to touch you. Do you hear it? Would you like to heed its call? Will you give me one small chance to change your life all over, to make you more happy, and to answer all those doubts and fears you might have had? "Will you?" asks the still small voice, again. I would like the opportunity to give you such a smile and sense of wonder that years from now you might still be wondering what I did to you. Let me answer that one here and now: I loved you – all the way through, and out the other side.

Your glasses were all fogged over and you were looking out at me through a slightly blurry haze. I don't remember if you were smiling: I remember that you were all hazed over and you were still trying to catch your breath and regain your balance.

I had caught my breath by then and could walk again without having to hold onto the wall like a 2 year old. But inside I was still all very hazy. I was smiling that you allowed me to touch you. I believe that I thanked you and said it was wonderful. I hope I did. It was.

After you left, Harry and I leaned back against the wall and visited briefly. He said that the young are always like that. I think that he was wrong. I don't remember ever meeting anyone who acted like that before – intense and reflective – peaceful and enraged – shy and self-assured. You were as tall as I was, but still small.

The next time I saw you, you winked at me. And I had to catch my breath all over.

I am grateful that you told me that I had given you the best sexual experiences in your life. Thank you. Thank you. But I am not grateful because I want praise. I am grateful because this assures me, now, that way back then, my best efforts to touch you better than anyone else had ever before or would ever again worked. I am grateful to know that you knew how much I felt like you were the very best creature in all of God's creation. I'm not sure where we are going or why we are in this hand-basket, but along the way there are wildflowers and butterflies.

Out for my morning walk in the desert, early in the morning, the moon was still fairly high in the west as I ambled down the dirt road surrounded by creosote and cactus. It was still dark, but there was more than enough moonlight for a walk.

The air was still. I could hear coyotes in the distance – an adult and pups both – a howling and yipping chorus. It was a wilderness song, softly, up on the hills.

All the mountains were outlined by the moon beginning to sink into the west and the sun just beginning to rise out of the east. Towards the end of my walk, there was a rooster crowing in the distance too. It was from some neighbor's yard and not too far away, but also far enough to be an attractive tune instead of any kind of disturbance. Not far from my door, I noticed that I could see my breath in the moonlight. It was very cold outside. Laugh out loud. I hadn't even noticed.

I was a very pretty woman. And intelligent and well educated And talented in my work. And pursued by many young men – and old ones as well. I was living my life my way, and I was happy with how it was going.

And then one morning at work, there was a terrible explosion and I was ripped from my body like a dead leaf torn from a tree branch by a terrible wind.

Normally when someone dies, there is a period of time when the spirit will linger nearby the dead body awhile.

And then it will move on. That's the reason that, all around the world, people have their cultural traditions of burying the dead within a certain time after death: Give the spirit time to adjust and move on – as well as inter the remains before they start to smell.

I doubt they ever even found my flesh to bury. It was shredded: Totally incinerated: Melted into ash and smoke and dust. And my spirit was tossed away in the vortex of debris with all of the other spirits, also ripped from their lives that day, and caught up into oblivion and confusion and fear.

None of us knew what was happening. But I was clear that I had been ripped away from my life: My life, in which I was very happy.

I was surrounded by hundreds of other souls, and they all clearly felt much the same way. They had been ripped away from life. And none of us knew why, AND none of us were prepared for it. We were not in a war zone. We were not soldiers. We had not been trained to expect to die so soon.

But we had all died suddenly. And we had all died violently. And we were all very angry and confused by it.

Yes, I was very angry and confused. And I drifted in the ether, alone but surrounded by others, who were all angry and frightened and confused. And then, suddenly, I was born again: Alone and Helpless and Naked and SCREAMING AS LOUD AS I COULD!

I didn't know what had happened and what was going on, but I was screaming as loud as I could until I could not scream another note and fell asleep. I was a baby again. But I really couldn't understand how that could have happened either. And then, later on, I found that, this time, I was a boy, and, "Oh My God!"

Talk about confused and angry. This time, a boy.

It's Okay! It's not a secret! Everybody knows.

Everybody can see it in your face and
hear it in your voice and watch it in your stride
as you walk by.

It's okay to talk about it now.

In fact, it might even help to talk about it now.

The secret that is your secret is still very heavy.

You might as well let go of the load.

About 40 years ago I talked with a man in the emergency room who had been in an automobile accident. He wasn't really hurt, just very badly shaken and needing to be checked by a physician. Apparently his car had rolled a couple of times and landed in a field. He was covered with dirt.

He told me that he was just driving home from Pace Bend Park when a tree ran out into the road in front of him. He swerved to avoid it and there was a goddamn barbed wire fence chasing it – that he couldn't miss – and then the road just dis-a-fucking-peared.

I thought to myself,
"There's not a lot of that
going on around here."

I have heard many different tales about creatures that live on the bottom of the rivers. My favorite being that many Dominicans believe, and tell their children, that the Indians, who lived on the island before Columbus arrived, all moved into the rivers to hide from the invaders And they live there still. They live there still and come out at night to steal the bad children and take them back into the river – never to be seen again.

Of course, it's an obvious lie, because the Dominicans are descended from the Indians and the invading Spanish and the slaves that the Spanish brought in as laborers. (Since the Indians wouldn't work like slaves). In truth, the clear purpose of the story is to scare the children: They must behave, or they will end up helpless and alone among the strangers in the river. Never to be seen again.

One of my personal mentors told me a similar story once. I doubt that he had ever heard of the Dominicans' version of beings who live in the rivers. He wasn't that much of a traveler or that much of a reader. But he was a man of great calm and peace, and one time, when we were talking about some greatly troubling problem that I had, he said that I needed to "let go."

I had heard of “letting go.” I had heard of “letting go” from him and from others. But, on that occasion, I had progressed enough in the art of growing up and asking for help that I actually said to him, “I don't understand this 'letting go' thing. I mean I hear that I should 'let go' or 'drop the rock' or other phrases about how I was holding on too tight. But how do you not hold on? How do you let go?”

He was a man with a wicked smile, and he smiled it at me.

“Once upon a time there were people who lived on the bottom of a river. It was a very big river, like, maybe, the Mississippi: Wide and deep and with as strong a current as could be. It was so strong that everyone had to hold on to the rocks on the river bottom for dear life. Everyone, all around. There were lots of people living there, and every one was holding on to the rocks for dear life.

“Occasionally one or two of them would lose their grip on the rocks on the bottom of the river, and they were instantly washed away. They would fly by on the current and call out for help and then be gone – never to be seen again. They would disappear into the dark water while fighting the current for all they were worth and be gone forever: Terrified!

“Everyone knew that if you lost your grip on the rocks you were gone. Nobody knew where you went. But you went away. And no one heard from any of those who went away ever again.

“But then, every now and then a person would float by on the current. Just floating. Not fighting. Maybe even smiling and waving as they passed overhead. They were the people who had an idea. It had crossed their minds that maybe there was someplace else to go. And drifting on the current was the only way to get there.

“They had not lost their grip on the rocks. They had decided to relax and just go with the river. And when they relaxed, the river carried them down stream. They had let go and were washed away, never to be seen again, but, instead to see where the river took them.

“And, although they were never seen again by the others who held on tight, they were taken on the adventure of their lives.

“Relax,” he said, “and the currents of life will take you where you cannot imagine being. As soon as you loosen your grip the least little bit you will be washed away. The people you leave behind will say that you were never seen again. But you will say, 'Wow. Look where I have been.' And you'll wonder, where you are going to be next.”

In the summer of 2017, we were on one of our camping trips and stopped for a break at one of those roadside tourist-trap snack-and-souvenir places that are scattered along the highways.

(You know: “The World’s Largest Hamburger;” “See the One-Eyed Monster;” “Genuine Indian Belts and Moccasins.”)

We were eating snacks on the front porch talking with a couple about the weather and travels, and the woman got up and walked away. As he watched, her husband said to us, “You have to forgive her. She’s having a hard day. Her father died a while back. She hadn’t seen him in years and didn’t even know where he lived. Her sister told her that he had died, and that she wasn’t in the will, but no one wanted his house and she could have it if she wished. We’re in town to see it and just came from there. She keeps saying that she doesn’t know what happened: what went wrong.”

The wind has not stopped blowing for days. The shrubs and trees have not stopped shaking (trembling before the wind). Sand and dust and leaves and litter have not stopped flying about us. And the birds, who should be flying, are not. They have taken to branches and to nests in the eaves and to walking awkwardly about on the ground. When they try to take to the air, the wind just blows them about like the leaves and the litter. The local people say that it's just the season and that it will be over before I know it: But that some folks have been known to go mad: And that some have never recovered.

One weekend when I was 20, I loaded my van with half a dozen surfboards and half a dozen friends and we went to Galveston for the day. We had a great day in the sand and sun and surf. That night, I was in my driveway unloading the surfboards and taking the roof racks off and putting them in the garage and I turned around and there was an officer with his revolver drawn and cocked. And it was pointed at my abdomen. And he wanted to talk to me about what I was doing there. I fondly remember that day at the beach, but not that cop talking to me.

He wanted to know who I was. He wanted to know where I lived. He wanted me to prove it, even though I was dressed in shorts and flip-flops and didn't even have the keys to my car in my pockets much less some ID. He didn't like my answers. He wanted to know if I had any drugs – I replied, incredulously, “No.” (Because there weren't any on me. Only flip-flops and shorts and a surf board.) After a long, silent pause, he put the hammer down on his revolver and re-holstered it. He barked, “Be more careful next time,” and he turned and walked off into the darkness.

As he was leaving, I didn't say a word, but, inside, I wondered what that had been about. I was in my own driveway, working on my own car, putting my own

surfboards in my own garage, and he thought I needed to “Be more careful next time?” I mean was this all just because I was a long-haired hippy weirdo with an old Volkswagen van with paisley curtains and peace symbols and surfboards on it? Even now it doesn't take much thinking to know the answer to that one. But things have changed since then. I may still be a hippy in my mind. But, I look like an old white Grandfather.

Being stopped by the police is different now. The last time I was stopped, the cop was angry. I didn't belong there. I wasn't from there. I was driving too fast. He wanted my driver's license and proof of insurance. He wanted to know where I was going. He wanted to know who I thought I was. Then, I remembered to give him my concealed carry permit. I didn't have a gun with me, but the law is that I still need to present my permit to the police as part of my ID. He looked at it and guessed that I was a member of America's great (and white)

militia. His mood changed. He smiled at me. Politely, he said, with all the sweetness of the Old South, “Please be more careful driving through my county. Hope you have a good trip.”

Be careful what you pray for.
 God is expeditious in
 his response to prayers. Sometimes
 the answer is, "No." Sometimes
 the answer is, "Not right now."
 And sometimes the answer is,
 "Hang on tight! 'Cause here it comes!"

One night I got down on my
 knees by my bed and told God
 that I was ready to work
 on sex: Didn't understand
 sex; Didn't know what to do with
 sex; And was willing for Him
 to show me the way.

Next day

my truck broke down south of Killeen, Texas.
 I was a bit of a mechanic, and
 I had tools and knew what parts I needed.
 But I was in the middle of nowhere.

Another guy stopped, while I was staring
 at my engine with the hood up, and asked
 if I needed any help. I told him
 what was wrong and what I needed, and he
 told me there was a Ford dealership down
 the road, and he'd give me a lift. Half an
 hour later I was standing in the parts
 department with the parts I needed and
 said to the counter man, "Now I just need
 to figure out how to get back to my truck."
 "Oh," he said, "we have a courtesy car

that can take you back.” So, another half an hour later I was sitting in a shiny new Ford sedan with the dealership name painted on the doors and a very old, old-man driving me back to my truck.

I mean this guy was old. I was 30 then. Almost anyone over 30 seemed very, very old. But even now, as I think back, I can't imagine how anyone could've been as old as he was.

But, he wanted to make conversation, so we talked. And as soon as he found out that I was going to Memphis to pick up my wife and the kids, he wanted to talk about sex with our wives. His wife was dead, and he was older than dirt anyway, so he probably hadn't had any sex for 20 or 30 years, but he guessed that I was really looking forward to getting to Memphis and getting laid that night. And he wanted to share the experience of his life and love.

He said,

“Sex in the evening is great. Don't get me wrong. And it's not like sex while waking up in the twilight of the morning. Sex in the dawn's early light is really, really great. Much better than sex in the evening. But, let me tell you son, nothing is like dreaming of having sex with the one that you love and then waking up in the dark, to find that you were really having sex, in your sleep, with the one that you love.

I did that many times with my wife. I don't know what better love there is than to love somebody even when you're asleep. That is when dreams become reality.”

Then, he dropped me off at my truck, told me to have a good trip, and he drove away.

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I was married to
a woman once. We even
had a couple kids.
So, I believe that it is
possible to get too stoned.

Matthew was 17 years old and was arrested for selling heroin on his high school campus. When he was standing before the court, the judge leaned forward, to have a conversation just with him, and asked, "Would you rather that I sentenced you to prison, or to treatment so we can see if we can get you off of the drugs?"

Drugs were very precious to him, but he was no fool. He was from a very good family, and they had enough money to get him a great lawyer, who had proposed the idea of treatment to the judge (instead of locking him up in prison.)

But Matthew paused for a while and then asked, "Can I have some time to think about that?" And the judge said, "Take all the time you need. We'll talk about it again next Wednesday." And Matthew went back to his cell to think.

The word "cell" apparently comes to us from Latin and was long used to describe the small room or hut of a monk or a hermit to which they would retire for their solitary contemplation and prayer.

Matthew's cell was in a jail – which is the modern usage of the word – and he did not know contemplation or prayer. But he did wonder what was to become of him. What on earth was God going to do with him?

He had already gone through withdrawals from the Heroin. Every nerve in his whole body was raw with pain. Heroin was the thing that had stopped the pain before now.

Another man in the same predicament said to the judge, "God wants me in jail." But something called out to Matthew, "Treatment," and he stood before the judge on Wednesday and said out loud, "Please, your Honor, treatment."

Afterwards, we lay in each others arms and caught our breaths. After a few minutes, you let go of me long enough to pull the covers up to keep us warm. Then your hand was on the nape of my neck again. I think you fell asleep. Your breathing was slow and even and calm. And I presumed that you were dreaming sweet dreams. I was not asleep. But I held you, listening to your breathing and hoping that your sweet dreams were mine as well. After another while, your breathing changed. And I thought, this is what they mean by Be Here Now. Still and quiet, I was nowhere else and neither were you.

I do not ask much of the moon.
I enjoy that it is there and sometimes
lights up the night.

Sometimes I see the man on the moon.
Sometimes I see the rabbit on the moon.
Sometimes I see the craters on the moon.
Sometimes I know that it is a humanoid rabbit,
made of cratered rock,
way way off in the distant, dark sky.

Captain Kirk's motto
was that he was always going
where no man had gone before.
But I read somewhere that, in his nineties,
he actually had an opportunity to fly up into space
and was very depressed to find that
there was nothing there. Nothing but darkness.

And I have to admit that finally going
where no man has gone before
and finding only darkness
is pretty depressing.

But, you know, sometimes the moon
just makes me laugh a little bit.
I mean, how weird it is that the sky holds
a pock-marked stone man-rabbit
that brings light into our darkness -
but only every now and then.

Mildred says that she was married four times. All of them were alcoholic, but her third husband was also schizophrenic and had multiple personalities. So she actually had many more husbands than you could count. One of them was even gay. Not one of the four: One of the third's personalities. So she'd be in the middle of making love with her husband and all of a sudden she'd be naked in bed with a feminine boy. At one moment he'd be rebuilding the carburetor on the car and the next he'd be redecorating the bedroom.

You never knew when he would start singing show tunes. It was no wonder that she would threaten to kill him. Or threaten to kill all of them. (Not all of the four, all of the personalities.) In her early sixties, deciding that her man-picker was broken, she went back to being a virgin; kids, grand-kids, racehorses and all. You know she had to have racehorses too. But you have to lie to sell racehorses. You have to lie to raise grand-kids. You have to lie about how many husbands you've had. But – honest now – she was proud that she hadn't gotten laid in twenty-five years.

Football may not be
the best social training tool
for youth after all:

One group fighting with
another over moving
a meaningless object
from one place to another
against the will of others,

strictly to establish
which group accomplished the
inconsequential task.

Or maybe it is good training.
Maybe one inconsequential task after another
is all that life is about.
And if we do a good job at it all
we get to go to heaven.

So I met this rock star – who shall remain anonymous.
 I had heard of him before. I knew that he existed.
 I didn't like his music, and hadn't given him a second thought.
 I certainly never longed to get to know him.
 And he had never heard of me or my poetry.

But we met. We talked a little bit. He was very interesting.

He was not the most handsome man in the world.
 Don't get me wrong, he was a good looking man, just
 not some over-the-top super-model kind of guy.
 But, God he was interesting.

He had an incredibly quick mind.
 He was very quick to track ideas wherever they went.
 He was funny. He was creative.
 He had been around the world 7 times with his band.
 He was having a good time with his life.
 He was not addicted to drugs.
 I was interested in him, and he was interested in me,
 and we enjoyed talking.

That was all in our very first conversation.
 Then, at one point in that conversation,
 I reached across the emptiness of all of space and time
 and touched him. He jerked very slightly back, and
 paused and said, "God! Did you see that?"

Yes.
 I had.

There had been a flash of white light as if
 lightning itself had burst out of us
 upon each other and through each other.

We were both goners. It was hopeless.
It was all over but the crying.

Boy, was that an affair to remember.

Space Tourist –

On my first trip to visit the moon base
They told me it was called the Lunar Outpost
I allowed as how we all called it the moon base back home.
“Well, here,” I was informed, “it is the Lunar Outpost.”

And everything else was different too.
It was like being in the army.
Inside the buildings they had fake gravity and atmosphere
so you could have walked around in regular clothes
but they only allowed overalls
And everyone had the same color overalls with the same insignias
but only different serial numbers and names.
My name was VISITOR, and I don't remember my number.

So it was kinda like back home, but very different.
You could hardly recognize familiar objects.
There were no regular glasses to drink from,
Only thermos like things with straws
So you wouldn't be as likely to spill them.
The urinal was more like a computer than a urinal.
One night, waking to go to pee,
I peed on a computer because I thought it was a urinal.
Boy, were they mad at me for that.
The computer repair guy said no one had ever made that mistake
before
but, in the haze of just waking up
and the dim light of the night lights in the outpost,
it looked like one of the urinals to me.

Outside, I could run around
and jump into the air like a 3 year old.
“I can jump higher than you can.”
And I had so much energy. I ran fast than ever.

I skipped again. God how I found that I had missed skipping for so many years.

But they made me wear a very funny outfit.
Space suits don't even have any pockets.
I couldn't even carry my pocket knife.
And it had a hat like a crash helmet
with a full plastic face shield.
When I had it on, I couldn't even spit.
I tried once and it splashed back into my face.
They made fun of me for that.
I was ready to go back home.
I mean, who wants to live where you can't even spit.

Even though I didn't fit in
and even though they laughed at me
when I called it the moon base.
I still had lots of fun.
I'd go back if I could, but I can't.
Something about people who destroy computers.

I think we're lonely
and frightened and trying to
make sense of it all.

I don't know the difference between fiction
and reality. But then, really, well,
neither does anyone else. We make up
explanations for the things that we don't
understand and can't control. We think we're
in love when we're really just horny. We
pretend to be brave when we really just
have no other way out. We think that we're
angry when we're really just scared shitless.
And we pretend there's a Santa Claus when
we're really just trying to be nice to
one another. We act as if this will
all go on forever, and we know that
it's only good for a few years at best.

I think we're lonely
and frightened and trying to
make sense of it all.

A conversation between 2 men
with \$3000 cameras
who are bird watching
and see a Sharp-Shinned Hawk.

“Look, it's a Sharp-Shinned Hawk.”

“I don't think so.”

“Yes, it's a Sharp-Shinned Hawk.”

“I think it's a Coopers Hawk.”

“Coopers? Well they do look alike,
but look at the beak.

The beak is too small for a Coopers.”

“I can't see the beak that clearly.”

“Well, that's why you think it's a Coopers,
when it's a Sharp Shinned Hawk.”

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It's just a kiss, on
the side of your neck, below
your ear: Nothing more.

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I don't really believe in reincarnation, but next time I don't want to be a wizard. I want to be a lizard. I want to come back as a big Gila Monster.

I have been told that I am not just a physical being. I am also a spiritual being. And I exist as both at the same time. And although the physical being may come to an end, the spiritual being continues for all time.

I have been told, "Care for your physical being to prepare the spiritual being to last for all eternity."

But, you know, sometimes I am just a penis. And it goes where it wants to go. And it goes when it wants to go. And it does what it wants to do. I have no say. And it just takes me along for the ride.

What a wondrous thing is penis.
It will work inside vagina, mouth, or anus.

It will work in hand (one's own
or someone else's)
inside of towels, or pillows, or
a thousand other made up holes.
A wondrous thing indeed.

I guess that others feel their genitals are fine.
I wouldn't know they are not mine.
I sing this for my penis.
What a wondrous thing.

Art For Money's Sake

When my mother retired, as a labor of love in her golden years, she began to make quilts. They were lovely and well praised by everyone. She kept a few herself, but gave most of them away. She didn't believe in selling them. She didn't believe in art for money's sake (which is a philosophy I learned from her and which I strongly believe). So she gave them to friends and to family members and got back rewards of gratitude and affection.

She never did give one to me, and I finally asked her why. She replied, "Why would you want one? You don't have any family!" I had a daughter I was raising alone, but no longer a wife and marriage. But I explained that I wanted one just for myself, not for my descendants. She could not imagine such an attitude but said that she would make one, if I paid for it.

I was glad to pay. But it did not turn out well. It was going to be expensive. She took months to make it and then she told me that she didn't like it very much. I told her I would love it anyway. Then, she shipped it to me by UPS, and they lost it. After a month or two she said that she had not insured it (because it had no value) but would try to file a claim. Then UPS found it in Waco, Texas. When it got delivered,

the box had a note on it that my street did not exist in Austin, and it should be sent to Killeen. It had a second note that the address did not exist in Killeen either, and should be in Dallas.

Because UPS could not find my street, we had it forwarded to my office. My co-workers were aware of the problems and aware that it was coming to the office. So, they wanted to see it.

When I finally got it, I called her and told her it had arrived and thanked her profusely for it. Then I opened it.

It was ugly. It was a solid black sheet on which she had sewn a few colorful circles. But it was mainly just black.

My coworkers laughed at it and agreed it was ugly and said they would never be able to sleep under such a thing. It felt more like a curse than a comforter. I put it in a storage bag on the back of the top shelf in a closet downstairs.

A couple of years later I offered it to a friend who was coming out of homelessness and needed everything to live in an apartment. But he refused, saying, "That thing would give me nightmares."

When my mother died, she left several of her quilts behind, in her apartment. The family divided them up, and I got three or four. All lovely. They're in storage

bags in the closet. My bed has a gold and white wedding ring quilt on it. It was made in China by prison laborers and I found it in a garage sale for twelve dollars. It's nice. And it's warm. And even though it was made for money's sake, it's art. And it doesn't give me nightmares.

Funny how the importance of things change. There was a time when it mattered to have the right shoes. I was very excited when I found white bucks with rubber soles that they would allow at the school dances in the gym. Now, I'm glad to find comfortable shoes that don't cost too much. In my teens, I had to have the fastest car in town. Now, my car is reliable and fairly good on gas. As a young man, I had to have tight slacks that showed off my crotch and my behind. But, although I still try to be clean and presentable. It's much, much more important to have a good book.

At a table across the way in this restaurant, there's a half a dozen or so young teenagers who are in town for the Future Farmers of America convention. The FFA, as it is known, is an organization for high school students that is designed to help young men and women become successful in the business of agriculture and to be active, constructive members of their communities. I don't know if it's a national organization, but it is very active across the south.

When I was in high school, I remember being utterly contemptuous of them: They were the kids in blue jeans and blue jean jackets with the FFA logo across their backs. They were all clean and white and straight and hoping to be leaders of their communities someday. The boys all had crew-cuts. The girls were all blond (or at least looked like they should be blond). They all drove pickup trucks to school. They all wore cowboy boots.

They were not like me. I was cool. I had a fast car. And I drove it hard. I had a beard. I cared about poetry and the arts and intellectual pursuits and curiosities. I did not wear cowboy boots. Even when I rode horses, I did not wear cowboy boots. I was going to go to college. I was going to be an artist. I was NOT going to be a

leader in my community. I was going to be very, very dangerous. Art is supposed to be dangerous.

Over the course of my life, I've become somewhat less judgmental. Alright, I have become less angry. I've come to enjoy my life and love my creativity without needing to fight about it. I've relaxed. I no longer own a fast car. I own a pickup truck: it's amazing how useful it is for getting things done. I am no longer in such a hurry. I don't know that I act like it, but I look pretty clean and straight too. And today,

those kids look like they might be nice kids. They look like they are having a good time. And the chaperones are not having to keep them in line. They look like they don't need to cover themselves up with alcohol and drugs this evening. They look like they're going to remember where they are (and who they are with) in the morning, without a hangover.

I am jealous of them and their good time. I'm glad that I have not lived my life as a leader in my community. But, I wish that I had worn my cowboy boots.

36

The more I know about
people, the more happy I
am that I found you.

It's one-forty-three in the morning.
I am awake in the middle of the night.
Again. This time I am seventy-seven years old
and not feeling very well. But I am still
alive, and still awake in the middle of the night.

When I was younger, being awake in the night was
exciting. I was alone and able to do as I wanted.
I was able to pretend that I could go anywhere
and do anything. Now, I have already done all of that.
And I am simply alone and awake.

It has been a great life. A life of adventures and loves -
some of which nearly consumed me. Physically and
emotionally: Mountain tops and craters in the deserts.
And none of it meant anything to anyone but me
and the ones that I loved. I have learned,

“Do not sweat the small stuff.

And, it is all small stuff.”

We might as well enjoy it and have a good time.

Scotty was repeatedly tempted by suicide.
 He and suicide were very good friends.
 The attraction was chronic and profound.
 I don't know how many times he tried to kill himself –
 always failing – but it was many, many times.

He told me, on more than one occasion,
 that he felt as if there were a scrim curtain
 between him and the rest of the world.
 He said that it was clearly a barrier,
 but he could kind-of see through it – not clearly –
 just well enough to see that there were people
 on the other side and he was not among them.
 They were ghostly, and he felt as if he would
 never be among them. He did not belong among them.

He sang in the community opera. He had a great voice.

He spoke freely in French and Italian (and Dutch oddly enough).

And, he thought you were incredibly attractive.
 I don't know if he ever told you, but he really did.
 I know because I sent him a picture of you at some party
 and he replied, "He is the cutest guy in the whole world."

I wouldn't be surprised if he never told you. I mean
 He never told me face to my face:
 He only told me in a email.
 Scotty had a hard time telling anybody anything.

I loved Scott. But he was an unusual guy. He and I
 had a lot of fun with each other. We must have spent
 a thousand hours laughing our asses off at trivial shit.
 I told him several times that he was my best playmate ever.

We never did have sex. It was friends from beginning to end.
There was nothing else going on.
But, there was always that scrim curtain
between him and the rest of the world.
We were great friends, but he still believed that
there was no connecting, with anyone.
He and I were close friends for several years.
We spent our time together joking, laughing,
having a very good time. Friends! But one day
even I was on the other side of the curtain.

He tried therapy. He tried medications.
But he always came back to suicide.

I had often told him that, if he kept trying to
kill himself, one day he would succeed;
and I did not want that for him.

But he had begun to see me as only
another ghost on the other side of the haze.
He could no longer see me clearly and
could no longer hear me clearly as well.

I was the distant voice of a distant specter.

The last time I saw him, we had dinner at a little
beer and barbecue joint just off campus the week after
he got his Masters degree in French. He was already fluent
in half a dozen languages, but he decided he wanted to teach French.
He was supposed to go to Penn State the next semester
for the PhD. But he never showed up there.

I don't know what happened, but I presume he's dead.
I called him a few days after the barbecue dinner and
wished him luck on the PhD.
And I never heard from him again.

Troy said he talked to him a few day before I last did.
Mike said he hadn't heard from him in weeks.

His mother said that he left for Penn State and
she had no idea what happened to him.
Of course, they looked for him, but no body, no letter,
no clothing, nor any other personal leftovers.
Nothing. Dead I guess. Probably a suicide,

He packed up to go for the PhD and,
instead, he just stepped off of the world.
He couldn't even say goodbye.

Sally asked me once, out of nowhere, “Do you know what I miss about Crystal Meth?”

I shook my head “No.” “I miss sitting in my rocking chair in the living room, with

all the curtains closed, petting my sawed-off shotgun.” Try as she might, she did not stay

clean. Last time that I saw her she was dating six or seven guys. One of them took her

to a drug deal in the country where they got killed by Drug Enforcement Agents when

they decided that it was a trap and they were going to have to shoot their way out.

They were out-numbered, of course. It was not at all like sitting on the rocking chair

in her living room, with all the curtains closed, while petting her sawed-off shotgun.

The clock in the kitchen has stopped at ten minutes to six.
 It says it's the same time now as it did yesterday.
 It may even be saying that it is yesterday again,
 or still. But I'm sure it's today, because
 I believe that living one day at a time means
 living in each separate day as it comes and goes away.
 I don't believe that living one day at a time
 means being stuck in the same day over and over again.
 And I don't believe that it's always ten minutes to six.

I had a sister-in-law some years ago,
 back before the divorce, after which
 she became my ex-sister-in-law,
 who tried to explain to me, once,
 that everything happens at ten to six:
 Dinner was always ready at ten to six;
 one always ran into friends in the park at ten to six;
 the presence of ten to six was almost universal
 for her and had cosmic proportions and importance.
 I thought it was a pleasant eccentricity for her
 and accepted it without argument,

But, now,
 it turns out that the clock in the kitchen seems to agree with her.

I do not have to accept eccentricity in my clock.

I want my clocks to really tell me what time it is.
 And if they can't properly do their job to heck with them.

I'll try a new battery, and if that doesn't work
 I'll throw the darn thing away.

They say that even a broken clock is right twice a day.

But my standards are higher than that.
Three minutes off. Oh well, whatever.
Five minutes off. I'll probably reset it once or twice.
Ten minutes to six is not good enough.

The old man in front of us in the checkout line in the grocery store was as old as me: Gray hair and beard and so on. He was also in an electric shopping cart and had his crutches leaned up over his shoulder as he sat in the cart. He was having trouble getting his credit cards to pay for his groceries. The total was 118 dollars and change. He tried one card repeatedly and it denied the charges repeatedly. He tried another card and another and another. The cashier was very kind and understanding and offered a few friendly suggestions,

but he could not get any of his cards to pay for his food. Finally the cashier suggested that she put the purchase on hold and he call in about the cards and see if they could sort it all out.

He pulled his cart around the corner of the checkout aisle and began fiddling with his phone. She began checking us out. When she was done with us, and we were walking out of the store, he was still fussing with his phone call. I said to Mike, "I keep getting messages that I have no reason to ever feel sorry for myself. NOT that I do very much.

But I just have no reason, at all."

In his middle 80's he was found to have become very addicted to alcohol and was in ICU for 3 months, as they tried to get him detoxified without him breaking into severe Delirium Tremors. Afterward he said that he had never been more happy, ever before in his life, than now that he was sober. But he was still pretty inappropriate. On one occasion, while telling us how much he liked the rehabilitation hospital that he'd been placed in after he detoxed, he went on about how he used to have to pay

prostitutes 200 dollars to give him a bath in a hotel room and now insurance was paying for a big black man to bathe him in his hospital room. It was free! On another occasion he referred to his wife using the name of the old girlfriend who had been killed by her husband for having an affair with him. He had made up a new ending for that story: And they lived happily ever after. Then he had a stroke and never went home again. So, in the end, he checked out of life a little confused and very angry and very afraid.

43

Egrets roost in a
sunset Cottonwood tree and
glow like Christmas lights.

There is a difference
between the sunrise that
comes when you have risen
in the darkness and watched
the day begin to glow
and the sunrise that finally
arrives after you have
stayed up all through the night.

I love your skin.
I love the way it looks.
I love the way it feels.
I love the way it seems
to love the way I touch it.

Inside or out.
Wet or dry.
Sweet or salty from sweating.
I just love it.

Thank you for sharing it with me –
time and again.
And then, again.

Next time,
I want to lie with it
some more
again.

I love your mind and your smile and your eyes
and your laugh and your attitude,
But our skins
seem to bring it all together.

Wait a minute.

What happened to the serpent? Did he get to stay in Eden? Do you mean to tell me that God threw us out, but the serpent, crawling on his belly and eating dirt, got to stay? We were banished, and he stayed?

That's not fair! That doesn't make any sense at all.

I wonder if something might have been lost in all of the translations. I wonder if God might have forgiven them all: The snake, and Adam, and Eve. And the snake said "Thank you," and the humans said, "No, thank you. We can take care of ourselves." I wonder if it wasn't the fruit of the tree of Knowledge. I wonder if it might have been the fruit of the tree of self-will, or the fruit of the tree of defiance. The fruit of the tree of no contrition, or the fruit of the tree of never asking for forgiveness. Perhaps it was the fruit of the tree of not understanding our place in the universe. I wonder if God might have said to them all, "Look, I asked you not to do that," and the snake replied that he was sorry and wouldn't ever do it again. And the humans each said, "I'm going to do as I please, and you can't stop me," and stomped out of the room and slammed the door.

When I was a young man,
I knew a fellow who was quite fond of my writing,
and who helped me get some of my earliest poetry published.
He said that he knew another writer in town
whom he thought I would like and asked if I would like to meet him.
That writer's name was Thomas Pynchon.
I had never heard of him before,
we were both young and he had just published V,
but I responded with a shrug of my shoulders
and said, "Sure."
I was always glad to meet anyone.
It turned out, that he thought that all of his best friends died horribly.
He thought he was a curse: He had had two
good friends who had died in accidents that he
felt were his own fault. One of them actually fell off of the back
of his motorcycle and died.

And, whoever I was,
Thomas Pynchon did not want my blood on his hands.
He didn't even want to meet me.
We each went on with our separate lives.
Later, reading his works, I quickly realized
that he was a complete genius. And
I also realized that, in his own way,
he had wanted to save my life.
I am still curious about what he might have been like.
But I am also grateful for his mercy and concern for me.
Not that there's anything wrong with death.
Death is our constant companion. And we
might as well learn how to walk with it hand in hand.
But it was very nice of Pynchon
to not want to get me killed too early.

We were in our little cabin up in the mountains. It was early morning and still cold and dark. It had rained all night, and, outside, everything was wet and shining in my flashlight as I walked to the outhouse. I was reminded of a friend who lived in the woods in Alaska for five years before he got indoor plumbing, and the northern lights would often light the pathway to the privy. But, once he had indoor plumbing, he never saw the northern lights again. He said he didn't realize the northern lights were gone until he moved back down to the lower 48 states.

Can you imagine yourself not seeing the northern lights for years just because you weren't walking to the outhouse in the night? For me, at our cabin, my walk in the night was about my flashlight making shadows and glistening on wet rocks and leaves. It was largely dark and still – and silent but for my footsteps and the sound of the occasional rain drops dripping from the trees. My love was still asleep. And so I rejoined him in his sleep. It was pretty chilly that morning, and the rain had not gone completely away. There was plenty of time and temperature for snuggling.

I'm sure that you have had the occasion where
you woke up with some old song stuck in your mind,
playing over and over again.

Well, I recently woke up with
"All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth"
playing in my mind.
And it wasn't just for a moment.
It was while eating breakfast.
It was while shaving and taking a shower.
It was while driving to the grocery store.

I'm 78 years old, and
"All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth"
was playing in my mind over and over.
I was getting tired of it.

What I want for Christmas is a new Birthday Suit.
I want a new Birthday Suit. A new Birthday Suit.
I need a state-of-the-art one – like in the good old days.
Mine is old and wrinkled, and its hair is turning gray.

I want my freckles back on me: Head down to my toes.
I'm tired of having age spots. I'm tired of having moles.
It needs a perfect texture, that others want to use.
It needs my red hair back again, right down to my pubes.

What I want for Christmas is a Birthday Suit that's new.
I don't want this old one, that time has so abused.
I want a brand-new Birthday Suit that no one could refuse.

I think it was July, but it might have been August. It was definitely 1967, and I was in San Francisco for the “Summer of Love.”

Everybody thinks that the summer of love was about Haight-Ashbury, and the scene there was pretty amazing, but at one point I was walking along Union Ave., downtown, and it was very crowded with people from all walks of life, and I was walking past a record store when outside speakers were blaring The Boxtop's new record, “The Letter.”

And there was this guy dancing, no, writhing to the music in the middle of the sidewalk.

Everyone was walking around him as if he were nothing more than a fire hydrant in the way, but I stopped to stare.

He was as young as I. He was as tall as I. He was dressed in colorful tattered jeans and T-shirt just as hippies were supposed to be. And he had long blond hair down to his shoulder blades (although it was dancing/writhing in the air about him as he moved).

He must have been the very first guy in the world to let his hair grow out. No one else, that I had ever seen, had hair so long.

He was the ideal heathen: Tall, skinny, long-haired, dressed to the nines in freak-wear, dancing like he was possessed, and probably very stoned.

The thought crossed my mind that he might only be an hallucination. I walked on.

Later that night I was at a concert at the Fillmore Theater. It was THE PLACE. Things were happening there: The afternoon show had been a new experimental version of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. The band playing that night was Big Brother and The Holding Company. And then

he
walked in.

(Love among the young in the 1960's
in San Francisco.)

He, had just walked in.

And he was no hallucination.

There is a house in New Orleans they call the Rising Sun. It's been the ruin of many a poor boy, but, God, I stayed away from there. I always went to the gay bathhouse that was around the corner and a few blocks away.

In the summer of 1993

I was in the midst of one on my, "I could be famous. I should really pursue this." phases. (I have had a few of them in my lifetime, and I have been lucky enough to survive all of them and get over all of them.) But I had a date in New Orleans for a reading from my second book, and I had made quite a big deal about it among my friends because it was a big deal for me. I had two books out. I had written a song that sold several million copies. I was on my way to notoriety – maybe fame.

And I was excited about it.

One of my friends mentioned to me that I was doing my reading the same night as a Marky Mark concert in New Orleans. If you don't know about Marky Mark, he was a young white rap musician. And he had several hits, if you like that kind of music. But his real claim to fame was that he always ended up, at one point in his show, prancing around the stage in his white underwear. He became quite famous for that, and even ended up modeling

for a very famous Calvin Klein underwear campaign. Then he got over all that and went on to making movies under his real name, Mark Walberg.

But, in '93 he was Marky Mark, the young musician in his underwear. We had a big laugh about me competing with Marky's Show. There was no way that I was going to compete with Marky Mark. But that was okay. I was just boosting my book. I had a nice time in New Orleans. The man promoting me arranged a small apartment in the French Quarter for me. It was one of the lovely old courtyard apartments – you know, red brick, surrounding a lush green garden courtyard. Everyone had a balcony overlooking the courtyard. All of the railings and gates were wrought iron.

It was great. One of my neighbors told me of a private Keith Richards concert that night in the courtyard. But I couldn't go because it conflicted with my reading.

(I was very close to the in-crowd there.)

As always in New Orleans, I had great food and I ran amok a little. My reading went well. I sold some books. And they video taped the whole reading for a separate release. I was on my way. Back home in Austin, over dinner with friends, one friend asked how the reading in New Orleans went. I shared pretty much what I've just told you. Except for the part when I said I ran amok a little bit. Among

friends, I said that I went to the baths and got laid. Then I paused and joked, "Oh, I fucked Marky Mark in the baths." Now everyone knows that no one has ever fucked Marky Mark. I knew I was joking. And they knew I was joking. But, they didn't know I was joking. In a matter of hours, all of my friends had heard that I had fucked Marky Mark in the baths in New Orleans. It came up repeatedly for days. I always laughed about it and shrugged it off, but it took on a life of its own. A few days on, my very best friend in the world came to me and wanted to know if it

was true or just a joke. He said that he loved Marky Mark and didn't think he could stand to be around me anymore if I had fucked him. I told him it was a joke. I was joking around and it came out completely unexpectedly. I mean, everybody knows that nobody has ever fucked Marky Mark. And he didn't believe me. It ruined our otherwise very nice friendship. It reminded me, once again, that notoriety always has its costs. I stopped talking about it. And when it would come up I would say that it was just a joke and it had gotten completely

out of hand and I didn't want to talk about it anymore. It's been years since then, of course, and I have long ago finally realized that I really didn't want to be famous or notorious. It was just too weird to run in that crowd, and I

didn't want to do all of the work that
was involved and pay all of the prices
that were involved. Shit. But it still comes up,
occasionally, among my old friends.
It seems like the only things my oldest
friends know about me is that I used to
write poetry; I even wrote a hit
song; And I fucked Marky Mark in the baths
in New Orleans.

Of course there is no way to be certain, but every now and then I wonder if I might have been Gertrude Stein in a previous lifetime. There has always been something about her work that I just got. I mean all of her writings make perfect sense to me. And I love having the walls all covered with objects and art. And I can so clearly see everything that she taught Hemingway and Fitzgerald. And I have always just loved Alice B. Toklas.

I had a friend some years ago who was convinced he had been a Centurion 2000 years ago in the Roman Empire. He still had that kind of swagger and attitude about him: Sure he could have been standing at the crucifixion of the Christ. Though he claimed to recall it all clearly, he also had to admit that he had no recollection of an other life up until this present. Then again, were he at the crucifixion, it would have made perfect sense that he should have to spend 2000 years as a dung beetle, and then be born back into our human form as a cocaine addicted country musician from Oklahoma. God is not always swift in his retribution.

Grandmother Pearl's Song

I live in an old duplex down near the university. I bought it a long time ago as an investment, and it has paid for itself all along with young students living in it through the school years and then moving on after their studies and into their careers. When I retired, I moved into the back half of it, to downsize from my big house to this smaller 2 bedroom. I have the back half of the duplex with the back yard. And the tenants have the front half of the house. I can come and go as I please, and travel, and the place always looks occupied. And when I'm

home, it's quiet and simple and easy to keep clean. Last summer, I rented the front half to a young couple studying at the university. They were so young and pretty, and smart, and vital, and enthusiastic. They seemed so happy to find my cottage. And they were very appreciative of my low rent rates. They were so cute and in love. And this was the first home of their new life together. One Saturday morning, after they had been there for a month or so, the girl came to my door and emotionally said she would like to visit with me, if

I was free. Of course, I welcomed her in. Tearfully, she spoke about how much they liked living there, and how much they loved having

me as their landlord. And how sweet she thought I was, quietly living in the back of the house, knitting things for my grand-kids and baking cookies for my neighbors. But she was wracked with guilt about how they had lied to me. They were not married. They were living together in sin. And they hoped to get married someday, but not yet now. Instead they were blaspheming my house and me with their sin and their lies. She wept, almost helplessly, and begged for my forgiveness.

She knew that they had gone against my values. She pleaded that I not throw them out for their deception. Comforting her, I held her hand, and assured her that I would not reject them: That I understood and that I was pleased to have them as tenants; That it was okay, and I would not throw them out of their lease for deceitfulness. Instead, I still wished them well and hoped they would have a full and very happy life together. But, inside, although I could not say it to her, I thought, "I am old now, but knitting and baking cookies? If only they knew how wide a path I cut."

54

I was buying some
new white towels.
The woman behind
me in line to check out
said,

"I love white towels.
You never know how
dirty you were
until you dry off
with white towels."

In Dallas in the 1950s, the Parker family lived a life of some real privilege. Mr. Parker was successful and well-connected. Life was very good. They lived in a big house on the corner, and all of the children were good looking and in private schools. Early one morning, Mrs. Parker called the police to report that she had seen a man burying a body just outside of the living room window. The police were there immediately. Mrs. Parker stood in the front yard, in front of the living room window and explained to the officers where she saw

the body and the man with a shovel. The officers dug there for an hour or so and then told her there was no sign of a body, or of anyone digging there before themselves. She said, "Maybe it was outside of the dining room window after all. It was dark, and I was just barely awake." So they dug there as well. Later, she directed them to the front bedroom window. Still later she changed her mind that it might have been outside of the kitchen window. By early afternoon the police had searched under every window that faced out onto the two streets. She was

quite sure that the killer had not been in the back yard, but the officers looked in the back as well before telling her that there just wasn't any sign of someone

having dug anywhere, except, of course, for their own digging in the front of the house. Sadly, she relented that it might have been a dream. She said. "People do have dreams you know. Perhaps it was a very bad dream." (She had always been a Southern Bell.) And then the officers left. At dinner, her husband asked her how her day had been. She replied, "I got all of the flower beds turned. They're ready for the spring planting."

It was a few weeks later before the doctors told the family that she was a schizophrenic, and she was locked in a psychiatric hospital for treatments.

She was never quite the same again. And neither was Charlie: He had lost his interesting mother. His father was never quite the same again either, and

his businesses all collapsed. And they had to move out of the corner house. Charlie was taken out of his private school and graduated from a public high school. There, everybody knew who he was and who his family had once been, long ago.

All the way home there was silence.
They didn't talk to each other.
They didn't talk to me.
They didn't even talk to my brother,
who had clearly done nothing wrong.
I didn't know what I had done wrong,
but it was something.

They were like that a lot.
They never would tell me what I had done wrong.
Later, when I was all grown up,
my mother would at least say,
"I don't want to talk about it."

But back then, it was almost always
silence.

It was as if my mother was wondering,
"How could this child have come from my body?"
(having forgotten for the moment
that dad was involved
in this creation too.)

I would wonder if dad was
going to kill me this time.
He would never threaten
to kill my brother, but
it was always implied for me.
But, once again, it was just silence,
all the way home. And
they would never even tell me
what I had done wrong.

Of course, I occasionally got that

from other people too. Once,
in junior high school,
I had a teacher angrily announce I was getting an “F”
in citizenship for the day:
“Don't toy with me, young man,” he said,
“You know what you were doing.”

I did not know what I had been doing.
But, at least, I suspected
he wasn't going to kill me for it.

For years, I just
didn't understand the secret silence.

I realized that I was a gay man in my thirties:
Thirty-three, I think.
And a few years after that
I finally figured it out.

All those times that I was
doing something so wrong
that all of them couldn't even talk about it;
All those times that mother seemed to wonder,
“How could this child have come out of my body”;
All of those times that I
“knew what I had been doing”
(even though I didn't know)

I was being a little bit of a sissy.

I was doing something in front of them
that they thought meant that someday
I was going to take off my clothes
with some other guy, and do something
that was utterly unacceptable

to them.

And they couldn't even talk about it.

It was just the long repeated silence.
And they were never
going to tell me what was wrong.

They thought I already knew,
and I was just toying with them.

I have never met anyone who has actually seen one of the wolves that live in these mountains. But everybody says they are here. And the forest service has even put up signs about them at the entrances to the wilderness trails.

I was camping in the wilderness one time during elk hunting season. It was bow hunting season (no rifles allowed) so it was really pretty safe to be camping and hiking even though the other men I came upon were all hunting.

And almost every conversation was, first, "Have you seen any elk?" (No. Have not.) And, second, "Have you seen any wolves?" (None.)

But all of the bow hunters were carrying handguns in holsters on their hips in case they were confronted by the wolves. And several of them wondered why I wasn't armed as well. Didn't I know how dangerous wolves can be? No, I figured that they would probably be afraid of any person that they might see. We are, after all, the killers who kill for fun and sometimes don't even bother to eat the meat. That we are dangerous is well known in the woods.

I met one hunter who was wearing a 9 millimeter pistol on his hip. "I'm not a hunter," I said, "and I don't mean to be rude. But is that pistol a

good enough gun, ballistically, to stop a charging wolf.” “No,” he admitted. “But I’m hoping the noise will scare it away.”

Good luck with that, I thought. He had never seen a wolf in these woods either. But, everyone says they are here.

One fall afternoon,
Emily Dickinson left
her upstairs room, and,

standing in her front
yard, in her white dress, she caught a
large red maple leaf
carried to her by the air.
The flowers in her garden

danced to the music
of the breezes. As she looked
about, the world came
to her eyes, and she had to
pause to catch her breath again.

Waving At Trains

I have an old friend named Henry.

I hadn't known very many men named Henry. And when I mentioned that it was an unusual name, he said it hadn't been used much for a while, but was coming back into style, and that he was named after his father: Henry senior I guess.

Anyhow, when we met, my friend Henry was a pretty unhappy young man. He was actually very messed up. He had a therapist with whom he was working on childhood survival issues. But he was also wandering around looking for a friendly mentor on how to be an adult. And he stumbled upon me.

We really hit it off. Which was odd under the circumstances. I was in my 50's and gay. He was 20 something and very straight (and acting upon that a little too much, perhaps).

But his father had also been a very unhappy man. And, in keeping with his wishes to pass on his name, he also tried to pass on his anger and his fear and his despair by being very abusive throughout his junior's childhood.

Then junior met me, and we hit it off, and he picked me as his friend and mentor.

I think he really liked the idea of knowing an adult male who would not abuse him and then say that it was all his fault.

Anyhow, he worked with his therapist, and we talked a lot about all kinds of stuff, and he began to relax and enjoy his life.

It was very nice to watch him growing up and becoming himself – instead of his father's junior monster.

I liked knowing him. I liked sharing what little I knew about life. I liked meeting some of his friends and his 2 brothers. It was good to be a nice adult for him.

After a few years he had done a lot of work on letting go of his past, and arrived at a point where he was more content.

He no longer needed every woman he met. He became employable. (He had not been employable when we met. I never did know how he survived financially, but he couldn't get up out of bed on a regular schedule and hold down a job. Maybe his mother was sending him money.)

But once he got to the plateau where he could live with regular hours and could follow a boss's instructions, his older brother helped him get a job with the railroad. A union job no less. And he moved away.

A couple of years later he even fell in love,
got married, and had two children.
And he did not beat or yell at his children.
He hugged them and played with them.
His life was good. It is very good.

We have stayed in touch.
And whenever I see a train go by
I wave at it as if he were on board.

I told him that.

And he replied that, therefore,
whenever he saw someone waving at his train
he would wave back as if it were me.

I wanted to share this story because
I wanted to offer the suggestion that
we should always wave at every train
we see pass by.

It is a way of honoring our old friendships.
And it is a way of honoring the fact that
we do not have to spend our whole lives
carrying our fathers' troubles or despairs.

God bless my old friend Henry.

Everywhere he goes.